

## Recruiting for Staff/Project Consultant

Northern Economics has an opening for a talented individual in our Anchorage, Alaska office. We seek a life-long learner who enjoys working on analyses of energy, transportation, resource management, and infrastructure development projects. We offer a stimulating and collegial work environment emphasizing professional growth including the potential for partnership opportunities. We value objectivity, dedication, a sense of humor, and creative problem solving. Our location in Alaska's largest city offers us the opportunity to make a difference through applied economics and policy analysis while enjoying a superior quality of life.

Preferred qualifications:

- ❖ Graduate degree in economics or related field
- ❖ Minimum of four years consulting, or applied research and writing, experience
- ❖ Demonstrated ability to deliver projects on time and within budget
- ❖ Excellent analytical, writing, speaking, and computer skills

For more details, including a description of responsibilities and information on how to apply, please visit our website: [www.northerneconomics.com](http://www.northerneconomics.com) and click on the Staff/Project Consultant link.

## From Proposal to Analysis to Action

One of the challenges of working as a consultant in Alaska is that Alaska's unique natural environment and geographic location often mean that proposed projects that are economically feasible where construction, labor, and/or energy costs are lower are economically infeasible here. As the professionals who often conduct the feasibility analysis, our all-too-frequent role as the bearers of disappointing news brings a new meaning to the term "the dismal science." While our motto may be "Helping Society Make Better Decisions," it's still not easy to tell a client that their dream project is unlikely to result in a positive economic outcome. Sometimes, though, we are blessed with the joy of watching an obviously beneficial and feasible project move from proposal to analysis to action. A recent example moved one step closer to reality when Governor Sarah Palin approved the new FY 2009 Capital Budget, which included \$150,000 to help the Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ADF&G) with its planned overhaul of the current system for collecting labor data on Alaska's seafood harvesters.

### The Problem

Accurate data on participation is important for both the communities crew members call home and for the crew members themselves. Without accurate data fishing communities find it difficult to prove to policy makers, granting agencies, or lawmakers that their communities are integrally tied to fisheries. This is especially true for inland communities where a connection between the community and the sea may not be obvious to a policy maker located outside Alaska. Crew license holders suffer because their licenses do not provide adequate proof that they participated in a specific fishery. This makes it more difficult for crew and communities to find a seat at the table during fisheries restructuring discussions or

when they try to access federal programs such as those run under the Trade Adjustment Act. Hence, an improved system has the potential to make a large difference in the lives of crew members and in their communities. (We also note that improved data collection systems always make the lives of your friendly neighborhood economic consultants easier.)



### The Process

The recent state appropriation is part of a process that began with the Southwest Alaska Municipal Conference's (SWAMC) Seafood Harvesting Labor Data (SHLD) project-when SWAMC expanded an existing effort to improve the quality of seafood harvesting labor data. SWAMC member communities are located from Kodiak to Bristol Bay and out along the Aleutian Chain. Commercial fishing is a cornerstone of the local economy in many of these communities. While several sources track permit holder effort and processing labor by community, crewmember data has received a decidedly lower level of attention than other key components of the seafood labor force. For example, permit holder effort and processing labor are each tracked-by community-by one or more of the following agencies: the U.S. Census, the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, the Alaska Department of Labor and Workforce Development, and the Commercial Fisheries Entry Commission.

## Proposal to Action, contd.

Normally, worker counts are available through unemployment insurance premiums paid to the State of Alaska, but crew members are contract workers who are not required to pay unemployment insurance premiums so the Alaska Department of Workforce and Labor Development does not collect wage reports. The only consistent data over time comes from the Alaska Department of Fish and Game's licensing program. The current licensing program is both vendor and license-holder friendly in that applying for a crew license is the same as applying for a recreational fishing license: simply tell a vendor you would like to purchase a crew license, fill out a carbon-paper backed form, hand over your money, and walk away with your new license. A paper copy of the license is then sent back to ADF&G by the vendor, where it is hand-entered in a database. That point represents the end of consistent official tracking of crew effort across the entire population of crew members. While the data collected by ADF&G allow us to know how many people purchased licenses and where they purchased them, we do not know how many crew license holders participate in a given fishery in aggregate or by community of residence. The current system tracks licenses purchases as opposed to actual participation.

### Our Role

Northern Economics' role in the SHLD project was to document the challenges communities and crew license holders faced with the current system, to outline past and current efforts to address the

problem, to convene a 2-day workshop of stakeholders, and to outline roadmaps to a variety of solutions for SWAMC. The high point of the project came in November 2006 when more than two dozen stakeholders representing crew, communities, state and federal agencies, and researchers came together to exchange ideas and explore solutions to the issues at hand. The meeting ended with a commitment by ADF&G to review the current situation. After the completion of the project in early 2007, the SWAMC Board voted to continue pushing for a revamped data collection system. SWAMC's staff has continued working with ADF&G on to make sure that a new data collection system meets the needs of crew members, communities and policymakers while also meeting ADF&G's goals of ensuring the system stays accessible to vendors and purchasers alike. As quoted by the Anchorage Daily News on May 4th, 2008, John Hilsinger of ADF&G noted "We need a system that works in the Bering Sea Crab Fisheries as well as the skiff fisheries on remote rivers."

While Northern Economics no longer has an active role in SHLD project, we are heartened every time we hear that the project continues to move forward and that SWAMC and the myriad of state and federal agencies involved in the project continue to build on the understandings forged during the SHLD workshops. If SWAMC's and ADF&G's efforts result in an improved crew labor data collection system, we'll be excited to be able to use the new data and to know that we played a small role in making positive change for Alaska.

## Mike Fisher to Present at ProMAC 2008

Project Consultant Mike Fisher has had a paper on project risk management accepted for ProMAC 2008, an international Project Management Conference sponsored by the University of Anchorage Alaska. The conference will be held in Anchorage at the Captain Cook Hotel, September 15th to the 18th.

The paper, titled "Organizational project risk management maturity assessment and improvement," will look at the current methods available to assess an organization's maturity with respect to project risk management (PRM) and will provide general guidance for organizations to improve their maturity.

The paper will be based on work done recently with the University of Alaska Anchorage in looking at the future of PRM, as well as on recently published articles on project management and PRM maturity.

For more information on the conference and to register online, visit the ProMac 2008 page at the UAA website: <http://www.uaa.alaska.edu/promac/>



## Want to know more about Northern Economics?

To learn more about our people, projects, and clients, visit our website:

[www.northerneconomics.com](http://www.northerneconomics.com)

And check out our BLOG by clicking the link on our home page!