

Weather Service Changing Marine Forecast Zones

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Brianna Gibbs/KMXT

Folks around Alaska can expect to hear some different marine weather forecasts in a few weeks. The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration National Weather Service is modifying certain forecast zones for maritime weather starting October 1.

Louise Fode is the marine, public and severe weather program manager for the weather service's Alaska Regional Headquarters and said the changes have been a long time coming. She spoke on KMXT's Talk of the Rock and said they've received feedback from mariners over the years that some of the forecast areas are too large. As a result, weather service broke some of those areas down into smaller sections, adding seven new forecast zones.

"We've also done things like look at satellite imagery to indicate where the winds are the strongest or how they're divided up in different weather regimes. So we made the decisions based on not only feedback from the mariners but what we know meteorologically using techniques like satellite and radar and just our general knowledge as well."

Fode said the weather service was already separating some of the areas within the forecast, and gave an example of what she meant.

"One good example is our zone 172, which is eastern Aleutians, Nikolski to Adak. That's a pretty large zone. For today the forecast is southwest wind 50 knots, gusts to 60 knots. Then it says Bering side, seas 15 feet building to 20 feet in the afternoon. And then on the Pacific side, seas 28 feet. So we have it divided up between Bering side and Pacific side. With the new zones, actually, it will take all that out. So instead of having all of those divisions within one large area, there will be the smaller areas and people can choose which area they think is more relevant to where they're going to be."

For Kodiak's mariners, Fode said probably the biggest change for this area will be the separation of the Barren Islands.

"Right, that's the one that's probably most relevant, or I should say closest to Kodiak is the Barren Islands zone. And that one is going to be right on the Barren Islands line."

She said there will now be separate forecasts for east and west of the Barren Islands. Other areas of interest for Kodiak may be changes for Cape Suckling to Gore Point and Cook Inlet.

Fode said the changes are minor, but should make things quite a bit easier.

“If you get your forecast of course the web maps are going to look a bit different. But another important thing is our Alaska weather information line. We have a lot of people who call that on the telephone and they have their favorites memorized so they just punch the four buttons to get to their favorite forecast. Well, that will be changing so there is a new brochure online that people can look up. But also the changes will happen over NOAA weather radio our HF and VHF broadcasts will be broadcasting all the new zones instead of the old ones on October 1.”

This is the first change made to marine weather forecast areas in ten years. You can find a complete list of changes by visiting NOAA online at A-R-H dot NOAA dot gov.