

Prince William Sound Herring Research and Monitoring Program

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The Pacific herring population in Prince William Sound (PWS) collapsed shortly after the Exxon Valdez oil spill (EVOS). Since that event in 1989, the EVOS Trustee Council has funded considerable research on herring. Beginning in 2009 they chose to fund research through integrated programs and in 2012 the Herring Research and Monitoring program began. The program currently has projects that monitor the population level and disease prevalence to allow us to track the status of the population. We are also conducting research to determine when the herring mature to the spawning population, tracking movement in and out of PWS, how disease and pathogens impact the populations, growth, how the herring population is effected by environmental conditions and the long-term impacts of oil exposure on herring. A modeling effort pulls information from the different projects to help us better understand the factors influencing the population. A general overview of the program and a highlight of results will be provided. We will show how the various projects tie together to provide a better understanding of this important forage fish. In particular, beginning in 2015 we saw a decline in the PWS herring population. We use the data from this program to examine how the environmental conditions associated with the warm oceanic conditions may have played a role in the decline.