

SWAMC Annual Membership Meeting Summary 2025

The Southwest Alaska Municipal Conference (SWAMC) Annual Membership Meeting brought together leaders, policymakers, and industry experts to discuss key issues and opportunities affecting communities in Southwest Alaska. The two-day event covered a wide range of topics, from community development and housing to fisheries policy and economic development.

Thursday, March 6 – Community Development

The first day focused on community development, addressing critical issues such as rural housing, child care, and energy infrastructure. Sandra Moller from the Division of Community and Regional Affairs provided an overview of the current state of Alaska's communities and tribes, and emphasized that the strength of Alaska is in its partnerships. Daniel Delfino from the Alaska Housing Finance Corporation discussed strategies for improving rural housing access, rehab project and developing a master plan within your community.

Energy challenges and opportunities were a major point of discussion. Dominique Pride from UAA's Institute of Social and Economic Research addressed the Power Cost Equalization program, while Mark Lisac of the Nushagak Cooperative highlighted the Nushagak Cooperative Hydro Project. Jim Stevens from the Native Village of Atka presented on advancements in hydrogen energy for Atka's energy independence. Even though the federal government is less focused on renewable energy, SW Alaska should still pursue green energy for economic benefits and prepare for opportunities.

Resilience and hazard mitigation were also key themes, with presentations from Sally Russell Cox and Nora Nieminski of the Alaska Division of Community and Regional Affairs and Geological and Geophysical Surveys. KC Kent of HDR, Inc. spoke on coastal resilience, while Aurah Landau and James Marks from HDR, Inc. and Jocelyn Fenton from the Denali Commission discussed project planning in changing times. Highlights included the Alaska flood inundation tool, and the importance of developing an emergency response plan. Dan Smith from USDA Rural Development provided insight into rural business loan programs, discussing the REDLG program. He encouraged pursuing public-private partnerships.

Friday, March 7 – Fish Friday

The second day, themed "Fish Friday," focused on the economic and policy aspects of Alaska's fisheries. Brett Watson, PhD, from the UAA Institute of Social and Economic Research discussed the impacts of local ownership on communities. Alice Ruby from the Bristol Bay Economic Development Corporation provided details on the BBEDC Permit Program and its role in fostering economic sustainability.

The discussion on Alaska's blue economy emphasized mariculture and seafood innovation. Tommy Sheridan from the UAF Blue Economy Center provided an update on mariculture developments, while Dan Lesh from the Southeast Conference and Kathryn Caravano from Saltwater, Inc. shared insights on Alaska's Mariculture Cluster and the Kachemak Kelp Innovation Hub, respectively. Sam Friedman from the McKinley Research Group reviewed the economic value of Alaska's seafood harvest. Statewide, there is an increase interest in integrating kelp as livestock feed source. Other uses include concrete and lab materials.

Facing headwinds in the industry: Fisheries management and policy discussions featured key industry representatives, including Julie Decker from the Pacific Seafood Processors Association, Doug Vincent-Lang from the Department of Fish and Game, Tracy Welch from the United Fishermen Alaska, and Jeremy Woodrow from the Alaska Seafood Marketing Institute. Key points are that Alaska seafood needs to be treated fairly and equitably in the world market, and there needs to be alternatives to world certifications. Also discussed the challenges if tariffs happen and how they could increase costs and create market loss. The new administration brings many unknowns and challenges, especially if the Russian seafood band does not hold. Also need to look for replacement for the China market.

The conference concluded with remarks from Alaska's Congressional Delegation.

The SWAMC membership and business meeting was also conducted during the conference.