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# North Pacific Anadromous Fish Commission



Victoria, Canada  
2019 October 28

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

## **NPAFC HOLDS SUCCESSFUL INTERNATIONAL MEETINGS TO PLAN 2021 PAN PACIFIC HIGH SEAS SALMON RESEARCH EXPEDITION**

*Victoria, Canada (October 28, 2019)—*

The North Pacific Anadromous Fish Commission (NPAFC) successfully completed three days of meetings (October 19-21) associated with the 2019 annual PICES conference in Victoria, B.C., Canada. As part of the International Year of the Salmon initiative, ocean and salmon scientific experts from around the Pacific Rim were brought together to explore findings from the ground-breaking 2019 winter expedition to the Gulf of Alaska and planned for a fully pan-Pacific expedition in March of 2021.

The meetings were held as part of the North Pacific Marine Science Organization's (PICES) 2019 Annual Meeting. On October 19-20, 2019, NPAFC co-hosted a two-day workshop that convened salmon/fish specialists, oceanographers, climatologists and resource managers from around the Pacific Rim and abroad to review the scientific results of the March 2019 survey. Presenters included 2019 High Seas Expedition scientists. These individuals are from a wide variety of partner organizations including Fisheries and Oceans Canada, Pacific Branch of VNIRO (TINRO-Center), NOAA Fisheries, the Pacific Salmon Foundation, the NPAFC, the University of British Columbia, the University of Victoria and Hokkaido National Fisheries Research Institute.

The defining feature of these workshops was the enthusiasm that the international team displayed as they revealed novel findings from the March 2019 survey and began planning for an unprecedented suite of surveys to cover the entire North Pacific in 2021. Ultimately surveys of the high seas will provide the missing science that will allow us to both understand the mechanisms that drive salmon productivity and effectively manage salmon in a highly uncertain future.

In the Gulf of Alaska, sockeye, coho, chum, pink and Chinook salmon were caught. The distributions of each species differed and showed preferences for particular regions that were associated with ocean features such as higher or lower temperatures or types of prey. Most surprising was the presence of coho in the high seas given they are thought to be coastal in distribution, and the presence of North American sockeye in the small set of western North Pacific samples taken as the R/V *Professor Kaganovskiy* made the journey from Russia to Canada to begin the 2019 Expedition. Chum salmon of Asian and North American origin co-mingled in the survey area. For the first time, new genomic tools allowed researchers to conduct DNA analyses of the stocks present in real time at sea as well as assess physiological condition and the presence of pathogens. Some of the first samplings of micro-plastics in the open ocean of the Northeast Pacific surprisingly indicated that the level of micro-plastics has not increased since the collection of baseline samples in the 1980's.

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The third day of meetings held at Ocean Networks Canada (ONC) resulted in preliminary survey plans involving a minimum four vessels participating in the winter of 2021. At the present time notional requests for vessels are being considered by Canada, United States, Russia, Japan and Korea. Three or four vessels will cover a pan-Pacific grid while a fourth will conduct fine scale research to provide greater detail in our understanding of how salmon interact with the high seas environment. In conjunction with the 2021 winter surveys, NPAFC member countries will conduct coastal and high seas salmon surveys during the spring, summer and fall of 2020-2021.

The bold 2021 Expedition is being planned primarily by agencies of NPAFC member countries. The mid-October meetings in Victoria received substantial funding from the British Columbia Salmon Restoration and Innovation Fund (BC SRIF). A total of \$3.3M from BC SRIF over three years will support the effective engagement of Canadian scientists/managers from academia, government and NGOs in this important research. Building on the single vessel expedition conducted from February-March 2019 in the Gulf of Alaska, the 2021 Expedition will employ up to five research vessels operating simultaneously to survey the full breadth of the North Pacific Ocean (NPO) in winter 2021. These vessels will carry leading scientists from Canada, Japan, Korea, Russia and the United States, committed to answering questions about the mechanisms affecting the productivity and distribution of salmon. The 2021 Expedition will provide a platform for international collaborative ecosystem research to monitor the distribution, abundance and productivity of salmon to directly inform fisheries management and enforcement decisions to be made in an increasingly uncertain future.

Successful implementation of the Canadian role in the 2021 Pan Pacific High Seas Research Expedition will be facilitated by the British Columbia High Seas Research Council (BC HRC). Members include invited scientific and executive representatives from International Year of the Salmon (IYS) partner organizations spanning academia, government, First Nations and industry.

Earlier this year, an International Gulf of Alaska Expedition 2019 was completed with 21 scientific personnel from five Pacific Rim countries, Canada, Japan, Korea, Russia and the United States, aboard the chartered 62 m Russian R/V *Professor Kaganovskiy*. The expedition was organized by Dr. Richard J. Beamish, the Pacific Salmon Foundation and NPAFC with funding from private individuals, government agencies and NGOs. This expedition was the first in decades to study salmon in the winter high seas and set a precedent for addressing gaps in our knowledge through survey work of salmon, plankton and physical conditions in the central Gulf of Alaska.

Both the 2019 and 2021 Expeditions are Signature Projects of the International Year of the Salmon (IYS). The IYS is a five year initiative (2018-2022) of the NPAFC and its North Atlantic partner, the North Atlantic Salmon Conservation Organization (NASCO) aiming to establish a new hemispheric-scale partnership of government, Indigenous Peoples, academia, NGOs and industry to effectively address the scientific and social challenges facing salmon and people in an increasingly uncertain environment.



Organizers and attendants, including members of the successful 2019 International Gulf of Alaska Expedition scientific team, at the North Pacific Marine Science Organization 2019 Annual Meeting in Victoria, B.C., Canada, October 19–20, 2019 (photography by Stuart McNish, Oh Boy Productions).

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### **Stay Connected to the Expedition**

- Expedition website: <https://yearofthesalmon.org/gulf-of-alaska-expedition/>
- The IYS on [Twitter](#), [Facebook](#) and [Instagram](#)

### **About NPAFC**

The NPAFC is an international organization that promotes the conservation of salmon (chum, coho, pink, sockeye, Chinook and cherry salmon) and steelhead trout in the North Pacific and its adjacent seas, and serves as a venue for cooperation in and coordination of scientific research and enforcement activities. The NPAFC Convention Area is located in international waters north of 33°N latitude in the North Pacific, Bering Sea and the Sea of Okhotsk. NPAFC member countries include Canada, Japan, the Republic of Korea, the Russian Federation and the United States of America.