



2nd Quarter: May. 1, 2020 - July 31, 2020

Greetings!

The Gulf Watch Alaska (GWA) program and Principal Investigators (PIs) are persevering as we continue to endure the COVID-19 pandemic. Some projects have lost data collection opportunities for FY20 because of state or federal agency mandates. However, numerous projects have developed methods to safely conduct field studies and the majority of datasets will continue with only minor gaps.

Oceanographic, nearshore, marine bird, and marine mammal surveys have been successfully conducted at some level, maintaining long-term curation of our legacy datasets. The array of remote sensing instruments supported by GWA and the *Exxon Valdez* Oil Spill Trustee Council has also become an invaluable source of information while PIs are grounded from fieldwork. During these challenging times the tenacity and ingenuity of GWA scientists and the value of their long-term monitoring efforts has become even more evident. Stay healthy everyone!

Here is a brief summary of our program's second quarter activities and accomplishments:

Science Update:

- GWA will be able to provide most of their annual ecosystem indicator contributions for the Alaska Fisheries Science Center's 2020 Ecosystem Status Report to the North Pacific Fisheries Management Council. GWA data will be a particularly important contribution for the Gulf of Alaska this year because many other agencies' surveys were cancelled due to pandemic mandates and restrictions.
- GWA's science synthesis report to the *Exxon Valdez* Oil Spill Trustee Council (EVOSTC) is nearing final review with EVOSTC staff. The EVOSTC Science Panel provided valuable reviews for the chapters. Authors also are preparing report chapters for publication in peer reviewed journals.
- In collaboration with the North Pacific Research Board's Gulf of Alaska Integrated Ecosystem Research Program, the GWA management team is leading and GWA scientists are contributing papers to an upcoming special issue in *Deep Sea Research Part II* on understanding ecosystem processes in the Gulf of Alaska (Volume 3). Currently, more than 20 manuscripts are anticipated for this peer reviewed publication.
- GWA welcomes new postdoc Sarah Traiger. Sarah completed her PhD at the University of Alaska Fairbanks College of Fisheries and Ocean Sciences in 2018 studying the top-down and bottom-up factors that influence kelp communities in Kachemak Bay and comes to us from a postdoc position at California State University Northridge. Sarah replaces Ben Weitzman who took a permanent position with NOAA's Kasitsna Bay Lab and continues to work with the GWA program.
- We are advertising for a second postdoc position in collaboration with the Cooperative Institute for Climate, Ocean, and Ecosystem Studies (a partnership between NOAA, UAF, University of Washington, and Oregon State University). This postdoc will support day-to-day GWA science synthesis work with Dr. Rob Suryan, GWA's Science Coordinator, who has taken on the additional responsibilities of Program Manager for Recruitment Energetics and Coastal Assessment at NOAA's Auke Bay Laboratories.

Program Management Team (PMT):

- In addition to conducting field work, GWA PIs are currently preparing EVOSTC Work Plan proposals for FY21.
- GWA's annual PI meeting is going virtual this year. We cancelled plans to hold the meeting in Cordova this fall given the increasing spread of COVID-19 in Alaska. We made the decision early before travel plans would be initiated by PIs. This also allows the management team to prepare for a meeting format more conducive to a virtual platform. We will miss the opportunity for team members to collaborate in person and will seek ways to bring camaraderie to the computer screen.

Data Management:

- Axiom Data Science continues to improve user experience on the Alaska Ocean Observing System's Gulf of Alaska Data Portal. In addition to the ability to visualize data from one to multiple datasets on the portal, the team is working with PIs to narrate and provide context for infographics developed for projects.

Outreach:

- Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, GWA has postponed the information exchange outreach we had planned for spill-affected communities in Prince William Sound this year. Information exchange is a valuable component of our work and we regret the cancellation, but do not feel comfortable traveling to remote communities where we have potential to spread the virus. We are evaluating methods to continue community engagement.
- We continue to update the GWA website. Several new news items have been added to the "Latest News" section (see Relevant Media below). We are also working with our Nearshore team to revise the project pages of that component.
- GWA continues to contribute to the Prince William Sound Science Center's annual publication Delta Sound Connections. The publication can be found in print at public places around the Sound and in a digital format online: <https://pwssc.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/DSC-2020-web.pdf>.

Relevant Media:

- [Continuous Plankton Recorder](#) (CPR) surveys hit long-term milestones.
 - Tiny plankton tell the ocean's story – this vast marine mission has been listening. Recent article in The Guardian: <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2020/jun/19/tiny-plankton-tell-the-oceans-story-this-vast-marine-mission-has-been-listening>.
- The NPS has a new online story map entitled "How Marine Heatwaves are Changing Ocean Ecosystems - what we have learned from a massive seabird die-off in the North Pacific." GWA PIs provided their expertise for this product.
 - Visit the story at <https://www.nps.gov/articles/000/heatwavestorymap.htm>.
- USGS intern and videographer Ben Collins posted a video of his field experience with GWA pelagic component PIs looking at impacts of the marine heatwave to forage fish and seabirds.
 - Visit our website for brief news highlights and link to this video: <https://gulfwatchalaska.org/the-blob-video-spotlights-marine-heatwave-and-seabird-die-off/>.

Important Upcoming Dates:

- **August 14, 2020** - FY21 Work Plans due to EVOSTC
- **September 2020** - EVOSTC Science Panel Work Plan Reviews
- **September 30, 2020** - EVOSTC Public Advisory Committee (tentative)
- **October 14, 2020** - EVOSTC Trustees Annual Public Meeting
- **November 17-18, 2020** - GWA Annual PI Meeting (virtual)
- **November 19, 2020** - HRM Annual PI Meeting

Gulf Watch Alaska quarterly photo:



Brian Robinson (USGS), right, and Heather Coletti (NPS) take measurements of a banded black oystercatcher in Prince William Sound. The work is conducted in cooperation with GWA and Simon Fraser University. July 2020, Prince William Sound.