

EVOS RESTORATION AND PUBLIC COMMENT

A focus area for the remaining restoration funds

Gary Thomas, 2/11/10

EVOS Restoration science has come a long way since the early days. We have watched a transition from the single-species to an ecosystem approach. We have observed an integration of physical and biological disciplines. We have witnessed an advancement of empirical methods, despite being in an age that has been dominated by the predictions from theoretical models. Yet there is still a long way to go to rebalance theory and empiricism in fisheries science. The most encouraging sign is that the making, and using of model predictions of marine fish stock size without testing against quality empirical data is rapidly losing its public acceptance.

One lesson from the EVOS experience that looms over other the fish and wildlife issues was the reliance on theoretical models to assess oil spill damage and manage the Pacific herring stock in Prince William Sound. Many important immediate to long-term impacts of the spill on the herring stock and its co-dependent fish and wildlife were either mistaken or missing from the settlement, reopening, court, management, and research decisions. One can only guess on how this affected the Alaskans who depended upon these issues for their quality of life.

There should be no accusations of blame because this was new ground for all who were involved, and after an anthropogenic impact of this magnitude, the local communities were disrupted, opportunists were everywhere, and distrust was rampant. The political climate was not right for new science or management change. However, time heals most wounds and today there may be a possibility to insure that past mistakes are not repeated. The EVOS Restoration Program has this opportunity.

One way to guarantee that some major mistakes are not repeated in the future is to endow community non-profit corporations to become involved in the quantitative and independent monitoring of their resources, such as the acoustic monitoring of the herring stock by the PWS Science Center. The herring stock is too valuable to the people, fish and wildlife, and ecology of the Sound to trust management to highly uncertain model predictions. As the Alaska Natives say, "*The herring are the grass of the sea.*" Thanks to EVOS, we know that the annual collection of the acoustic data is the prerequisite for detecting and understanding changes in the herring stock.

In the opening comments of a past EVOS Trustee Council Annual Meeting, former Commissioner Frank Rue stated something like the following, *if we could only measure the herring and the pollock like we do the wild salmon that return to our rivers to spawn, then we could use our inseason management practices to conserve these spawners too, which has been the key to maintaining healthy stocks and sustaining prosperous salmon fisheries.* Again thanks to EVOS, we now can measure the herring spawners in the Sound better than we can measure the wild salmon spawners in the rivers. Whereas, it is possible that we could measure other fish stocks in a similar manner, it still remains to be seen if the independent monitoring of the Sound's herring can be maintained long enough for the management change to take place. The EVOS Restoration Program has a rare opportunity to endow independent monitoring of the Sound's herring stock, which if done, can prevent the repetition of past mistakes.

Good luck and God bless.