



Chugach Regional Resources Commission

December 21, 2020

Chenega
Eyak
Nanwalek
Port Graham
Qutekcak
Native Tribe
Tatitlek
Valdez Native
Tribe

The Honorable Wilbur Ross
Secretary
U.S. Department of Commerce
1401 Constitution Avenue NW, Washington, DC 20230

Re: NOAA Aquaculture Opportunity Areas, Request for Information - Alaska Letter of Support

Dear Secretary Ross,

The Chugach Regional Resources Commission (CRRC) is writing to express our support for the consideration of Alaska as an Aquaculture Opportunity Area (AOA). CRRC is an intertribal consortium of seven Alaska Native villages in the Prince William Sound and Lower Cook Inlet regions of Alaska: Tatitlek Village IRA Council, Chenega IRA Council, Port Graham Village Council, Nanwalek IRA Council, Native Village of Eyak, Qutekcak Native Tribe, and Valdez Native Tribe. CRRC acts as the natural resource entity for the Chugach region and for some of our member Tribes, serves as the only nexus to natural resource funding and projects.

CRRC's primary mission is to develop the natural resource capability and capacity for each of our seven member Tribes, improve their economies, generate sustainable jobs through long-term cultivation of native fisheries and shellfish hatcheries, and engage in cutting edge scientific mariculture research undertaken with our state, federal, and private partners. Since 1994, CRRC has been engaged in a mariculture program to develop fish and shellfish, and undertaken important research to better understand oceanic, atmospheric, and climate conditions that affect shellfish and fish habitats.

CRRC operates the Alutiiq Pride Shellfish Hatchery (APSH), the only shellfish hatchery in the state of Alaska. This 12,000 square foot institution is located in Seward, Alaska, and currently engages in both hatchery nursery operations, as well as grow-out research to adapt mariculture techniques for the Alaskan shellfish industry. As a shellfish hatchery, APSH produces oyster seed, littleneck clam seed, geoducks, cockles, razor clams, sea cucumbers, and several species of kelp. CRRC is the flagship location for the research and development of both red and blue king crab hatchery enhancement models in Alaska. CRRC is the flagship location for the research and development of both red and blue king crab hatchery enhancement models in Alaska.

As a marine research facility, CRRC currently engages in cutting edge research on ocean acidification, kelp production, harmful algae, and abalone culturing through a variety of academic, agency, and private partnerships.

Historic mariculture efforts from Tribal entities included operating an oyster farm, shellfish nursery and hard-shell clam gardening. Finally, much of the research and development conducted at CRRCs APSH has the potential to dramatically increase commercial mariculture opportunities for the region in the future.

Mariculture is a vital part of Alaska's commercial seafood industry, with existing producers generating an estimated 1.75 million oysters and 200,000 lbs. of kelp in 2019 alone. While the current mariculture industry in Alaska is in the developmental phase, our state is uniquely suited to become a global leader in the industry. Alaska is centrally located, and currently possesses the largest seafood infrastructure in the nation. The Ted Stevens Anchorage International Airport provides an efficient means for product export, handling over 80% of the air cargo traffic between Eurasia and North America. With over 30,000 miles of coastline, and a unique oceanographic upwelling of nutrient-rich waters, Alaska presents an abundance of territory perfectly tailored to mariculture pursuits. This has been widely demonstrated in the recent dramatic surge in aquatic farming interests. Current requests for mariculture lease sites have continued to climb since the introduction of regional kelp farming techniques and have increased by 400% within the last year alone. CRRC remains at the forefront of these pursuits as a leader in mariculture science and industry support.

CRRC is supportive of multiple AOAs in Alaska, but strongly feels that Gulf of Alaska (GoA) should be considered as a primary region. If only one Alaska region is to be considered, CRRC feels that the GoA region is the strongest candidate for several reasons:

- An estimated 3,800 miles of coastline in Prince William Sound alone, most of which is ideal for mariculture
- Central location and proximity to major cities and ports
- Existing and well-equipped seafood market presence
- The presence of well-established mariculture research and support from Tribal, academic, agency, and private entities
- A current cohort of knowledgeable fishermen, many of whom currently engage in, or are interested in, mariculture activities outside of their primary fishing season

In short, CRRC recommends that Alaska, and the centrally located GoA region will be considered as future Aquaculture Opportunity Areas. We appreciate the opportunity to comment on this proposition.

Maile Branson



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