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NOAA FISHERIES
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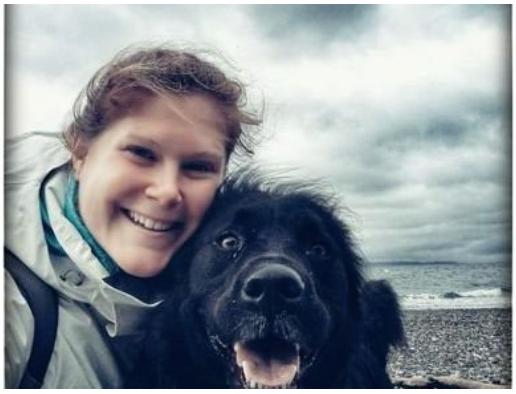
2024 AFSC Seminar Series

Cecilia O'Leary, AFSC Groundfish Assessment Program

Tuesday, April 30th @ 10 am Pacific

Tracking down the groundfish that ignore our survey footprint: improving bottom trawl survey index accuracy



This talk will go over two critical issues facing groundfish surveys in the Bering Sea and Gulf of Alaska systems, respectively: shifting fish distributions and untrawlable habitats. The dynamic nature of groundfish distributions, driven by ocean warming, poses hurdles for surveys. As species migrate and habitats shift, effective management requires a comprehensive understanding of groundfish distributions. I will discuss how international collaborations play a pivotal role in this endeavor, facilitating the integration of disparate datasets and tracking groundfish beyond traditional survey boundaries. Model-based biomass estimates for Bering Sea groundfishes (walleye pollock, Pacific cod, and Alaska plaice) enable combining data sets to inform fisheries-independent survey footprint coverage to help with conservation and management strategies in the face of environmental change. Moreover, across the Gulf of Alaska and Aleutian Islands, significant portions of survey areas are inaccessible to fisheries-independent bottom trawl gear to survey due to rocky bottoms, high relief, and steep seafloors. Overlooking these untrawlable habitats in current abundance estimations risks biasing assessments, as assumptions of uniform fish density with trawlable areas fall short. To address this, we explore innovative methods such as lowered stereo-camera systems to integrate UT habitat data, enhancing the accuracy of abundance models, particularly for groundfish species dependent on rocky habitats.

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