

NORTH PACIFIC RESEARCH BOARD
ENHANCEMENT ACT

R E P O R T

OF THE

COMMITTEE ON COMMERCE, SCIENCE, AND
TRANSPORTATION

ON

S. 190



OCTOBER 14, 2025.—Ordered to be printed

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SENATE COMMITTEE ON COMMERCE, SCIENCE, AND TRANSPORTATION

ONE HUNDRED NINETEENTH CONGRESS

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NORTH PACIFIC RESEARCH BOARD ENHANCEMENT ACT

OCTOBER 14, 2025.—Ordered to be printed

Mr. CRUZ, from the Committee on Commerce, Science, and
Transportation, submitted the following

R E P O R T

[To accompany S. 190]

[Including cost estimate of the Congressional Budget Office]

The Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation, to which was referred the bill (S. 190) to enhance the operations of the North Pacific Research Board, having considered the same, reports favorably thereon with an amendment in the nature of a substitute and recommends that the bill, as amended, do pass.

PURPOSE OF THE BILL

The purpose of S. 190 is to enhance the operations of the North Pacific Research Board (NPRB) and provide a temporary fix to a financing issue related to its operations.

BACKGROUND AND NEEDS

The NPRB is a science board that supports marine research in the North Pacific Ocean, Bering Sea, and Arctic Ocean.¹ Established by Congress in 1997 under the Department of the Interior and Related Agencies Appropriations Act,² the NPRB is primarily funded through the Environmental Improvement and Restoration Fund (EIRF), which receives revenue from interest earned on a portion of the settlement funds from the Dinkum Sands dispute over oil and gas leasing off the Arctic coast of Alaska.³

The NPRB's mission is to improve understanding of marine ecosystems and to inform sustainable management of natural re-

¹“Who We Are,” North Pacific Research Board, <https://nprb.org/about-nprb/>.

²Public Law 105–83.

³“Who We Are,” North Pacific Research Board, <https://nprb.org/about-nprb/>.

sources in the North Pacific.⁴ The NPRB funds research on various topics, including fisheries, marine mammal populations, and ecosystem dynamics.⁵ This research has led to large-scale collaborative efforts to study environmental variability and its effects on fish stocks and marine communities.⁶ The NPRB supports core research projects, large-scale ecosystem studies like the Gulf of Alaska Integrated Ecosystem Research Program, and graduate student research awards.⁷ The NPRB also emphasizes collaboration with partners, including NOAA, academic institutions, the fishing industry, and Alaska Native communities and Indian Tribes.⁸ It is governed by a multi-sector board that includes representatives from Federal and State agencies, tribal organizations, environmental groups, and industry.⁹

In recent years, the NPRB has faced budget challenges due to fluctuations in the income generated by EIRF, its primary funding source.¹⁰ The EIRF earns interest on 10-year U.S. Treasury notes, and the NPRB receives 20 percent of that interest, which is split between research and administration of the NPRB (capped at 15 percent of the NPRB funds).¹¹ Because of this funding structure, NPRB experienced a steady decline in revenue when interest rates were low, reaching its lowest award value in 2020 when interest rates had an average yield of 0.89 percent.¹² These fluctuations impact the NPRB on a 2-year delay, lasting beyond the end of the interest rate lows. Fluctuations are also influenced by broader economic trends, such as changes in Federal interest rates and market performance. Volatility in the administrative funds, which cover items such as the staff, can be particularly problematic for the continued operation of the Board.

SUMMARY OF PROVISIONS

S. 190, as reported, would do the following:

- Revise the existing North Pacific Research Board by adding a nominated seat to represent Alaska Natives with personal knowledge of, and direct experience with, subsistence uses.
- Require the Secretary of Commerce to make funds available within 14 days after the start of each fiscal year.
- Allow flexibility for the Administrator of NOAA to increase the 15 percent cap on administrative expenses to allow for the continued operation of the NPRB if funding drops below that of the previous fiscal year (for example, if the interest rate falls too low on the EIRF).
- Temporarily waive the 15 percent administrative costs cap for 4 years after the date of enactment, which, over time, would bring the funds available for administration of NPRB up to the

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ “Ecosystem Research In Alaska,” NOAA Fisheries, <https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/alaska/ecosystems/ecosystem-research-alaska>.

⁷ North Pacific Research Board, *2024 Annual Report*, 2024, <https://online.flippingbook.com/view/277695255/10/>.

⁸ “Who We Are,” North Pacific Research Board, <https://nprb.org/about-nprb/>.

⁹ “Our Marine Research Leadership,” North Pacific Research Board, <https://nprb.org/nprb-leadership/>.

¹⁰ “North Pacific Research Board,” North Pacific Research Board, <https://nprb.org/>.

¹¹ Public Law 105–83.

¹² “Monthly Federal Funds from 1954 to 2025,” Statista, <https://www.statista.com/statistics/187616/effective-rate-of-us-federal-funds-monthly/>.

level available before the low interest rate caused Board funding to decline.

LEGISLATIVE HISTORY

S. 190 was introduced on January 22, 2025, by Senator Sullivan (for himself and Senator Murkowski) and was referred to the Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation of the Senate. On May 21, 2025, the Committee met in open Executive Session and, by voice vote, ordered S. 190 reported favorably with an amendment (in the nature of a substitute).

S. 190 was included as section 741 of S. 524, the Coast Guard Authorization Act of 2025. S. 524 was introduced on February 11, 2025, by Senator Cruz (for himself and Senators Cantwell, Sullivan, and Baldwin) and was referred to the Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation of the Senate. On March 5, 2025, S. 524 passed the Senate without amendment by unanimous consent.

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S. 3996, the North Pacific Research Board Enhancement Act, was introduced on March 20, 2024, by Senator Sullivan (for himself and Senator Murkowski) and was referred to the Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation of the Senate. S. 3996 was included as an amendment to S. 4579, the Northwest Straits Marine Conservation Initiative Reauthorization Act of 2024.

S. 4579, the Northwest Straits Marine Conservation Initiative Reauthorization Act of 2024, was introduced on June 18, 2024, by Senator Murray (for herself and Senator Cantwell) and was referred to the Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation of the Senate. On July 31, 2024, the Committee met in an open Executive Session and, by voice vote, ordered S. 4579 reported favorably with amendments.

ESTIMATED COSTS

In accordance with paragraph 11(a) of rule XXVI of the Standing Rules of the Senate and section 403 of the Congressional Budget Act of 1974, the Committee provides the following cost estimate, prepared by the Congressional Budget Office:

S. 190, North Pacific Research Board Enhancement Act				
As ordered reported by the Senate Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation on May 21, 2025				
By Fiscal Year, Millions of Dollars		2025	2025-2030	2025-2035
Direct Spending (Outlays)		0	*	0
Revenues		0	0	0
Increase or Decrease (-) in the Deficit		0	*	0
Spending Subject to Appropriation (Outlays)		0	0	0
Increases <i>net direct spending</i> in any of the four consecutive 10-year periods beginning in 2036?	No	Statutory pay-as-you-go procedures apply?		Yes
		Mandate Effects		
		Contains intergovernmental mandate?		No
Increases <i>on-budget deficits</i> in any of the four consecutive 10-year periods beginning in 2036?	No	Contains private-sector mandate?		No
* = between -\$500,000 and \$500,000.				

S. 190 would authorize the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration to increase the portion of funding the North Pacific Research Board (NPRB) can use for administrative costs, under certain conditions. The NPRB awards grants on a competitive basis to federal, state, and private entities to research the health and sustainability of fisheries and marine ecosystems in the Bering Sea and the North Pacific and Arctic Oceans.

Each year, the NPRB receives a transfer of 20 percent of the interest credited to the Environmental Improvement and Restoration Fund, an account established from a court settlement involving Arctic lands. In 2024, the amount transferred to the NPRB totaled about \$7 million.

Under current law, the NPRB is authorized to use 15 percent of the transferred amount for administrative costs. S. 190 would temporarily authorize the NPRB, for the next four years, to exceed the 15 percent limit if its funding declines from the previous year.

CBO expects that enacting the bill could accelerate spending of amounts transferred to the NPRB because money for administrative expenses typically outlays more quickly than money for grants. CBO estimates that any increase in outlays during that four-year period would be insignificant and would be offset in later years by less spending for grants. Thus, enacting the bill would have no net budgetary effect over the 2025–2035 period.

The CBO staff contact for this estimate is Aurora Swanson. The estimate was reviewed by H. Samuel Papenfuss, Deputy Director of Budget Analysis.

PHILLIP L. SWAGEL,
Director, Congressional Budget Office.

REGULATORY IMPACT STATEMENT

Because S. 190 does not create any new programs, the legislation will have no additional regulatory impact, and will result in no additional reporting requirements. The legislation will have no further effect on the number or types of individuals and businesses

regulated, the economic impact of such regulation, the personal privacy of affected individuals, or the paperwork required from such individuals and businesses.

CONGRESSIONALLY DIRECTED SPENDING

In compliance with paragraph 4(b) of rule XLIV of the Standing Rules of the Senate, the Committee provides that no provisions contained in the bill, as reported, meet the definition of congressionally directed spending items under the rule.

SECTION-BY-SECTION ANALYSIS

Section 1. Short title.

This section would provide that the bill may be cited as the “North Pacific Research Board Enhancement Act”.

Section 2. North Pacific Research Board enhancement.

This section would add a deadline for funds to be made available to the NPRB not later than 14 days after the start of each fiscal year. It would add a member to the NPRB representing Alaska Natives with personal knowledge of, and direct experience with, subsistence uses. This member would be nominated by NPRB and appointed by the Secretary.

This section would specify a 3-year term length for board members representing Alaska Natives and fishing interests, allowing one reappointment for these members. If administrative funding drops below that of the previous fiscal year, this section would allow flexibility for the Administrator of NOAA to increase the 15 percent cap on administrative expenses to allow for the continued operation of NPRB.

Lastly, this section would temporarily waive the 15 percent administrative costs cap for 4 years after the date of enactment.

CHANGES IN EXISTING LAW

In compliance with paragraph 12 of rule XXVI of the Standing Rules of the Senate, changes in existing law made by the bill, as reported, are shown as follows (existing law proposed to be omitted is enclosed in black brackets, new material is printed in *italic*, existing law in which no change is proposed is shown in roman):

DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR AND RELATED AGENCIES APPROPRIATIONS ACT, 1998

* * * * *

[43 U.S.C. 1474d(e)]

TITLE IV—ENVIRONMENTAL IMPROVEMENT AND RESTORATION FUND

SEC. 401. (a) * * *

(b) * * *

(c) * * *

(d) * * *

(e) MARINE RESEARCH ACTIVITIES.—(1) **[Funds available under subsection (c)(2) shall be used]** *Not later than 14 days after the start of each fiscal year, funds shall be made available under subsection (c)(2) by the Secretary of Commerce according to this subsection to provide grants to Federal, State, private or foreign organizations or individuals to conduct research activities on or relating to the fisheries or marine ecosystems in the north Pacific Ocean, Bering Sea, and Arctic Ocean (including any lesser related bodies of water).*

(2) * * *

(3) The Board shall be comprised of the following representatives or their designees—

- (A) the Secretary of Commerce;
- (B) the Secretary of State;
- (C) the Secretary of the Interior;
- (D) the Commandant of the Coast Guard;
- (E) the Director of the Office of Naval Research;
- (F) the Alaska Commissioner of Fish and Game, who shall also be a co-chair of the Board;
- (G) the Chairman of the North Pacific Fishery Management Council;
- (H) the Chairman of the Arctic Research Commission;
- (I) the Director of the Oil Spill Recovery Institute;
- (J) the Director of the Alaska SeaLife Center;
- (K) five members nominated by the Governor of Alaska and appointed by the Secretary of Commerce, one of whom shall represent fishing interests, one of whom shall represent Alaska Natives, one of whom shall represent environmental interests, one of whom shall represent academia, and one of whom shall represent oil and gas interests;
- (L) three members nominated by the Governor of Washington and appointed by the Secretary of Commerce; **[and]**
- (M) one member nominated by the Governor of Oregon and appointed by the Secretary of Commerce**[.]**;
- (N) one member who shall represent fishing interests and shall be nominated by the Board and appointed by the Secretary**[.]**; *and*
- (O) *one member who shall represent Alaska Natives and possesses personal knowledge of, and direct experience with, subsistence uses and shall be nominated by the Board and appointed by the Secretary.*

The members of the Board shall be individuals knowledgeable by education, training, or experience regarding fisheries or marine ecosystems in the north Pacific Ocean, Bering Sea, or Arctic Ocean. Three nominations shall be submitted for each member to be appointed under subparagraphs (K), (L), and (M). Board members appointed under subparagraphs (K), (L), and (M) shall serve for three-year terms, and may be reappointed. *Board members appointed under subparagraphs (N) and (O) shall serve for 3-year terms, and may be reappointed once.*

(4)(A) * * *

(B) The Board shall establish written criteria for the submission of grant requests through a competitive process and for deciding upon the award of grants. Grants shall be recommended by the

Board on the basis of merit in accordance with the priorities established by the Board. The Secretary shall provide the Board such administrative and technical support as is necessary for the effective functioning of the Board. The Board shall be considered an advisory panel established under section 302(g) of the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act (16 U.S.C. 1801 et seq.) for the purposes of section 302(i)(1) of such Act, and the other procedural matters applicable to advisory panels under section 302(i) of such Act shall apply to the Board to the extent practicable. Members of the Board may be reimbursed for actual expenses incurred in performance of their duties for the Board. **[Not more than 15 percent]** *Except as provided in paragraph (5), not more than 15 percent* of the funds provided to the Secretary of Commerce under paragraph (1) may be used to provide support for the Board and administer grants under this subsection.

(5) If the amount made available for a fiscal year under subsection (c)(2) is less than the amount made available for the previous fiscal year, the Administrator of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration may increase the 15 percent cap on administrative expenses provided under paragraph (4)(B) for that fiscal year to prioritize—

(A) continuing operation of the Board;

(B) maximizing the percentage of funds directed to research;

and

(C) maintaining the highest quality standards in administering grants under this subsection.

[(5)](6) All decisions of the Board, including grant recommendations, shall be by majority vote of the members listed in paragraphs (3)(A), (3)(F), (3)(G), (3)(J), and (3)(N), in consultation with the other members. The five voting members may act on behalf of the Board in all matters of administration, including the disposition of research funds not made available by this section, at any time on or after October 1, 2000.

(f) * * *