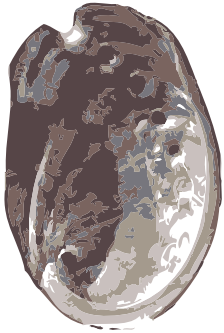




The  
SeaDoc  
Society

# Research Update Summer 2006

## A Marine Ecosystem Health Program



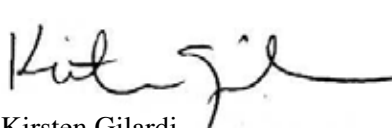
Dear SeaDoc Society Supporter,


Abalone are a part of the Pacific North West's natural heritage. Today however, many people associate abalone and the abalone fishery with California, rather than the Puget Sound Georgia Basin which is home to the Northern abalone (*Haliotis kamtschatkana*), also called the Pinto abalone. In Washington, this small beautiful abalone was never fished commercially, but a thriving recreational fishery once existed and abundant intertidal abalone populations led old timers to call very low tides "abalone tides." Sadly, we don't call them abalone tides any more, probably because the abalone are mostly gone. We are losing northern abalone part of our cultural history and that of First Nations people both as a food item and as decorative shell.

In Washington State, northern abalone were federally listed as a species of concern in 2004. Before that the recreational abalone fishery was closed in 1994 due to population declines. Follow up work by the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife 10 years later showed that abalone populations continued to decline despite the fishery closure. Recent SeaDoc Society-funded work is helping to set the stage for abalone recovery. Dr. Laura Rogers-Bennett of UC Davis is completing SeaDoc-funded work comparing abalone density between 1975 and 2005, studying the role that kelp beds and red sea urchins might play in supporting juvenile abalone and defining which habitats are most important to adult abalone. She's shown that the few abalone still in the region are old, solitary and closely associated with kelp beds. The fact that abalone are spread out makes it difficult for them to reproduce since they broadcast their gametes when reproducing, requiring males and females to be close together for successful fertilization. Other data support that abalone are not reproducing successfully very often any more. Concerted search efforts by Dr. Rogers-Bennett as well as by Dr. Carolyn Friedman and Josh Bouma at the University of Washington have found very few juvenile abalone. But before grouping of abalone to increase reproductive success and hatchery supplementation of depressed stocks can occur, it is critical that we know about the genetics of the abalone in the region. This is why the SeaDoc Society funded Dr. Kerry Naish at the University of Washington to study the genetic structure of abalone in our region. She's found that indeed, even though Northern abalone in the region all look the same, there are genetically differentiated populations (possibly another species) that will have to be managed separately for abalone recovery.

Private donations through the SeaDoc Society have made this important work possible. This winter, the SeaDoc Society is hosting a joint US-Canadian abalone recovery workshop to begin bringing back this important species so that one day, you and your grandchildren can see abalone when walking the beach during abalone tides. For more information on abalone, this research and other SeaDoc Society sponsored research visit [www.seadocsociety.org](http://www.seadocsociety.org).

With thanks,

  
Kirsten Gilardi

  
Joe Gaydos

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