



March 2012

Aleutian and Bering Sea Islands

Landscape Conservation Cooperative

The Aleutian and Bering Sea Islands Landscape Conservation Cooperative (ABSI LCC) belongs to a network of 22 LCCs that cover much of North America, the Pacific Islands, and the Caribbean. Formed in 2011, ABSI followed in the footsteps of the existing Arctic and Western Alaska LCCs that began in 2009 and 2010, respectively.

Background

The ABSI region supports an extraordinarily productive marine ecosystem. Millions of seabirds from more than 30 different species breed and summer here. Nearly half of Alaska's seabirds live in 10 colonies in the Bering Sea. Tens of thousands of marine mammals including Steller's sea lions, sea otters, seals and whales, depend on this important region for habitat. Commercial fisheries targeting pollock, cod, flatfish, halibut, crab, and salmon provide more than half of the seafood consumed in the United States. The North Pacific Great Circle Route, a major international shipping corridor, intersects with the Aleutian archipelago and is traversed by thousands of ships each year.

In addition to the commercial fishing industry, the region supplies food for more than 30 Alaska Native communities through subsistence hunting and fishing. The region also contains a myriad of cultural resources ranging from Alaska Native archaeological sites to World War II relics.

The islands of this vast region were mostly formed from volcanic activity that is still shaping the landscape today. There are 52 historically active volcanoes in the region and 14 have erupted since 1990. The Kasatochi eruption of 2008 completely buried the island in a new layer of ash and provided researchers an opportunity to



Horned puffins – an abundant seabird species in the ABSI region.

understand the evolution of ecological systems on volcanic islands.

Strong partnerships already exist to address many of the resource management concerns throughout the area. The ABSI LCC will not duplicate or assume the authority of any of the existing partnerships, rather it will seek to find efficiencies through collaboration and through the collection of additional science to address high priority resource management issues shared by the cooperative's partners.

Steering Committee

The interim steering committee met for the first time in September 2011. Consisting of three Federal agencies, the State of Alaska, and one Federally-recognized Alaska Native Tribe, the committee elected to focus first on

development of their charter. Initial drafts of the charter were based on the Arctic and Western Alaska LCCs, which had been finalized and adopted earlier. At subsequent meetings in November 2011 and January 2012, the committee revised the charter to include an appropriate mission statement, goals, and scope for the ABSI LCC.

The charter was finalized and adopted on March 5, 2012. At this time, the committee includes four Federal Agencies and one Alaska Native Tribe.

Mission Statement

The ABSI LCC promotes coordination, dissemination, and development of applied science to inform conservation of natural and cultural resources in the face of climate change and other landscape-scale stressors.



The Aleutian and Bering Sea Islands LCC includes St. Lawrence, St. Matthew, the Pribilof, and Aleutian Islands (highlighted in yellow) and the surrounding marine waters.

Goals

The goals of the ABSI LCC (not in priority order) include:

- ▲ Promote communications to enhance understanding regarding effects of climate change and other landscape-scale stressors in the ABSI region;
- ▲ Support coordination and collaboration among partners to improve efficiencies in their common science and information activities;
- ▲ Identify and support research, including data collection, analysis, and sharing that address common information needs of land and resource management decision makers;
- ▲ Enable synthesis of information at landscape and larger spatial scales;
- ▲ Enhance resource management in the ABSI region through applied science, analytical tools, data management, and information transfer.

Scope

The geographic scope of the ABSI LCC includes the islands of the Aleutian archipelago and the Bering Sea and surrounding marine waters.

The science focus of the ABSI LCC is the natural and cultural resources and their associated marine and terrestrial ecosystems important to ABSI LCC partner organizations. The ABSI LCC will strive to avoid duplication with other entities and coordinate on issues of mutual interest.

Science Planning

In addition to focusing on the formation of the steering committee, the ABSI LCC staff conducted an inventory of existing research and management plans from within the Aleutian and Bering Sea region. Over 40 plans including endangered species recovery plans, statewide conservation plans, and Bering Sea ecosystem plans were reviewed by Interim Science Coordinator Vernon Byrd.

Information about each plan was entered into a relational database that included information about conservation issues, target species or habitats, and science needs. This analysis revealed that climate change, fishery management, contaminants/pollution, oil spills, and invasive species were some of the more prevalent conservation issues within the ABSI region. The suite of plans included the following major science needs:

- ▲ Synthesis of available information;
- ▲ Identification of sensitive species and habitats;
- ▲ Determination of linkages between ecosystem components and processes;
- ▲ Development of forecasting models ranging from single species to whole ecosystems;
- ▲ Integration of future studies to improve ecosystem understanding.

This inventory of existing research and management plans also identified the major ecosystem drivers in the ABSI region, including:

- ▲ Climatic forcing (Pacific Decadal Oscillation, climate change);
- ▲ Fisheries (direct and indirect effects);
- ▲ Invasive species (terrestrial);
- ▲ Contaminants/Pollution (oil spills, persistent organic pollutants);
- ▲ Volcanoes and earthquakes in the southern part of the region;
- ▲ Sea ice in the northern part of the region.

Conclusion

The ABSI LCC was formed during the latter half of calendar year 2011. The LCC has made consistent efforts to engage with a large and active partnership community, and will continue to do so in the future. Priorities for 2012 include filling the Science Coordinator position and beginning the development of a strategic science plan to guide short- and long-term activities.

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