

*Science, Service, Stewardship*



# **NMFS Observer Programs**

Presentation to the Council Coordination Committee

April 15, 2013

**NOAA  
FISHERIES  
SERVICE**

NOAA



## NMFS Observer Programs

### Authorization:

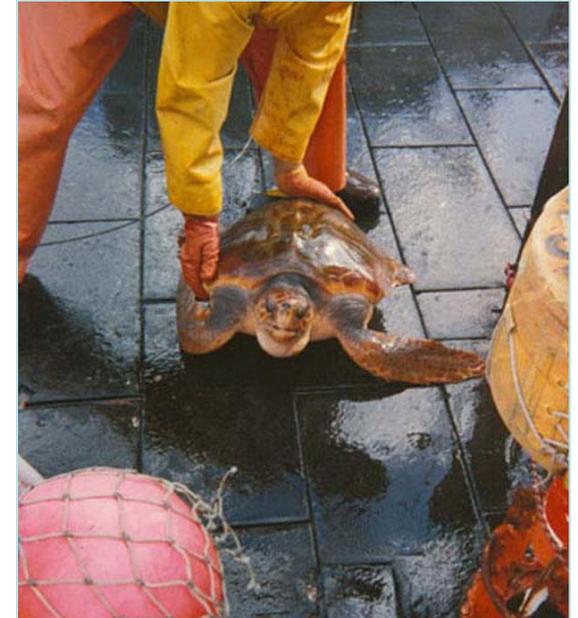
- Magnuson-Stevens Act
- Marine Mammal Protection Act
- Endangered Species Act\*

### Funding Sources

- Federal, Industry

### Statistics (2007):

- 42 fisheries observed
- Annual deployment of 700+ observers
- Over 64,000 sea days
  - 1,817 days of electronic (video) monitoring





## Who are Fisheries Observers?

- Contractors;
- Degree in Biology;
- Background in wildlife, fisheries, fishing technology, environmental sciences, wilderness survival;
- Experience at sea desired;
- No conflicts of interest; and
- Good health.





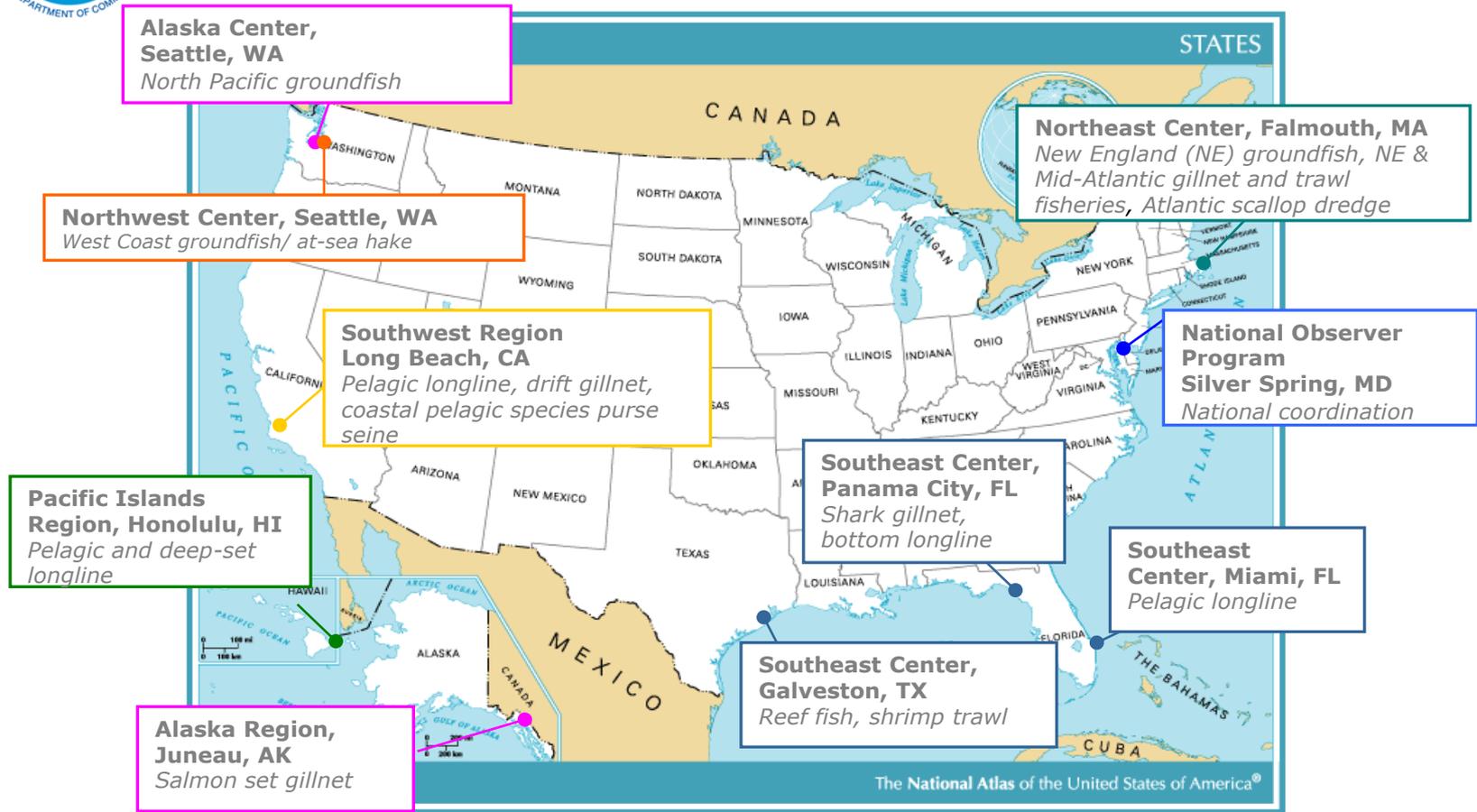
## Observer Role & Responsibilities

- Observers collect data; they are not enforcement agents.
- While aboard the vessel, observers:
  - Estimate weight of retained and discarded catch.
  - Determine species composition of discarded catch.
  - Identify reasons for discard for each species.
  - Record weight, length, sex, dissections from tagged fish.
  - Take biological samples such as sex, lengths, otoliths, stomachs, coral tissue, etc. from discarded individuals.
  - Document sea turtle, marine mammal, bird interactions.





# NMFS Observer Programs - Locations



**Figure 1.** U.S. commercial fishery observer programs (2007) are located in NMFS Regional Offices (“Region”) or Science Centers (“Center”).



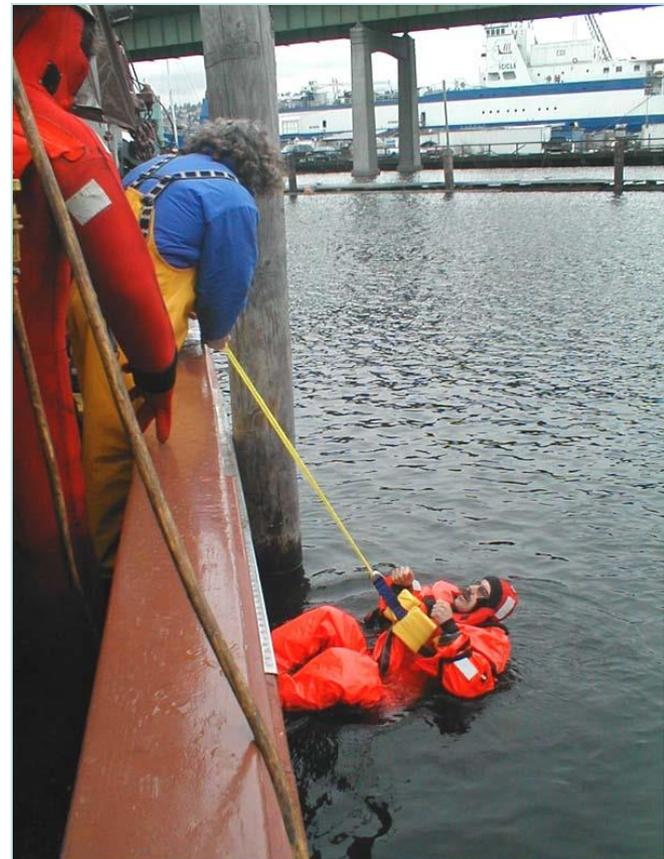
## Regional Observer Programs

### Responsibilities:

- Program development
  - Sampling protocols
  - Coverage levels
- New observer training, observer refresher training

### Day-to-day program operations

- Observer deployment and debriefing
- Data management and quality
- Data analysis and requests
- And more...





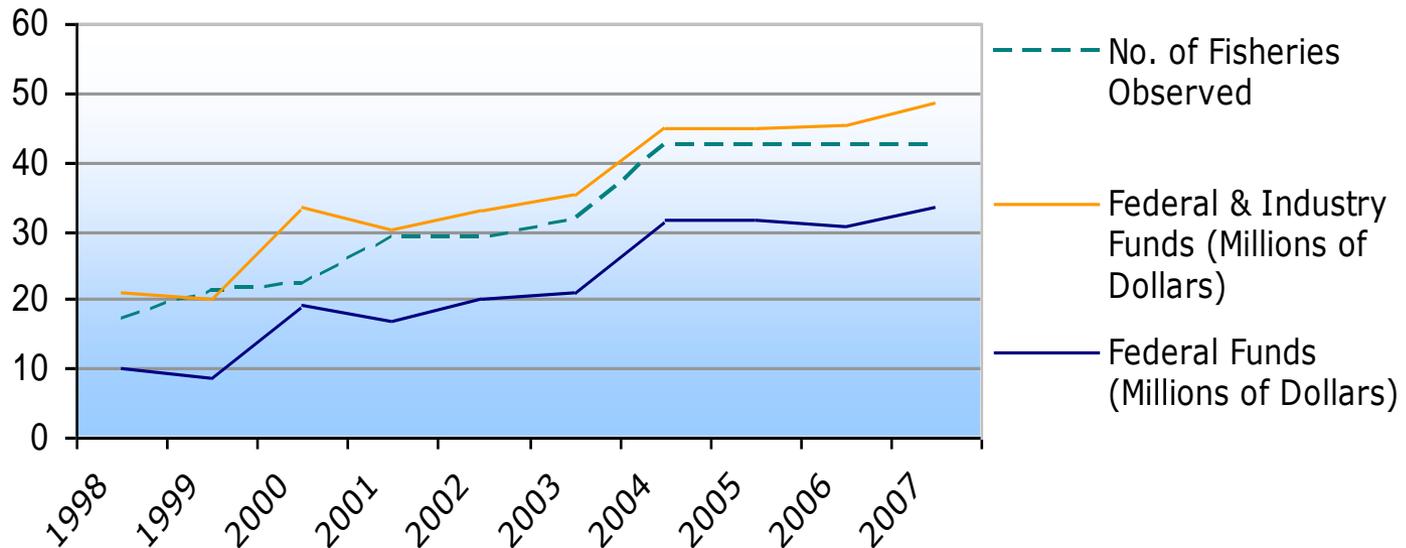
## National Observer Program

- Coordinate the National Observer Program Advisory Team (NOPAT).
- Communicate and advocate the mission of the NOP and each regional observer program.
- Develop and support national standards and policies to create high quality, cost effective, efficient, and productive observer programs.
- Characterize and qualify the activities and resources of NOAA Fisheries observer programs and advocate for full support





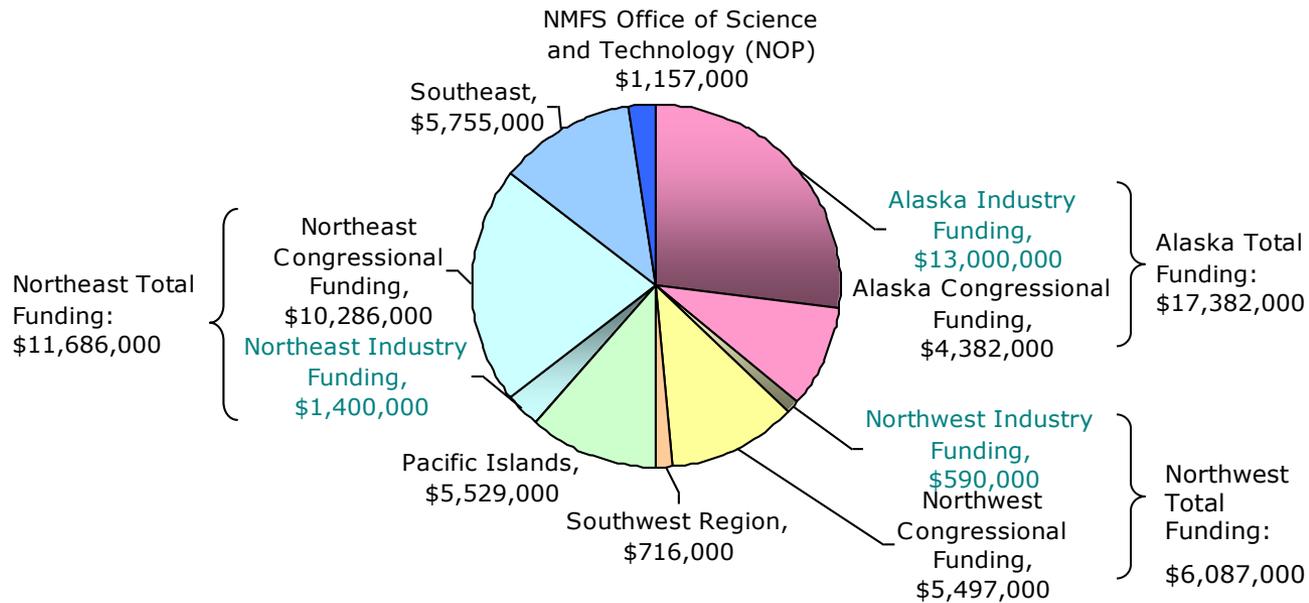
## Observer Programs Funding History



**Figure 2.** Overview of U.S observer program funding and observed fisheries from 1998-2007 (not adjusted for inflation).



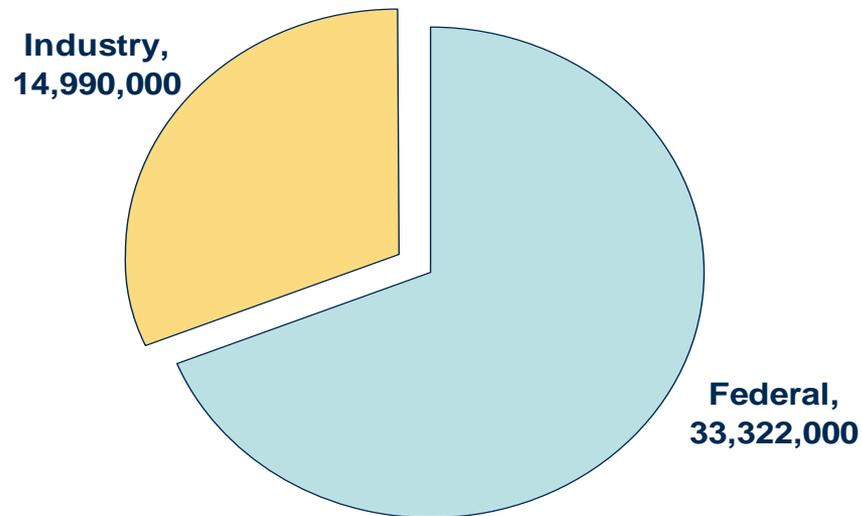
## Funding in FY 2007



**Figure 3.** Funding for National and Regional programs.  
FY 2007 total: \$48,312,000



## Funding - 2007



**Figure 4.** Federal vs. Industry Funding, 2007



## Cost Comparison

- Recently NMFS observer programs completed a comparison of the cost for an observed day at sea.
  - Developed for the North Pacific Council to aid in restructuring analysis for the Groundfish Observer Program (industry funded).
- Examined cost per sea day:
  - Across regions, and
  - Across observer job classifications (e.g. Observer 1, 2)
- Determined what was comparable across programs.
  - Minimum pay: DOL wage determinations
  - Maximum number of hours worked per day, per week
  - Fringe benefits (e.g. FICA, Medicare, etc.)



## Cost Comparison, cont.

- Examined programs under government contract.
- Differences were identified in:
  - Standard work day hours (range: 10-16 hrs)
  - Hours worked per week (range: 70-112 hrs)
  - Overtime hours (range: 30-72 hrs)
  - “Other contract costs” – for example:
    - Travel, transportation, lodging;
    - Overhead, administration;
    - Recruitment costs;
    - Vessel reimbursements;
    - Insurance.



## Cost Comparison, cont.

	Northeast	Southeast	AMMOP	Northwest	Southwest	Pacific Islands
<b>Total Wage per Hour *</b>	\$16.83 - 20.23	\$16.83 - 20.23	\$17.05 - 20.35	NA	\$16.46	\$13.61 - 14.43
<b>Maximum Hours Worked per Day</b>	12	16	12	NA	10	10
<b>Maximum Hours Worked per Week</b>	84	112	84	NA	70	70
<b>Total Cost Per Day – Observer Salary/Benefits Only**</b>	\$288.04 – 352.40	\$394.84 – 484.70	\$285.55 - \$347.01	\$363.75 - 436.25***	\$223.80	\$215.79 - 228.24

\*Wage per hour is based on DOL wage determinations for each region. These are minimum wages and do not reflect any actual contract costs (actual contract costs and the items included are confidential).

\*\*An average amount of 25% is used for fringe benefits, which include Federal Insurance Contributions Act (FICA), Medicare, and state unemployment. Insurance costs are not included.

\*\*\* The Northwest observer program pays observers based on a minimum of 12 days at sea per month (average deployment).



## Cost Comparison, cont.

- When developing a new program, NMFS needs to identify which “other” costs will be included in contracts.
- NMFS may also accrue additional costs, including:
  - Program development, improvement, administration, and management;
  - Data entry, data quality control, and data management;
  - Data analysis.
- This comparison provides only a starting point for further in depth evaluation.



## Other National Program Activities

- Observer Issues
  - Recruitment and retention
  - Safety training guidelines
  - Observer health and safety regulations
  - Eligibility requirements
- Data Quality
  - Accuracy, precision and bias
  - Electronic monitoring
  - National Bycatch Report
- Policy Issues



## Questions?

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