

119TH CONGRESS
2D SESSION

H. R. 6939

To address data and research gaps to improve marine environmental data collection, particularly in the Bering Sea, Aleutian Islands, and Gulf of Alaska, prioritize technology that supports research, bycatch reduction, and marine benthic habitat in Alaska fisheries, advance and streamline electronic monitoring and electronic reporting in United States fisheries, and establish a fund to provide financial assistance for fishermen purchasing gear and technology aimed at reducing bycatch and marine benthic habitat contact from trawl fishing gear.

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

JANUARY 6, 2026

Mr. BEGICH introduced the following bill; which was referred to the
Committee on Natural Resources

A BILL

To address data and research gaps to improve marine environmental data collection, particularly in the Bering Sea, Aleutian Islands, and Gulf of Alaska, prioritize technology that supports research, bycatch reduction, and marine benthic habitat in Alaska fisheries, advance and streamline electronic monitoring and electronic reporting in United States fisheries, and establish a fund to provide financial assistance for fishermen purchasing gear and technology aimed at reducing bycatch and marine benthic habitat contact from trawl fishing gear.

1 *Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representa-*
2 *tives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,*

3 **SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.**

4 This Act may be cited as the “Bycatch Reduction and
5 Research Act of 2026”.

6 **SEC. 2. RESEARCH.**

7 (a) RECONSTITUTION OF THE ALASKA SALMON RE-
8 SEARCH TASK FORCE.—

9 (1) IN GENERAL.—The Administrator of the
10 National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
11 (referred to in this Act as the “Administrator”)
12 shall reconstitute the membership of the Alaska
13 Salmon Research Task Force, as described in the
14 Alaska Salmon Research Task Force Act (Public
15 Law 117–328; 136 Stat. 5271).

16 (2) BYCATCH REDUCTION AND RESEARCH TASK
17 FORCE.—The reconstituted membership described in
18 paragraph (1) shall be referred to as the “Bycatch
19 Reduction and Research Task Force”.

20 (3) MEMBERS.—The Secretary of Commerce
21 shall appoint an additional 2 representatives who are
22 academic experts in groundfish ecology and inverte-
23 brate ecology to the Bycatch Reduction and Re-
24 search Task Force.

1 (4) DUTIES.—The Bycatch Reduction and Re-
2 search Task Force shall—

3 (A) review all research conducted and re-
4 ports published by the National Oceanic and
5 Atmospheric Administration under this section;
6 and

7 (B) in consultation with the Administrator,
8 provide priority recommendations for future
9 work as described in subsection (d)(2)(B).

10 (5) INAPPLICABILITY OF FEDERAL ADVISORY
11 COMMITTEE ACT.—Chapter 10 of title 5, United
12 States Code (commonly known as the “Federal Advi-
13 sory Committee Act”), shall not apply to the By-
14 catch Reduction and Research Task Force.

15 (b) SALMON LIFE HISTORY RESEARCH.—

16 (1) SALMON TAGGING.—

17 (A) IN GENERAL.—The Administrator
18 shall enter into public-private partnerships with
19 State agencies, nonprofit organizations, institu-
20 tions of higher education (as defined in section
21 101(a) of the Higher Education Act of 1965
22 (20 U.S.C. 1001(a))), Indian Tribes or Tribal
23 organizations (as defined in section 4 of the In-
24 dian Self-Determination and Education Assist-
25 ance Act (25 U.S.C. 5304)), and research insti-

tutions to research the marine life history of Alaska origin salmon species in the Bering Sea, Aleutian Islands, and Gulf of Alaska.

(B) PARTNERSHIPS.—In entering into partnerships described in subparagraph (A), the Administrator—

(i) shall involve a diverse group of Alaska salmon experts, including Alaska Natives, fishing industry representatives, commercial fishermen, and individuals who possess personal knowledge of, and direct experience with, subsistence uses in Alaska; and

(ii) may include cooperative research efforts with privately owned commercial or charter fishing vessel owners.

(C) RESEARCH.—At a minimum, the research required under subparagraph (A) shall include satellite tagging or other intelligent tagging methodologies to better understand migration and distributions of Alaska origin salmon during their marine life history in the Bering Sea, Aleutian Islands, or Gulf of Alaska.

(2) GENETIC SAMPLING GRANT PROGRAM.—The Administrator shall conduct a competitive grant pro-

1 gram to support improving the turnaround time of
2 genetic analyses of biological samples collected at-sea
3 or shoreside to provide real-time, or near-real-time,
4 in-season genetic stock identification and age com-
5 position estimates of Alaska origin salmon caught
6 incidentally in commercial fisheries conducted in the
7 exclusive economic zone (as defined in section 3 of
8 the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and
9 Management Act (16 U.S.C. 1802)).

10 (3) REPORTING.—Not later than 3 years after
11 the date of enactment of this Act, the Administrator
12 shall publish a report—

13 (A) on the findings of the salmon life his-
14 tory research conducted under paragraph (1)
15 and the findings of the genetic analyses grant
16 program conducted under paragraph (2) that
17 details how the research and genetic analyses
18 can better inform Alaska origin salmon stock
19 status and distributions; and

20 (B) that includes potential uses of artificial
21 intelligence or machine learning technology to
22 perform predictive modeling to inform potential
23 Alaska salmon bycatch avoidance areas.

24 (c) ECOSYSTEM ANALYSES.—

1 (1) IN GENERAL.—The Administrator shall con-
2 duct—

3 (A) research, through studies and models
4 that incorporate existing data, literature, and
5 ongoing research, of how contact from non-pe-
6 lagic trawl and pelagic trawl gear impact shal-
7 low shelves or other marine benthic habitats in
8 the Bering Sea, Aleutian Islands, and Gulf of
9 Alaska;

10 (B) a review of existing data, literature,
11 and ongoing research efforts on fluctuations in
12 Bering Sea, Aleutian Islands, and Gulf of Alas-
13 ka marine ecosystems that may affect the sur-
14 vivability or energetic condition of commercially
15 or culturally important wild marine and anad-
16 romous species, including examining—

- 17 (i) harmful algal blooms;
18 (ii) marine heatwaves;
19 (iii) in-river temperatures;
20 (iv) sea ice extent and thickness;
21 (v) ocean acidification;
22 (vi) diseases;
23 (vii) nutrient or prey availability;
24 (viii) density dependence;
25 (ix) shifting stock distributions;

1 (x) impacts from hatchery released
2 species, with particular attention to foreign
3 hatchery releases; and

4 (xi) predator-prey interactions; and

5 (C) new research, using the review of data,
6 literature, and ongoing research efforts under
7 subparagraph (B), to prioritize data collection
8 that support conservation of commercially or
9 culturally important wild marine and anad-
10 romous species.

11 (2) DIVERSE GROUP INVOLVEMENT.—In con-
12 ducting research under paragraph (1), the Adminis-
13 trator shall—

14 (A) enter into public-private partnerships
15 with relevant entities, such as State agencies,
16 nonprofit organizations, institutions of higher
17 education (as defined in section 101(a) of the
18 Higher Education Act of 1965 (20 U.S.C.
19 1001(a))), and Indian Tribes or Tribal organi-
20 zations (as defined in section 4 of the Indian
21 Self-Determination and Education Assistance
22 Act (25 U.S.C. 5304)); and

23 (B) include a framework that involves a di-
24 verse group of experts in commercially or cul-
25 turally important wild marine and anadromous

1 species, including Alaska Natives, fishing indus-
2 try representatives, commercial fishermen, and
3 individuals who possess personal knowledge of,
4 and direct experience with, subsistence uses in
5 Alaska.

6 (d) REPORTS.—

7 (1) IN GENERAL.—The Administrator shall
8 publish interim annual reports and a final report
9 (not later than 3 years after the date of enactment
10 of this Act)—

11 (A) on findings and results of the research
12 and review conducted under subsection (c)(1),
13 and the status of milestones reached for all re-
14 search initiatives under this section;

15 (B) on the results from the salmon tagging
16 and genetic sampling research under subsection
17 (b), including modeled Alaska origin salmon mi-
18 gration routes and potential applications to in-
19 form how best to minimize Alaska salmon by-
20 catch; and

21 (C) that includes results from the eco-
22 system analyses under subsection (c).

23 (2) RECOMMENDATIONS; FINDINGS.—The re-
24 ports described under paragraph (1) shall include—

(A) recommendations for applying the results from the ecosystem analyses review to model potential impacts on commercially or culturally important wild marine and anadromous species in the Bering Sea, Aleutian Islands, and Gulf of Alaska to support informed management actions; and

(B) other findings and recommendations for future work under this section.

SEC. 3. FLUME TANK.

(a) IN GENERAL.—The Administrator shall enter into a public-private partnership to build a flume tank for the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, the fishing industry, and other researchers to test technology and improved fishing gear aimed at reducing bycatch and contact with Bering Sea, Aleutian Islands, and Gulf of Alaska marine benthic habitats.

(b) FLUME TANK ASSISTANCE FUND.—The Administrator shall establish a Flume Tank Assistance Fund to provide grants or other financial assistance to support entities that wish to test their innovative technology, including approaches that support prototype development and associated devices, instruments, sensors, or fishing gear designs aimed at reducing bycatch in fisheries and Bering Sea, Aleutian Islands, and Gulf of Alaska marine benthic

1 habitat contact from non-pelagic trawl and pelagic trawl
2 gear, including workforce and training programs on such
3 technology or gear.

4 **SEC. 4. OBSERVER COVERAGE.**

5 (a) ELECTRONIC MONITORING AND REPORTING.—

6 The Administrator shall—

7 (1) create a timeline and process for reviewing
8 and approving exempted fishing permits to support
9 innovating fishing gear types and technology for re-
10 ducing bycatch and reducing marine habitat disturb-
11 ances, including streamlining exempted fishing per-
12 mits for fishermen and owners and operators of
13 commercial fishing vessels who purchase or modify
14 fishing gear, equipment, or technology with financial
15 assistance provided under the Bycatch Mitigation
16 and Habitat Protection Assistance Fund, established
17 under section 322 of the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery
18 Conservation and Management Act, if approving
19 such permits does not interfere with fishery con-
20 servation objectives;

21 (2) streamline the approval process for experi-
22 mental or exempted fishing permits for electronic
23 monitoring pilot projects, if approving such permits
24 does not interfere with fishery conservation objec-
25 tives;

1 (3) facilitate cooperative research programs and
2 regional pilot frameworks;

3 (4) conduct a public stakeholder consultation
4 process not less often than once every 3 years, which
5 shall include public notice, listening sessions, and a
6 written comment period of not less than 60 days,
7 and solicit input from stakeholders, including service
8 providers, regional management council technical
9 teams, fishery industry participants, and data sci-
10 entists, on—

11 (A) revisions to electronic monitoring and
12 electronic reporting technical standards or oper-
13 ational guidance;

14 (B) improvements to cost-effectiveness or
15 usability; and

16 (C) barriers to electronic monitoring adop-
17 tion, particularly among small-scale fleets; and

18 (5) provide a data integration strategy that—

19 (A) incorporates electronic monitoring data
20 directly into regional science center workflows
21 and stock assessment models;

22 (B) aligns electronic monitoring data re-
23 view and retention timelines and quality control
24 protocols with those used in traditional observer
25 data streams;

1 (C) reduces latency between data collection
2 and management application; and

3 (D) supports the development of interoper-
4 able databases that facilitate real-time or near-
5 real-time analysis and decision making.

6 (b) TRANSPARENCY.—The Administrator shall re-
7 quire the regional offices of the National Marine Fisheries
8 Service to publish, online and in layman’s terms, up-to-
9 date observer coverage category requirements for high-vol-
10 ume Federal fisheries specifying the Federal fishery under
11 their jurisdiction, including prohibited species catch (by-
12 catch) for each observer program category.

13 (c) REPORTING.—

14 (1) IN GENERAL.—Not later than 3 years after
15 the date of enactment of this Act, the Administrator
16 shall publish a report on how the National Oceanic
17 and Atmospheric Administration and Regional Fish-
18 ery Management Councils can improve and integrate
19 the use of observer and electronic monitoring data to
20 better inform spatio-temporal fishing activity and
21 impacts to harvested and incidentally harvested pop-
22 ulations, while ensuring the protection of proprietary
23 information.

24 (2) REPORT TO CONGRESS.—The Administrator
25 shall submit a report to Congress and publish the

1 report on the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Ad-
2 ministration’s website that includes the data integra-
3 tion strategy for increasing data review efficiency
4 and uniformity described in subsection (a)(5).

5 (3) RECOMMENDATIONS.—The reports required
6 under paragraphs (1) and (2) shall include rec-
7 ommendations—

8 (A) for the use of any technologies identi-
9 fied as effective for sharing real-time, or near-
10 real-time, catch information to identify bycatch
11 hotspots and bycatch avoidance areas; and

12 (B) to minimize commercially or culturally
13 important wild marine and anadromous species
14 in the Bering Sea, Aleutian Islands, and Gulf
15 of Alaska origin salmon bycatch.

16 **SEC. 5. BYCATCH REDUCTION AND MITIGATION.**

17 (a) REAUTHORIZATION OF BYCATCH REDUCTION
18 ENGINEERING PROGRAM.—Section 316 of the Magnuson-
19 Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act (16
20 U.S.C. 1865) is amended by adding at the end the fol-
21 lowing:

22 “(e) AUTHORIZATION OF APPROPRIATIONS.—There
23 is authorized to be appropriated to the Secretary to carry
24 out this section \$4,000,000 for each of fiscal years 2027
25 through 2031.”.

1 (b) BYCATCH MITIGATION AND HABITAT PROTEC-
2 TION ASSISTANCE FUND.—Title III of the Magnuson-Ste-
3 vens Fishery Conservation and Management Act (16
4 U.S.C. 1851 et seq.) is amended by adding at the end
5 the following:

6 **“SEC. 322. BYCATCH MITIGATION AND HABITAT PROTEC-**
7 **TION ASSISTANCE FUND.**

8 “(a) IN GENERAL.—There is established in the gen-
9 eral fund of the Treasury of the United States an account
10 to be known as the ‘Bycatch Mitigation and Habitat Pro-
11 tection Assistance Fund’, which shall—

12 “(1) be administered by the Foundation; and

13 “(2) consist of donations of amounts accepted
14 pursuant to subsection (c).

15 “(b) USE.—The Foundation shall use the amounts
16 in the Fund to reduce or mitigate bycatch, and reduce ma-
17 rine benthic habitat contact from non-pelagic and pelagic
18 trawl gear, including by providing financial assistance to
19 fishermen and owners and operators of commercial fishing
20 vessels to purchase or modify fishing gear, equipment, and
21 technology, including innovative technology, prototypes,
22 instruments, or sensors.

23 “(c) DONATIONS.—The Foundation may solicit and
24 accept donations of amounts for deposit into the Fund.

1 “(d) CONSULTATION.—In administering the Fund,
2 the Foundation shall consult with the Secretary, acting
3 through the Administrator of the National Oceanic and
4 Atmospheric Administration, each Council, and each of
5 the regional science centers of the National Marine Fish-
6 eries Service to ensure that, to the maximum extent prac-
7 ticable, amounts in the Fund are used in an efficient and
8 cost-effective manner.

9 “(e) REPORT.—Not later than 3 years after the date
10 of enactment of this section, and biennially thereafter, the
11 Foundation shall publish and post online in a manner
12 available to the public information regarding the use of
13 the Fund during—

14 “(1) with respect to the first publication of in-
15 formation, the preceding 3 years; and

16 “(2) with respect to each subsequent publica-
17 tion of information, the preceding 2 years.

18 “(f) DEFINITIONS.—In this section:

19 “(1) FOUNDATION.—The term ‘Foundation’
20 means the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation.

21 “(2) FUND.—The term ‘Fund’ means the By-
22 catch Mitigation and Habitat Protection Assistance
23 Fund established under subsection (a).”.

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