Forage Fish in Nearshore Waters of Prince William Sound, Alaska
S.W. Johnson, J.F. Thedinga, A.D. Neff, M.R. Lindeberg, R. Heintz, and P.M. Harris
NOAA Fisheries, Alaska Fisheries Science Center, Auke Bay Laboratory, Juneau, Alaska
Funding provided by North Pacific Research Board and the Oil Spill Research Institute

Problem: Limited information on forage fish species in shallow, nearshore habitats of Prince William Sound
Objective: Identify seasonal distribution, habitat use, and relative abundance of forage fish in nearshore waters

Forage fish are an important prey resource for marine mammals, seabirds, and other fish

What we did
- Sampled 3 habitat types
  - Kelp
  - Eelgrass
  - Bedrock
- Sampled in spring, summer, and fall
- Used 2 gear types
  - Beach seine
  - Purse seine
- Sampled 8 locations
  - Whittier
  - Knight Island
  - Prince William Sound

What we found
- Juveniles and larvae dominated catch
- Catch greatest in vegetated habitats
- Species composition changed seasonally
  - April: Pink salmon 28%, Herring 24%
  - July: Saffron cod 19%, Capelin 16%
  - September: Other spp. 24%
  - Catch greatest in fall
- 4 species accounted for 87% of catch

What we learned
- Fish abundance & composition changed seasonally
- Nearshore habitats used for several months a year
- Vegetated habitats used by capelin and herring

Future plans
- Diel study and resample sites in 2007