

Eradication of Invasive Tunicates in Whiting Harbor in Sitka FY2013 Request: \$500,000
Reference No: 50951

AP/AL: Appropriation **Project Type:** Research / Studies / Planning
Category: Natural Resources
Location: Sitka **House District:** Sitka/Wrangell/Petersburg (HD 2)

Impact House District: Sitka/Wrangell/Petersburg (HD 2) **Contact:** Charles O. Swanton

Estimated Project Dates: 07/01/2012 - 06/30/2017 **Contact Phone:** (907)465-6184

Brief Summary and Statement of Need:

This project will provide the Alaska Department of Fish and Game funds to support efforts aimed at the containment and eradication of invasive tunicates recently found in Whiting Harbor, Sitka and monitor the area for two additional years to assess effectiveness of the projected response efforts.

Funding:	FY2013	FY2014	FY2015	FY2016	FY2017	FY2018	Total
Gen Fund	\$500,000						\$500,000
Total:	\$500,000	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$500,000

<input type="checkbox"/> State Match Required	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> One-Time Project	<input type="checkbox"/> Phased - new	<input type="checkbox"/> Phased - underway	<input type="checkbox"/> On-Going
0% = Minimum State Match % Required		<input type="checkbox"/> Amendment	<input type="checkbox"/> Mental Health Bill	

Operating & Maintenance Costs:

	<u>Amount</u>	<u>Staff</u>
Project Development:	0	0
Ongoing Operating:	0	0
One-Time Startup:	0	
Totals:	0	0

Additional Information / Prior Funding History:

This is a new capital project. In prior years, funding for this project was supplied out of the Division of Sport Fish's operating budget. In FY2011 \$90,000 was received from the United States Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) to assess distribution, develop a rapid response plan and do outreach. In FY2012 USFWS provided an additional \$20,000 to assist with immediate control efforts and the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) provided an additional \$5,000 to assist with lantern net and infrastructure removal.

Project Description/Justification:

The department does not have the financial resources or the staff to adequately address this issue nor is the potential for alternative funding sources positive. The population in question is still contained to one embayment, control and eradication has a greater chance of success with immediate response efforts.

This species has severely impacted marine communities in the eastern United States and New Zealand by overgrowing and suffocating existing native and economically important commercial organisms. Whiting Harbor became the dump site when the military left Sitka; it is located between small islands adjacent to the Sitka airport. The site has had various research projects and mariculture farms, some of which have added to the debris on the seafloor. The invasive tunicate has colonized the floating aquatic farm infrastructure that is present in Whiting Harbor. Removal of colonized floating and submerged debris has been estimated to cost a marine contractor approximately \$250,000.

Application of treatment to control the tunicate is estimated to cost \$130,000. Biannual monitoring would be done by ADF&G herring and shell fisheries divers at a cost of approximately \$40,000 for at least three years.

This project is a high priority because of the potential effects to our native fisheries and our growing mariculture fisheries. If the floating infrastructure in Whiting Harbor is not removed, it could float out of the embayment and take the invasive tunicate along with it to begin new populations where it meets suitable conditions. Though the populations of the tunicate on the seafloor cannot quickly travel long distances, if an unsuspecting boater dropped anchor into a colony, then moved to a new area where the anchor was again dropped, the boater becomes a vector to introduce the tunicate to a pristine area.

The department is committed to reducing the impacts of invasive species on fish stocks, recreational fisheries, and fish habitat as identified in the Sport Fish Strategic Plan. Non-native tunicates put the viability of habitats that support our fisheries at risk. Removing suitable substrate and treating undesirable populations of non-native species is the most direct means of providing suitable habitat for our native species.

This project contributes directly to the department's mission through its impact on the division's ability to minimize impacts of invasive species on fish stocks, recreational fisheries, and fish habitat as identified in the department's core service "Provide opportunities to utilize fish and wildlife resources" as well as the division's core function "Fisheries Management".