Good morning everyone! Welcome to our 27th Lowell Wakefield Symposium! My name is Paula Cullenberg and I am the Associate Director of Alaska Sea Grant. Alaska Sea Grant is a partnership between the University of Alaska and NOAA and works statewide to bring information, education and technical assistance to Alaskans involved with marine issues.

The International Lowell Wakefield Symposium series is named in honor of Lowell Wakefield and his many contributions to Alaska’s fisheries. Wakefield, who is regarded as the founder of the Alaska king crab industry, recognized that for the fishery to survive, superb quality seafood products must be provided to the consumer, and resource management must be based on the best available scientific data.

In 2000, Frankie Wakefield, Lowell’s wife, made a gift to the University of Alaska Fairbanks to establish an endowment to continue the series that honors her husband’s commitment to wise management and utilization of marine resources.

We have a stimulating four days ahead of us. We have over 150 people registered for this conference, from 10 states and seven countries. The next three evenings, we also have interesting events – tonight a poster session and reception here at the Hilton. Tomorrow we are hosting Anchorage’s first Fishing Poetry/Prose reading at Snow City Café from 7-9 pm. And of Friday, we will have a tour of the Sailing for Salmon exhibit at the Anchorage museum and the chance to meet with one of the fishermen who participated in that way of harvesting salmon in Bristol Bay in the 1950’s.

I would like to recognize the hard work of steering committee and the Alaska Sea Grant staff for their help in developing this symposium and ask them to stand if they are here: co-chairs, Courtney Caruthers and Keith Criddle, both with the UAF SFOS faculty, Mary Pete, UAF Kuskokwim Campus; Jim Fall with Alaska Department of Fish and Game, Nicole Kimball, North Pacific Fishery Management Council, Amber
Hines, NOAA Alaska Fishery Science Center, Marie Lowe, University of Alaska Anchorage Institute of Social and Economic Research, Charles Menzies, University of British Columbia, Jahn Petter Johnson, University of Tromso, Catherine Chambers and Emilie Springer, both graduate students at UAF; I’d also like to recognize, David Christie, director of Alaska Sea Grant and Sea Grant staff Sue Keller and Adie Callahan.

Alaska Sea Grant also would like to express our appreciation for the financial sponsors of the Wakefield Symposium – they have been long time supporters and are truly critical to the success of the Wakefield symposia – they are the Alaska Department of Fish and game, NOAA Fisheries Alaska region, the North Pacific Fishery Management Council, the North Pacific Research Board, the World Wildlife Fund, the Alaska Marine Conservation Council
Since its inception, the Wakefield symposium series has addressed subjects that are timely and key to the understanding and management of commercially harvested marine species. This symposium, Fishing People of the North, is the first time the Wakefield has focused on the unique lifestyles and challenges that fishing people face and are facing in the future.

It is a fitting topic for Alaska since Alaska is a fishing state and we are a fishing people. Last week NOAA Fisheries noted that for the 22nd year in a row, Unalaska/Dutch Harbor is the largest commercial fishing port in the country. Kodiak falls close behind every year as do a number of Alaska fishing communities – Sitka, Naknek, Petersburg, Cordova, Homer, and Seward...

Annually, over 70,000 people are involved in the commercial harvest and processing of seafood in Alaska. Thousands more are harvesting fish for sport, subsistence or personal use. I would dare say that the vast majority of Alaskans have some locally harvested fish in their freezers, on their drying racks or in glass cans on their shelves at any point in the year.
And what makes “fishing people of the north unique?” Well, we know that in the north, we face rough weather together; we face the dark in the winter but the long work-filled days of the summer. And we often face geographic isolation. In Alaska, of the close to 300 communities in state, the majority of them are not connected to each other by road – virtually hundreds of small islands. That can be a hindrance – making it difficult to access capital to expand fishing operations, access to information and educational opportunities or access to the public process and our ability to influence decisions that will impact our lives. But the trade off is found in the unique quality of life that fishing people often share – a strong sense of community, the ability to see and experience our natural world on a daily basis, and a sense of independence that is not easily replicated.

But as we know, change comes fast, and anyone involved in fishing knows that change is constant. Through the Fishing People of the North symposium, I hope we will be able to share ways to address change and ensure that fishing remains a healthy vibrant part of our lives.