

PSPFA

Pacific Seafood Processors Association

- Our members provide
- *career opportunities for Alaskans
 - * markets for Alaska's catcher vessels
 - * millions of dollars in taxes to the state and local governments

PSPA objectives include:

- Continuing to encourage conservation, enhancement and optimum utilization of our renewable fishery resources.
- Encouraging the development of sensible standards for seafood production to assure the most wholesome and healthful products possible.
- Fostering a better public understanding of the importance of the seafood industry and its value to the state, regional, and national economies.
- Providing regular and consistent communication with government agencies, legislative bodies, the judiciary system and the news media in the pursuit of industry interests while coordinating efforts with other seafood related organizations.

PSPA, the voice of Alaska's seafood processors since 1914

www.alaskanjobs.com

213 Third Street, Suite 112, Juneau, Alaska 99801 (907) 586-6366 smadsen@pspafish.net

Resource Development Council
121 W. Fireweed, Suite 250
Anchorage, AK 99503
ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED

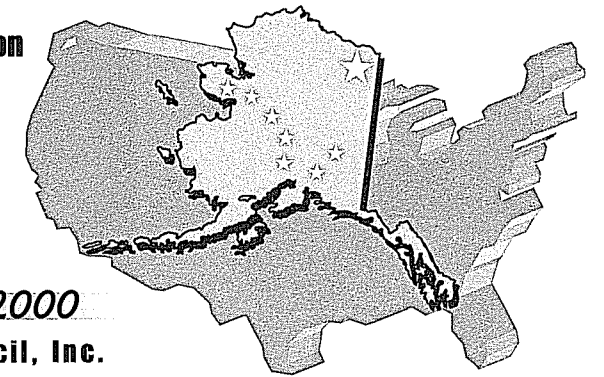
Bulk Rate
U.S. Postage
PAID
Anchorage, AK
Permit No. 377

This Edition Sponsored by: Pacific Seafood Processors Association

Resource Review

October 2000

A periodic publication of the Resource Development Council, Inc.



"Fishermen, fish processing plants and communities from Cordova to Dutch Harbor have survived and thrived despite earthquakes, volcanic eruptions, tsunamis, freezing spray and fluctuations in fish and shellfish abundance. The question now is can the communities from Cordova to Dutch Harbor survive the Endangered Species Act or will once thriving communities become ghost towns?"

Sea lion restrictions cripple fishing industry, coastal communities

By Chris Blackburn
Alaska Fish Data Bank

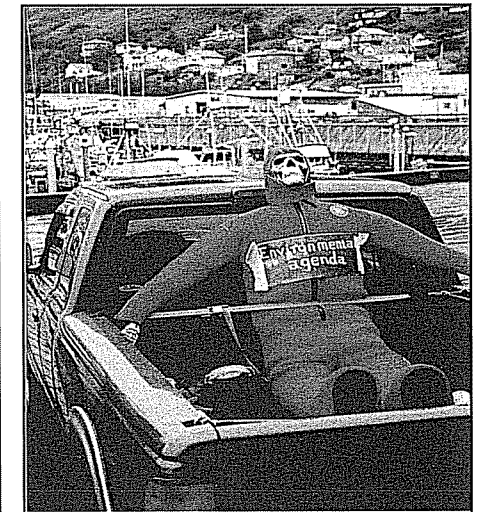
When the third quarterly pollock fishery in the Gulf of Alaska opened August 20, more than half the fleet stayed tied to the dock. Out of the 41 vessels that make up the Kodiak pollock fleet, 15 vessels stayed at the dock. Of the 52 vessels in the Sandpoint area

fleet, 35 stayed at the dock. The tie-up was not due to price, but to safety considerations.

The vessels that remained at the dock had been displaced from their fishing areas near shore by Ninth Circuit Judge Thomas E. Zilly who, on July 19, issued an interim injunction effective August 8 which prohibited trawling within 20 nautical miles (NM) of the shore

Impacts of trawling ban in critical habitat areas

- The ban on bottom fishing could reduce the tax base for local communities by as much as 60 to 70 percent.
- The fishing industry stands to lose well in excess of \$100 million annually from prohibitions on trawling in Steller sea lion critical habitat areas.
- Fishermen will face substantially higher risk factors as the ban forces their smaller boats further off shore into dangerous seas.
- The economic base of coastal communities depend heavily on fish. Revenues from fishing funds schools, hospitals, roads, and local merchants.
- The area closed to trawling is currently at least 50,000 square miles of near-shore ocean from St. Elias to Attu, a distance of 2,000 miles. The distance from the Canadian border to Key West, Florida is 1,800 miles.



Many local residents in Kodiak have hard feelings toward environmental groups pressing for an end to trawling in Steller sea lion critical habitat areas.

under the authority of the Endangered Species Act (ESA).

The Gulf of Alaska trawl fleet is mainly composed of vessels less than 60 to 100 feet in length – vessels designed to fish near shore. To venture 20 NM out is exceedingly dangerous.

The vessels that did try to fish the third pollock season found little pollock outside the 20 NM barrier and actually spent more money looking for pollock than the value of the small amounts of pollock they were able to find.

It is the 30-year decline of Steller sea lions in the Central and Western Gulf and Bering Sea/Aleutians that has brought the ugly realities of the ESA to the Alaska fishing industry. Between 1976 and 2000, the Western Area Steller sea lion population has declined from 120,000 animals to 25,000 animals.

According to National Marine Fish-
(Continued to page 4)

Steller sea lion debate rages, judge's decision approaching

(Continued from page 1)

eries Service (NMFS), the number of Steller sea lions declined at a steep rate from 1976 to 1988. By 1988 there were only 40,000 animals remaining. Since 1988 the rate of decline has slowed. It could be said that the situation for sea lions is improving, but this is not how NMFS Protected Resources Division views the picture nor that allowed under the ESA.

Little attention was paid to the Steller sea lion decline until 1990 when sea lions were listed as threatened under ESA. The Alaska Sea Grant Program held a meeting in Anchorage to discuss measures to help sea lion recovery. Prohibiting the shooting of Steller sea lions was agreed to by all fishermen. Beyond a ban on shooting, no one had any ideas to help Stellers because the cause of the decline had not been identified – nor has it been to this day.

The threatened listing in 1990 gave Greenpeace an opportunity to sue NMFS in an effort to reduce the Gulf of Alaska pollock quota. The Gulf communities intervened, as did the State of Alaska under Governor Wally Hickel. The Judge ruled in favor of the

interveners. The Judge also admonished NMFS for failing to update its Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement (SEIS). Despite the admonishment, NMFS failed to update the SEIS.

That failure, in the face of continued declines in the Steller sea lion population, left the door open for the current lawsuit filed by Greenpeace, American Oceans Campaign and Sierra Club.

Updating the SEIS is a long process which the agency is trying to do in a few months. Judge Zilly has turned down the biological opinions submitted so far. The judge has made it clear that he wants a document that explains how all the Alaskan fisheries fit together in the areas of Steller sea lion decline – a request which science may not be able to fulfill due to lack of knowledge.

In the early days of Steller sea lion research, blood samples indicated "nutritional stress" which was translated by marine mammal biologists as meaning sea lions were not able to find enough food. Industry has offered its opinion that rather than not enough food it was more likely that some dietary

elements may have disappeared during the 1975 regime shift during which crab and shrimp vanished in the Gulf of Alaska and Bering Sea while pollock and Pacific cod increased dramatically.

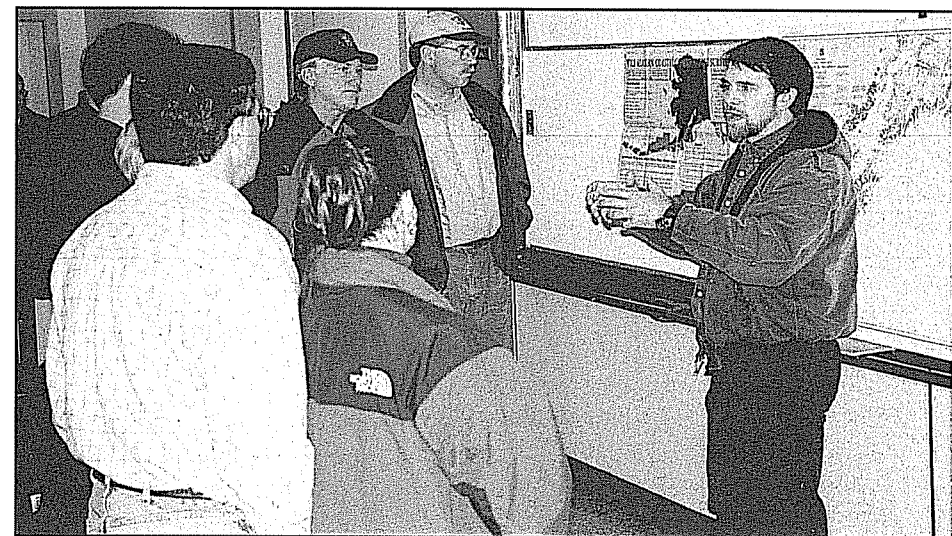
Currently pups leave the rookeries fat and healthy. In fact, according to NMFS, the pups born in areas of sea lion decline are leaving their rookery fatter than the pups born in Southeast Alaska where sea lions are increasing.

There are several hypotheses that could explain the sea lion declines, including the possibility that pollock have overrun the ecosystem or that the decline of fatty fish during the regime shift caused nutritional stress, or that the decline of the ocean productivity is low enough that there is not enough food to sustain the number of Steller sea lions seen in 1996 or that the million metric tons (MT) of arrowtooth flounder biomass in the Gulf whose diet is 90% pollock is out competing sea lions. However, the ESA does not simply wait for nature. The ESA requires action and the only action which can be taken is managing people since nature is unmanageable.

Right or wrong, the only hypotheses available in an ESA action is one that fingers human actions. The Protected Resources Division hypothesis is that fishing is competing with sea lions and depriving them of food. Based on the food competition theory, mitigation measures closing areas to fishing could make sense until it is pointed out that the fish taken by the industry represent 10-20% of the biomass, leaving 80-90% of the fish for sea lions, but the untested conjecture that fishing competes with sea lions is NMFS position.

Judge Zilly is tasked with the role of approving management measures which will, with certainty, reverse the decline of Steller sea lions as required by the ESA. Unfortunately there are no clear, certain answers. Frustrated with NMFS inability to deliver an adequate

(Continued to page 5)



Matt Moir of Alaska Pacific Seafoods briefs RDC board members last month in Kodiak on the Steller Sea lion issue. Moir noted that the Kodiak fleet and local processing plants employing hundreds of local residents have been severely impacted by the ban on trawling.

RDC Board visits Kodiak

Community Outreach
September 2000



Anchorage Mayor George Wuerch watches Kodiak Harbormaster Marty Owen navigate his vessel "The Sea Breeze" along Kodiak's waterfront.



RDC board members pose before the U.S. Coast Guard Cutter Ironwood. The RDC board toured the U.S. Coast Guard base at Kodiak. The base is the largest Coast Guard facility in the U.S.



RDC board members were treated to a waterfront tour of Kodiak's port by Harbormaster Marty Owen.



John Lucas describes the wine-making process at his Kodiak winery.

Steller Sea lion protection measures draw fire in Kodiak

(Continued from page 4)



RDC Board member Al Burch of the Alaska Dragger's Association leads an RDC delegation to the fleet's docks in Kodiak.

biological opinion as required by the ESA, Judge Zilly granted the plaintiffs' interim injunction which banned trawling within the critical sea lion habitat defined as the 20 NM from the shore. The interim injunction remains in effect until NMFS produces a satisfactory biological opinion. The opinion is due October 31. And No one knows how long the Judge will take to make his decision.

Meanwhile, many boats in the Gulf of Alaska will remain at the dock when the D season pollock fishery opens October 1 rather than risk fishing more than 20 NM from shore. When the boats can't fish or cannot find fish, there will be no work for processing workers, many of which are year-round residents of their communities.

The economic base for Alaska coastal communities is fish. When the pollock C season opened August 20,

there was 23,000 MT of pollock quota available. Because most of the pollock biomass was within the 20 NM critical habitat, the boats that did fish were only able to catch 9,620 MT before the season closed. The 13,413 MT left in the water was worth \$2,217,169 ex-vessel. Also lost was the severance tax and raw fish tax which is a significant part of a coastal community's income base.

Fishermen, fish processing plants and communities from Cordova to Dutch Harbor have survived and thrived despite earthquakes, volcanic eruptions, tsunamis, freezing spray and fluctuations in fish and shellfish abundance. The question now is can the communities from Cordova to Dutch Harbor survive the Endangered Species Act or will once thriving communities become ghost towns?