Kodiak will have a new Alaska Sea Grant Marine Advisory Program (MAP) agent for the first time in nearly 15 years.

Kodiak fisherman and environmental scientist Julie Matweyou will start her job as the new MAP agent on March 14 at the University of Alaska Fairbanks Fishery Industrial Technology Center (FITC) on Near Island.

The Alaska Sea Grant Marine Advisory Program is a statewide university extension and technical assistance program that helps Alaskans use and conserve marine and coastal resources. There are 16 MAP agents in 10 communities around the state.

Not since Hank Pennington, one of the original MAP agents, retired has an agent focused solely on the Kodiak community.

“He retired 15 years ago and the university — the funding just comes and goes — if somebody retires when there’s low funding they use that as an opportunity not to refund it,” said Paula Cullenberg, interim director of the FITC.

Cullenberg said Kodiak has been on a list of places to get a MAP agent for many years, but getting money for a position is always tough.

Thanks to $300,000 authorized from the Alaska Legislature in 2010 and $300,000 from UAF to fill vacant MAP positions in Kodiak and Nome, and to make permanent the existing positions in Unalaska, Cordova, Dillingham and Petersburg, Kodiak is finally able to have an agent. All of the projects Matweyou works on will mainly affect the Kodiak Island region and surrounding areas.

Kodiak has three other MAP agents on the island, but they are statewide specialists whose work encompasses all of Alaska.

Matweyou, currently employed by Bristol Environment, a global firm specializing in environmental monitoring and remediation, has experience working as a research technician with the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration fisheries in Kodiak. She is also a commercial fisherman aboard the Kodiak-based fishing vessel Lindsey Marie.
One of her objectives as a MAP agent is to work with UAF scientists at the FITC and her MAP colleagues to establish a community marine toxin-monitoring program for the island for paralytic shellfish poison (PSP).

“PSP is a serious community problem here on Kodiak and around Alaska, and a monitoring program will put science to work helping people,” Matweyou said in a press release. “Some of the highest toxicity levels worldwide have been recorded here on Kodiak. Community monitoring has worked in other areas and I believe it could be quite successful in this community.”

Matweyou plans on making commercial fishing issues a main focus as it is the town’s main economic engine. She also plans to explore development of ecotourism, collect basic oceanographic data to monitor ocean conditions and become involved in marine science teaching opportunities around the island.

“I’ll be down on the docks, introducing myself and listening to the needs of the Kodiak fishing fleets,” Matweyou said. “As a fisherman myself, I have a few ideas, but I want everyone to tell me what they think.”

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