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Sea Grant News online: <http://seagrant.uaf.edu/news/07news/10-09-07energy-fisheries.html>

North Aleutian Energy and Fisheries Initiative online:

http://seagrant.uaf.edu/research/projects/initiatives/energy_and_fisheries/general/

UAF, Bodø University create forum for dialogue between North Aleutian stakeholders on fisheries and offshore energy development

March 2008 workshop planned to begin discussions and determine research needs

FAIRBANKS, Alaska— The University of Alaska Fairbanks (UAF) and Norway’s Bodø University announced today an initiative to open a dialogue between offshore oil and gas interests and fisheries stakeholders in Alaska’s North Aleutian Basin Planning Area, a 5.6-million-acre region that encompasses most of the southeastern Bering Sea continental shelf and Bristol Bay.

The effort at dialogue comes in advance of a proposed federal offshore oil and gas lease sale in the southwest corner of the North Aleutian Basin scheduled for 2011.

The North Aleutian Basin Energy and Fisheries Workshop is being planned as a public event March 18-19, 2008, in Anchorage, Alaska. Setting the agenda is a 23-member steering committee consisting of the region's fishermen and seafood processors, Native and community leaders, energy and fishery regulators, environmentalists, and energy industry representatives. The initial meeting of the steering committee is scheduled for October 19, 2007, in Anchorage.

Organizers hope the March 2008 workshop will help people learn about energy development plans, discuss concerns, and find common ground.

“As an engaged university, we want to assist the people of the North Aleutians in creating a mechanism through which they can expand communications, share experiences and learn more about differing perspectives of fishing and energy development in the region,” said Buck Sharpton, UAF Vice Chancellor for Research. “The university brings to the table its extensive scientific and research expertise that can help better understand, plan for, and address the impacts and benefits of both fisheries and oil and gas development.”

The NOAA Alaska Sea Grant Program at the UAF School of Fisheries and Ocean Sciences is organizing the workshop. Alaska Sea Grant director Brian Allee said he hopes the workshop will be just the first in a continuing public effort to improve communications, share common interests and concerns, and fill data gaps on issues surrounding the potential for coexistence between the fishing and offshore oil and gas industries.

"Through the March 2008 workshop, and others we hope to have in the region, our goal is to build a rapport between fisheries stakeholders and the oil and gas industry," Allee said. "We also want people to tell us what questions should be answered to better understand the impacts of energy development on our important fisheries."

The concept of bringing fisheries and energy interests together comes to Alaska via Norway, where in April 2007 Bodø University held a roundtable discussion between energy and fisheries representatives from central Norway, Alaska and Louisiana. Because offshore oil and gas development and commercial fishing have successfully coexisted in Norway for 40 years, organizers said the discussion offers lessons for Alaska.

"Our hope was to foster discussion and share regional experiences, to fully examine the benefits and challenges associated with commercial fishing and oil and gas activities," said Jan Oddvar Soernes, program director and associate dean of Bodø University's High North Center for Business.

Stanley Mack, mayor of the Aleutians East Borough; Arni Thomson, executive director of the Alaska Crab Coalition; and Tiel Smith of the Bristol Bay Native Corporation participated in the Norwegian discussions, and are on the Alaska workshop steering committee.

"Our region of Alaska has relatively few citizens spread out over a great distance," said Smith. "For thousands of years we have relied on fishing. It is important that any offshore production not disturb our fisheries. I found the discussion and the exchange of ideas in Norway to be very helpful to my understanding of the complex issues involved. I look forward to continuing this dialogue in Alaska as soon as possible."

The U.S. Department of Interior Minerals Management Service (MMS) recently proposed an oil and gas program for 2007-2012 that includes one lease sale in the southwest corner of the North Aleutian Basin Planning Area—an area of about 5.6 million acres that includes most of the southeastern Bering Sea continental shelf and all of Bristol Bay. Any sale would be subject to environmental reviews, including public comment, before any development could proceed. The proposed lease sale is currently scheduled for 2011, but environmental studies may begin as early as 2008. Currently, there are no existing leases in the North Aleutian Basin.

The MMS estimates the North Aleutian Basin may contain as much as 750 million barrels of oil. But the basin's potential for nearly nine trillion cubic feet of natural gas

makes it particularly attractive for exploration and development.

The proposed lease sale lies within some of the world's most lucrative commercial fisheries and pristine wildlife habitat. The exvessel value of Bering Sea king and tanner crab, much of which is caught within the proposed lease sale area, was approximately \$55 million in 2007. The nearby Pribilof Islands snow crab fishery was worth about \$56 million in 2007. The Bering Sea region also is home to herring, halibut, pollock, cod, and other groundfish fisheries that together are valued at more than \$2 billion each year.

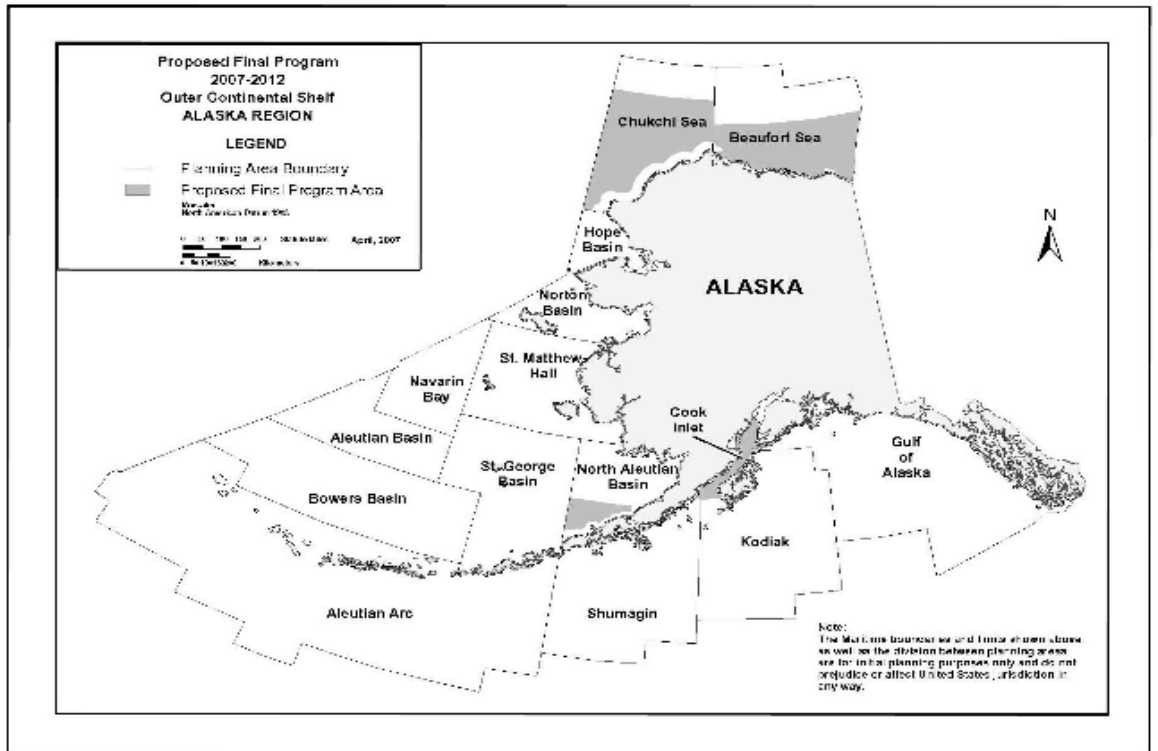
Within the North Aleutian Basin, and east of the proposed lease sale, lies Bristol Bay, which is the center of one of the largest salmon fisheries in the world. Commercial, subsistence, personal use and sport fisheries define the region's people, communities and economy. In 2007, Bristol Bay fishermen harvested nearly 30 million salmon, mostly sockeye, worth almost \$108 million. Trophy hunters, photographers, ecotourists, and others are attracted to the region's several national and state parks, refuges, and monuments. The basin also is considered essential habitat for endangered species including the North Pacific right whale and Steller sea lion.

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<http://www.alaskaseagrant.org>

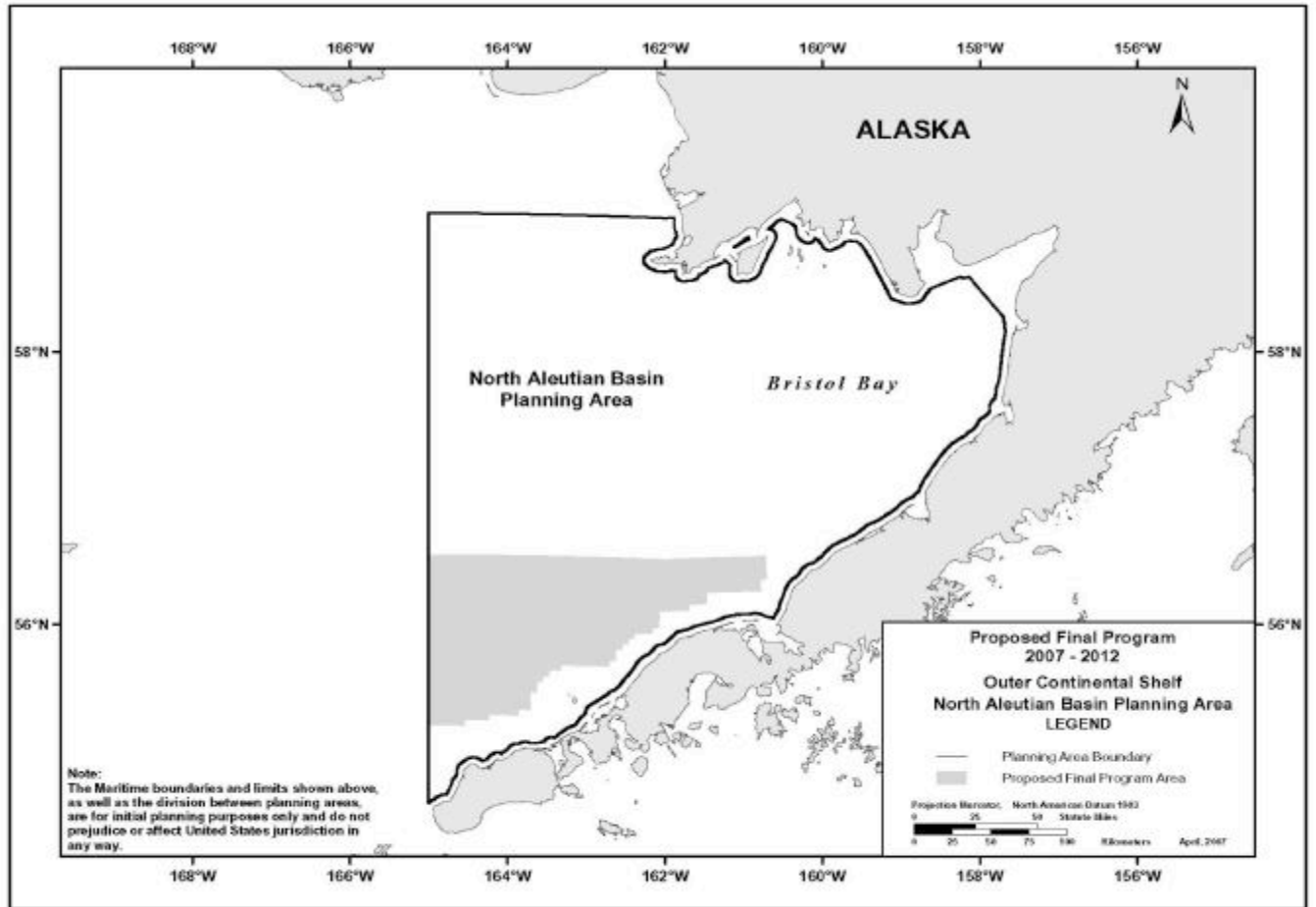
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Maps below, courtesy MMS.



Map A: Shows the Alaska Program Areas

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Map 5: Shows the North Aleutian Basin Program Area