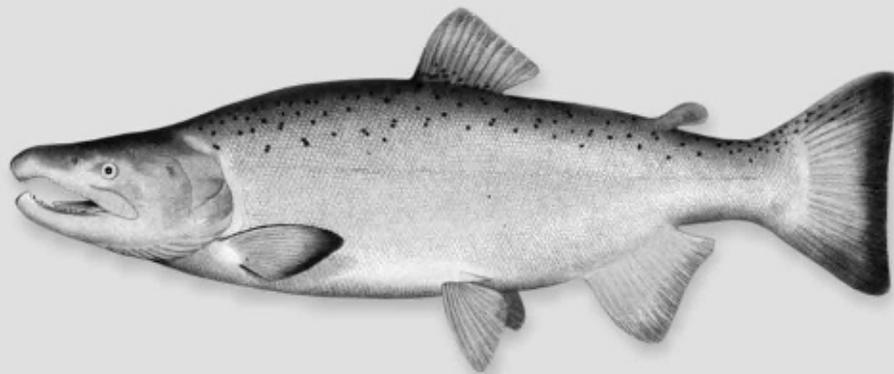
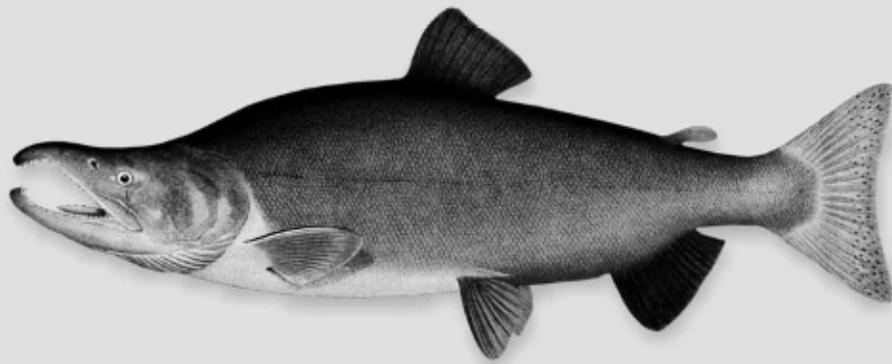
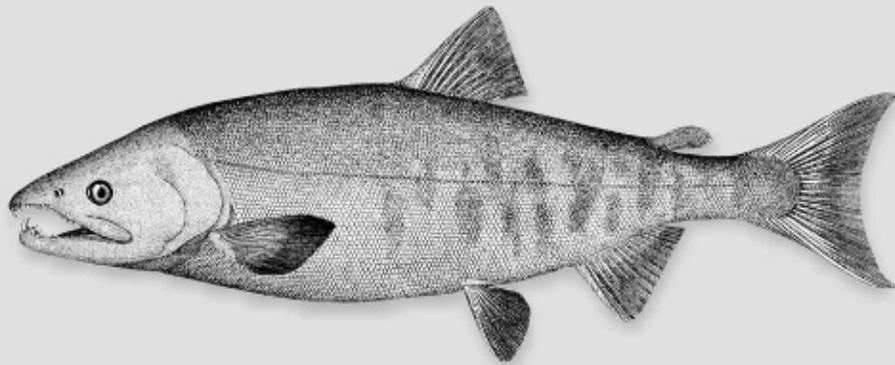


# Fish Report No. 6:

King Salmon—Halibut—Dungeness Crab—Tanner Crab—Pelican Cold Storage Changes hands (again)—Cell Phones—Sinking of *Westerly*—Sinking of *Oaxaca*



### King Salmon

Many who troll in Southeast Alaska are based in Seattle. Their pattern is to bring their boats north in late spring, then return to Seattle at the end of the summer season. As king salmon became more valuable, Seattle-based trollers increasingly stayed on to fish the first week or so of the winter season, which was usually fairly productive. The big effort at the beginning of the season cut significantly into the winter quota and diminished opportunities for Alaskans over the winter. To make the fishery more “Alaskan friendly,” ADF&G in 1992 rescheduled the opening of the winter troll king salmon season from October 1 to October 11, reasoning that the three-week interim between the end of the summer season and the beginning of the winter season was longer than most Seattle-based fishermen wanted to wait. Unfortunately for Glacier Bay’s fishermen, the first part of October is when king salmon were usually most abundant, and the catch of king salmon from Glacier Bay declined after the October 11 regulation was put into effect.

### Halibut

A great improvement occurred in Alaska’s halibut industry in 1995 when the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) implemented an individual transferable quota share program (“ITQ,” but more commonly referred to as “individual fisherman’s quota,” or “IFQ”).<sup>xxx</sup> Based on past production, some 5,000 individual fishermen (captains only) were awarded quota shares in the halibut fishery. Each quota share represented a very small percentage of the halibut quota in a given management area, which varies from year to year depending on the International Pacific Halibut Commission’s projected abundance of halibut. To ensure that large vessels did not dominate the fishery and that the composition of the halibut fleet remained approximately the same, the pool of quota shares was divided by vessel size (“class”) (see Figure 30). Halibut quota shares are transferable. Fishermen can purchase shares from others, or sell out of the business. (Purchasing IFQs is a little like participating in an agricultural commodities future market: their value can fluctuate depending on market conditions and the abundance of halibut.) In theory, quota shares migrate to the most efficient

operations. To prevent a relatively small group from ultimately owning an inordinate percentage of the quota shares, limitations were placed on the number an individual could own. As of this writing, consolidation has reduced the number of quota share holders to fewer than 4,000. Unfortunately, the high cost of purchasing IFQs is a substantial barrier to fishermen who would like to enter the fishery.

With the introduction of the IFQ program, the short, hectic, “derby days” were over. The halibut season opened March 15 and closed on November 15.<sup>yyy</sup> Fishermen could choose to fish at the time it was most efficient or convenient for them. If the weather was bad and conditions dangerous, they could wait for the situation to improve. They could fish when they believed the market would be best and their fish most valuable, or before or after another fishery in which they were involved. There was no need to even own a boat. An owner of IFQs could contract to catch his fish on any properly licensed boat of the same or smaller class. The owner of the IFQs had to be aboard the boat, but some just showed up with their IFQ card, coffee cup, and something to read, with no intention of working on deck.

Overall, halibut fishing operations became more professional. Because there was no desperate hurry to catch or deliver fish, halibut were handled better, and overall quality improved (see Figure 31). Processors benefited because they had a relatively steady supply of halibut rather than periodic gluts that often overwhelmed processing capabilities. Consumers benefited from the higher quality of halibut as well as the fact that the fish were available almost year-round. The improved quality of halibut and its increased availability on the fresh market caused the price of halibut to rise steadily, which was something of a windfall for the industry, particularly fishermen.

In implementing the IFQ program the federal government had privatized the rights to a common property resource. It had “created” an item of monetary value where none had previously existed, and distributed it to fishermen whom it deemed eligible. There was an element of unfairness to it all, particularly to crewmen who had a long history of fishing halibut. Nevertheless, out of respect for the resource, and in the name of efficiency,

<sup>xxx</sup> The Canadians had instituted a similar program in 1991.

<sup>yyy</sup> The season was later extended to begin on March 1 and end on November 30. There is talk of a year-round fishery, which could potentially target halibut on their spawning grounds.



Figure 30: F/V *Zapatista*, rigged for halibut fishing. A number of Glacier Bay fishermen fished from small vessels. (NPS collection, Bartlett Cove, Alaska)

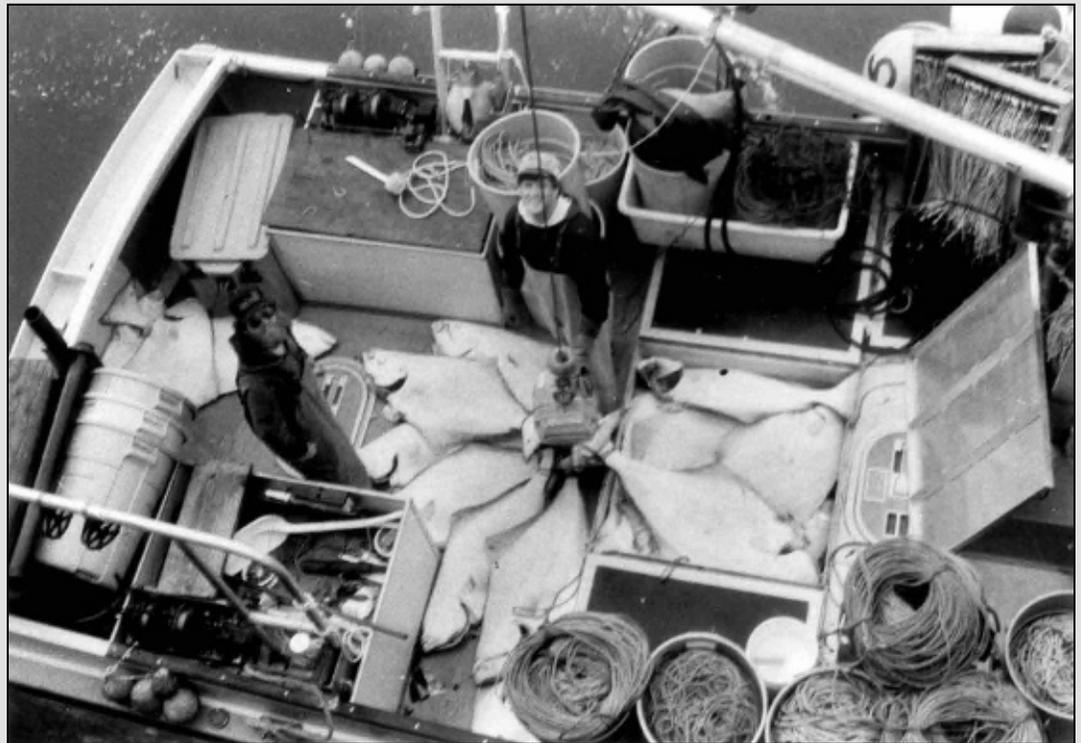


Figure 31: Gustavus fishermen Bruce Smith and Matt Metcalf aboard Bruce Smith's vessel *No-Seeum* with load of high quality halibut. (courtesy James Mackovjak)

providing a high-quality product to the American consumer, and keeping the halibut fishery viable, the IFQ program was a huge improvement over the previous harvesting system.

The impact of the halibut IFQ program on Glacier Bay was substantial. No longer was the Bay crowded for a few days each year with halibut boats, some with crews almost frantic

to catch as many halibut as they could as fast as they could. Under the IFQ program, fishermen were free to choose where they fished. Fishermen who wanted to fish in Glacier Bay could do so, but many opted for historically more productive grounds in Icy Strait and Cross Sound. For the NPS the fishery had the potential to be smaller and conflict less with visitors.

The reduction in the number of halibut fishermen also meant that any NPS effort to reduce or eliminate commercial fishing in Glacier Bay would affect fewer individuals. Furthermore, the IFQ program undercut the argument that access to Glacier Bay was needed by halibut fishermen due to weather-related safety considerations. As Chief Ranger Randy King said in 1995, “Fishers can [now] pick their weather and fish elsewhere.”<sup>568</sup>

### Dungeness Crab

The Dungeness crab fishing industry in Glacier Bay did not stand still while the NPS worked to end commercial fishing. It continued to grow. In 1990, Matt Metcalf, who came to Alaska in 1986 to work at Glacier Bay Lodge and had been fishing Dungeness crab and halibut with Tom Traibush since 1988, leased the vessel *Bogart* from Traibush, purchased 150 crab pots, and started fishing in the Beardslee Islands. Metcalf knew that the NPS wanted to close Glacier Bay to commercial fishing, but the effort had been unsuccessful for so long that he figured there was a good possibility it might never happen.<sup>569</sup>

In 1992 Tom Traibush purchased the 45-foot *Defiance II*, a Chesapeake Bay crab boat powered by a 650-horsepower diesel engine, on the East Coast and had it trucked to Seattle and then shipped by barge to Juneau. The *Defiance II* could carry 150 crab pots, but it burned a lot of fuel: 10 gallons per hour at 10 knots. It was not equipped with a live tank. Traibush leased and eventually sold the *Nellie Brown* to Matt Metcalf, who, in turn, sold the *Bogart* to Dan Foley, whose *Margaret Mary* was falling into disrepair. Charlie Clements bought the 38-foot *Ruby Lynn*, a fiberglass-hulled boat designed to seine salmon, in 1995. Part of the reason for Clements’ purchase was that, should it become necessary, the vessel was better suited to fishing outside Glacier Bay.

There was a recognized need by state fisheries managers to stem the rapid growth of Southeast Alaska’s Dungeness crab fleet, and in 1991 Alaska’s legislature authorized the establishment of a four-year moratorium on new entrants into the fishery.<sup>570</sup> A limited entry scheme was the goal, but the situation warranted a different type than had been used in the salmon fisheries. At issue was the range in the number of pots fished by individual permit holders. Although ADF&G regulations at that time limited individual permit holders to a

maximum of 300 pots, many fished far fewer. It was thought that the imposition of a simple limited entry program might actually cause the fishing effort to increase if fishermen chose to increase the number of pots they fished. During the moratorium, the Commercial Fisheries Entry Commission (CFEC) studied the matter and determined suitable qualifications for the issuance of permits. In 1995, the CFEC imposed a limited entry program on the Dungeness crab fishery. It limited the number of pots that an individual permit holder could fish based on past participation in the fishery. The allowed number ranged from 75 to 300, in 75-pot increments. At least one Dungeness crab fisherman in Glacier Bay was affected by the pot limitation. Matt Metcalf, who had recently been fishing 300 pots, was limited to 225.

The size of the local Dungeness crab fleet in Glacier Bay remained stable except for the 1997 addition of the *Wavelength*, a 24-foot light aluminum gasoline-powered skiff that was decked over and fitted with a small cabin. The *Wavelength* belonged to Naomi Sundberg, wife of Tom Traibush. Sundberg had two sons who fished with her and Traibush. As the boys grew older there wasn’t enough to keep them busy on one boat. The *Wavelength* was a vessel her sons could work on and eventually operate. It was faster than the *Defiance II*, and it was used some to explore different grounds inside and outside Glacier Bay. Sundberg was licensed to fish 150 pots.

ADF&G crab biologist Tim Koeneman determined that harvest levels of Dungeness crab in Southeast Alaska during the 1980s were maintained only because the fleet constantly moved to new areas as local populations were depleted.<sup>571</sup> As additional fishermen entered the fishery the grounds became saturated. There were simply no new grounds to move to. Fishermen staked—“homesteaded”—an area and defended it. If a newcomer moved in and set a string of ten pots, he might return to find that his pots hadn’t caught many crab because they were now sandwiched between twenty of the homesteader’s pots. Glacier Bay’s Beardslee Islands Dungeness crab fishermen acquired a reputation for cooperating to keep newcomers out.

This intense and unrelenting fishing pressure on Dungeness crab in Glacier Bay took its toll on crab. Dungeness crab were being caught as soon as they were of legal size. In fact, before reaching legal size, most crab had been caught and released more than once. In the parlance of

fisheries managers, this was a “recruit fishery.” This issue wasn’t so much a matter of quantity as it was of quality. Younger crab are generally smaller crab, and the average size of crab delivered from Glacier Bay was getting smaller, down to about 2.15 pounds from about 2.4 pounds a decade earlier. ADF&G’s “3-S” (sex, size, and season) management program was structured to provide the maximum sustained yield of crab. The size of those crab was not a consideration. Overall, though still very good, Dungeness crab from Glacier Bay lost some of their marketability. Such was the price of competition for a limited resource on finite grounds.

### **Tanner Crab**

Japanese demand for Tanner crab pushed the price up to record highs during the 1990s. As well, there was—at least for some years—an abundance of the species in Icy Strait, particularly in the vicinity of Pleasant Island.<sup>zzz</sup> Fishing was competitive and intense. With seasons less than two weeks long, it was very important for fishermen to keep their gear continuously productive. At the season’s opening, fishermen tended to set their gear in Icy Strait, then move into Glacier Bay as catch rates declined.

Hoonah Cold Storage and Pelican Cold Storage froze Tanner crab sections for the Japanese market. In Gustavus, Icy Passage Fish for several years cooked and froze Tanner crab sections for the Japanese market, while Point Adolphus Seafoods shipped live Tanner crab to Asian markets on the U.S. West Coast as well as to Japan.

### **Pelican Cold Storage Changes Hands (again)**

In 1996 Kake Tribal Corp. purchased Pelican Cold Storage from Kaihoh Suisan. Kake Tribal is one of more than 200 for-profit Native corporations established by the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act in 1971. The corporation also processed seafood at its cold storage plant in Kake. The purchase of Pelican Cold Storage would prove highly troublesome financially.

### **The Impact of Cell Phones on Fish Marketing**

Fresh king salmon from Glacier Bay, particularly during the winter season (presently October 11 through April 15), are mostly sold to distributors on the West Coast, including

Anchorage. There are surprisingly few customers with integrity who regularly purchase winter king salmon from Southeast Alaska, and they tend to be those that have a high-end clientele. Their names are no secret to anyone who has watched fish boxes being loaded aboard an airplane: the customer’s name is written large on every box.

Until cell phones became available, fishing vessels had very limited ability to communicate with anyone except by marine radio. The frequencies used are public, so there is no privacy. Being very secretive about what they catch and where they catch it, communications among fishermen are often done in prearranged code. The same is true of conversations between fishermen and processors.

The widespread use of cell phones by fishermen changed that, and added a new dimension to marketing fish by giving fishermen an element of independence. They could bypass processors and efficiently market their fish directly while still fishing. Many customers were very happy to buy direct. For a fisherman, cutting processors out of the action didn’t take much: a cell phone, a license from the state, and some fish boxes. Certified scales to weigh fish were available at airports. The most organized fishermen tended to have the highest quality fish (and often the most fish), and they tended to do well at marketing their own production. Fishermen are still ultimately dependent upon processors for ice, but they often stock up before processors close down for winter. When available, snow is sometimes used as a substitute for ice (icebergs are pretty scarce these days). With only one very small processor (Pep’s Packing) remaining in Gustavus, the ability of fishermen to market their own fish is very valuable.

### **Sinking of *Westerly***

On February 15, 1994, the steel-hulled, 72-foot Petersburg-based *Westerly*, which was preparing to set Tanner crab gear, reported that it was in danger of sinking northeast of Strawberry Island. There were gale-force winds from the north at the time. The three individuals aboard donned immersion suits and abandoned the vessel. They were almost immediately rescued by the vessel *Northwyn*, which was also fishing Tanner crab. The *Westerly* stayed afloat for approximately one hour,

<sup>zzz</sup> Tanner crab caught in the vicinity of Pleasant Island are considered by many to be of the highest quality available in southeast Alaska.

than sank east of Strawberry Island. Despite the severe weather, the cause of the sinking was not weather-related, but due to the sudden failure of a bulkhead in the main hold, which was filled with seawater to hold live crab. No attempt was made to salvage the *Westerly*.<sup>572</sup>

### **Sinking of *Oaxaca***

On February 15, 1998—four years to the day after the *Westerly* sank—the wooden-hulled, 36-foot, Gustavus-based *Oaxaca*, which was ring-netting for Tanner crab, struck a reef near the south entrance to Hutchins Bay (Beardslee Islands area) and began to sink.<sup>AAAA</sup> A distress call was issued, and the two individuals aboard began to don immersion suits. They were not long after taken aboard the *Cape Fairweather*, a commercial fishing vessel that responded to their distress call. Efforts were made to keep the *Oaxaca* afloat, but they were unsuccessful and the vessel sank in shallow water. The *Oaxaca* was later refloated and towed to Gustavus, where usable items were salvaged before the hull was burned.<sup>573</sup>



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<sup>AAAA</sup> In 1994 and 1998, February 15 was the opening day of the Tanner crab season.