NOAA Funds Mariculture Industry Development Plan in Alaska

Fishermen's News Online July 2, 2014

The Alaska Fisheries Development Foundation has been awarded a $216,812 federal grant to expedite development of the mariculture industry in the state, using a strategic planning process.

The goal, says AFDF executive director Julie Decker, is to grow a $1 billion mariculture industry within 30 years. According to the mariculture initiative developed by AFDF, this goal was attainable via a coordinated effort, a public-private partnership, and a strategic plan.

And part of the strategy plan, Decker said, in an interview with Fishermen's News, is to bring in harvesters and processors, to help them understand that this will benefit them as well.

AFDF is looking at coordinating with all the (seafood) entities around the state over the next two years to develop a long-term strategic plan, to include how to address issues regarding mariculture sites. While there have been some very legitimate conflicts in the past over use of some sites for mariculture, these can be worked out, said Decker. "The more we talk about aquatic farming and what it means, the more people will become comfortable with it," she said.

Finfish aquaculture is illegal in Alaska, but salmon enhancement is allowed, and that is really a form of aquaculture, she said. What AFDF is looking to develop is mariculture involving shellfish and aquatic plants, she said.

So the project has identified two interim goals to reach the end goal: expanding the stakeholder base, and developing a clear and comprehensive strategic plan.

Expansion of the stakeholder base – to include aquatic farming, wild fishery enhancement and restoration of species ranging from king crab to mussels and sea urchins- with creation of partnerships, would increase the capacity for the project to be effective. To develop the strategic plan, AFDF would convene strategic planning conferences in Alaska, including experts from other regions with successful mariculture industries.