photo by Aidan Hutchins

Standard Requirements

- Employment by a permitted observer provider or contractor
- Bachelor's degree in natural sciences
- Thirty semester hours or equivalent in applicable biological sciences with extensive use of dichotomous keys in at least one course
- One college level course each in math and statistics
- No limitations that will interfere with performance of duties
- Competent computer skills

photo by FMA Staff

Permitted Observer Providers for Full Coverage

Alaskan Observers, Inc.
(206) 283 -7310
www.alaskanobservers.com

Saltwater Inc.
(907) 276 -3241
www.saltwaterinc.com

TechSea International
(206) 285 -1408
www.TechSea.com

MRAG Americas
(907) 677-8772
www.mragamericas.com

Contractor for Partial Coverage

A.I.S., Inc.
(206) 403-1109
www.aisobservers.com

For more information please contact:

NORTH PACIFIC GROUNDFISH and HALIBUT OBSERVER PROGRAM
Fisheries Monitoring and Analysis Division
Alaska Fisheries Science Center
NMFS, NOAA

7600 Sand Point Way NE
Seattle, WA 98115

Phone: (206) 526-4674
http://www.afsc.noaa.gov/fma/

The National Marine Fisheries Service (NOAA Fisheries Service) is an agency within the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) of the U.S. Department of Commerce.

The mission of the NOAA Fisheries Service is to provide stewardship of the nation's living marine resources through science-based conservation and management and promotion of healthy ecosystems.

ALASKA FISHERIES SCIENCE CENTER

WHAT IS A NORTH PACIFIC GROUNDFISH AND HALIBUT OBSERVER?

NOAA FISHERIES

photo by Michael Friedrich

What is a North Pacific Groundfish and Halibut Observer?

Fisheries observers are biologists who work independently to collect a wide range of information onboard commercial fishing vessels and at shoreside processing plants receiving fish from Alaskan waters. Observer information is used by NMFS and partner agencies to manage commercial fisheries in the North Pacific.

Observers are deployed by permitted providers for up to three months at a time.

photo by Michelle Ruge

Job Training

Training to become a certified observer consists of a comprehensive three week program held in Seattle. The curriculum includes safety while at sea, sampling methodologies, species identification, and data documentation requirements. It also provides information regarding fisheries management, pertinent fishing regulations, and life as an observer. Attendance, full participation in exercises, and a passing score on exams are necessary to successfully complete the classroom portion. In addition, trainees must be able to don an immersion suit in less than one minute and enter the water and climb into a floating life raft while wearing the suit.

Life as an Observer

Working as an observer is adventurous and rewarding. Observers have the opportunity to experience life at sea and the beautiful scenery of coastal Alaska. The work is physically and mentally demanding. Rough seas are common, bouts of seasickness can be uncomfortable, and the environment can be cold and wet. Limited onboard space makes living and working conditions relatively cramped. Most trips last from one day to a couple of weeks, although some vessels go to sea for several weeks. Many vessels fish 24 hours a day, resulting in erratic and unpredictable work periods and irregular sleeping schedules. Daily activities may include heavy lifting (up to 80 lbs), climbing ladders, and working on rolling, slippery decks. There may be minimal access to phones, computers and mail. In the event of an emergency, advanced medical assistance may not be readily available. Observers can take pride in the knowledge that their work is essential to effective fisheries management in the North Pacific.

photo by Danielle Kane

Observer Duties

- Record fishing effort, location, and total catch information
- Sample to determine the species composition of catches
- Collect biological information such as size frequencies and sex ratios
- Collect biological samples
- Monitor for and document compliance with fishing regulations
- Record incidental takes and interactions of marine mammals and seabirds with fishing gear and vessels
- Maintain a detailed logbook of sampling activities
- Complete a post-cruise debriefing

cover photos by Aidan Hutchins, Lorna Cameron and Jon Moriarty