Salmon 2050

Alaska NSF EPSCoR gave the Kenai Peninsula a glimpse of the future.

The EPSCoR Southcentral Test Case's "Salmon 2050" project gathered people from Kenai governments, nonprofits, and fisheries agencies to help generate scenarios of how the area and its fisheries could change over the next few decades.

"It's a look at what potential conditions exist for salmon in the future for the Kenai River basin," said test case lead Jamie Trammell. "These conditions are defined by what we call critical uncertainties of environmental factors or social factors that will lead to alternative conditions."

First, stakeholders met for a workshop at Kenai Peninsula College, at which they were asked to identify the top uncertainties and choices facing Kenai fisheries in the future. "We brought them through some exercises," Trammell said, "saying 'envision your best and worst futures, what are the characteristics.' And then, what kind of decisions do you need to make in the future?"

Jamie Trammell at a Salmon 2050 stakeholder meeting.

Climate change was the stakeholders' largest concern, and marine conditions and economic, population and land use pressures were also cited. Test case scientists then used data from their research to build models that consider the implications of these uncertainties and management choices. "It all comes back to impacts to salmon abundance, and pretty much everyone (in the test case) is looking at some indicator of salmon abundance," Trammell said. "It integrates all components of the test case into one single story about the future."

At a second workshop, participants turned these results into five scenarios of the future of the Kenai, each based on different uncertainties and decisions. These included a major increase in industrial development, a flood of retirees, a sockeye salmon crash, an explosion in port fishing, and a level population coupled with a drop in salmon abundance. Trammell said the scenarios are meant to help facilitate greater understanding and coordination among agencies in charge of Kenai fisheries, who have been provided with the results.

"It's often used for strategic visions for a region, it's often used as the opportunity for interaction among the broader set of stakeholders to set a common division for how things should proceed," he said. "It often leads into - and this is what we're hoping - this sort of watershed management framework where everyone can say, okay, this is a common set of our understandings of how the future may unfold."

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