

Priority Addressed: Priority #1: Marine Aquaculture

Background: In 2014, the Alaska Fisheries Development Foundation (AFDF) was awarded an SK grant to spearhead the ***Alaska Mariculture Initiative*** with the following goals: 1) Broaden the stakeholder base and increase its capacity to be effective; 2) Develop a clear and comprehensive strategic plan, including commitments by the various stakeholders and State agencies. As a direct result of this Initiative, in 2016, Governor Walker established the Alaska Mariculture Task Force (Task Force) by [Administrative Order #280](#), and directed the Task Force to submit a comprehensive plan “to develop a viable and sustainable mariculture industry producing shellfish and aquatic plants for the long-term benefit of Alaska’s economy, environment and communities” by March 1, 2018. The Task Force represents 11 stakeholders, including: 2 state agencies, the University of Alaska, Alaska Sea Grant, Alaska Native Tribes, Community Development Quota (CDQ) groups, shellfish farmers, fishermen, processors, and hatcheries. The Task Force also appointed Advisory Committees in five key areas in order to integrate additional expertise into the comprehensive planning process: 1) Investment and Infrastructure, 2) Regulatory, 3) Research and Development, 4) Public Education and Marketing, and 5) Workforce Development. The Task Force is on track to complete the comprehensive plan, as well as a three-phased economic analysis which has been informing the comprehensive planning process. (Phase 1 can be viewed [here](#), and a draft of Phase 2 can be viewed [here](#).)

The ***Alaska Mariculture Initiative*** has been very successful in many ways. For example, the Initiative positively changed perceptions of what mariculture can mean to Alaskans, involved stakeholders who had previously not considered the benefits that mariculture could yield, and provided a legitimate, elevated platform (Task Force) to analyze the challenges, opportunities, partnerships, and solutions to enable mariculture growth in Alaska. The applications received by the state for aquatic farms in 2017 are a tangible indication of this change in perception and the resulting increased interest in the industry. The applications included the following: fifteen new farms (representing an increase of approximately 50% over the current active permitted farms), over 1,000 new acres (representing an approximate increase of 400% over existing permitted sites), increased average farm size (including four farm sites between 100 and 300 acres), farms located in multiple regions of the state (from Kodiak to Ketchikan), 7 applications for seaweed (which represents interest in a new species), and the first application submitted by a large seafood processing company. The Initiative was also effective at coordinating and attracting additional partners and research funding to Alaska for projects critical to developing the industry, including public agencies such as the U.S. Dept. of Energy, Economic Development Administration, and communities, and private entities such as industry, CDQ Groups, and The Native Conservancy (TNC).

Rationale: In ***The Political Economics of Marine Aquaculture in the U.S.***, by Michael Rubino and Gunner Knapp (2016), the authors state: “Government regulatory policies and social acceptance are critically important to the growth of marine aquaculture”, and further suggest five broad strategies to advance it: 1) fix problems, 2) create and demonstrate social benefits,

3) build partnerships, 4) argue effectively, and 5) reform governance (pg. 1). The first phase of the ***Alaska Mariculture Initiative*** utilized several of these same strategies, in combination with a unique methodology (multi-stakeholder, fishing industry-led, and community-based), in order to break down barriers to growth. This project – Phase 2 of the ***Alaska Mariculture Initiative*** – will build on these successful strategies and methods, and, as identified by the authors, is “critically important to the growth of marine aquaculture”.

This project is well aligned with the SK Grant Program’s objective “to address the needs of fishing communities in optimizing economic benefits by...increasing other opportunities to keep working waterfronts viable” (see ***Fishing Community Resiliency*** below).

Fishing Community Resiliency: Fishermen, businesses, and communities dependent on fisheries face significant challenges when limited access is placed on fishery resources (increasing the cost of entry), or when fishing is limited due to depressed stocks. In order to promote sustainable uses of fishery resources (e.g. reduce pressure to overharvest), these fishing dependent entities need supplemental sources of economic activity. The development of mariculture in Alaska will provide economic diversification for fishermen and processors which aligns well with their skills, markets, locations, and existing capital assets (vessels and processing plants). Developing mariculture opportunities will enhance fishing community resiliency. Increasing resiliency is woven into the Governor’s AO#280, the comprehensive plan, and the objectives of this project which are listed below.

Goal, Objectives & General Methodology: *The overall goal of this project is to implement the Governor’s statewide comprehensive plan to expedite the development of the mariculture industry, providing economic, environmental, cultural, and food security benefits to Alaskans.*

This goal will be accomplished through the following objectives:

- **Objective #1** – Provide education and outreach regarding mariculture opportunities. Additionally, provide support for farm start-ups (including permitting services). These activities will be targeted toward fishermen, fishermen’s organizations (i.e. salmon aquaculture associations), and fishing communities (including Alaska Native communities) to enable diversification of fishing businesses.
- **Objective #2** – Enhance coordination and cooperation between stakeholders and state agencies, including securing commitments from the next state administration (years 2019-2023) to continue implementation of the comprehensive plan, including prioritized recommendations for statutory and regulatory changes.
- **Objective #3** – Formalize an organizational structure to enable industry leadership during implementation of the comprehensive plan.
- **Objective #4** – Increase capacity of shellfish and seaweed hatcheries through the development of a short and long-term investment funding strategy and through facilitation of technology transfer and training for hatchery staff.

Identification of Required Permits: None required.

Estimated Budget: \$300,000