

FACT SHEET 1 FISHERY DEVELOPMENT

...attention to the increasing effects of international fishing resulted in long-overdue changes.

Increasing local participation

From the beginning, the potential for development of the rich fishery resources along western Alaska has remained at the heart of BSFA's mission. For decades, foreign fleets scooped up the fish and sailed away, while Alaska's own fishermen were shut-out of these fisheries due to the lack of adequate venture capital, infrastructure, and local expertise. BSFA set about assessing the viability of developing herring fisheries compatible with the rural Alaskan lifestyle. Increasing local participation in the herring fisheries was one of the major issues that spurred the formation of BSFA.

Creating an advantage

This little fish was significant to Alaskans. Herring has a long history as a food fish in Asia and Europe. The countries traditionally supplying those markets have fished in the North Sea, in Icelandic waters, and along the Norwegian Coast, but in the 1960s and 70s those herring stocks collapsed. During the period of low supply there was a shift toward higher status for herring and herring products, and since herring were still plentiful in the

Bering Sea, commercial fishing increased. Herring went from being a "poor man's dinner" to a delicacy. Western Alaskan gillnetters demonstrated beyond a doubt that they could both catch all the allowable harvest and attract processors to buy their fish. Throughout the most productive years of the herring fishery, BSFA continued to demand equal opportunity for western Alaskan fishers.

900 foot longlines

The development of the halibut fishery followed the successful herring fishery, and through BSFA's support western Alaskan fishers were able

to participate in the commercial fishery.

Traditionally, residents have fished for halibut during the summer months as a subsistence activity using hand lines and rods. Participants in the commercial halibut fishery learned to use skiffs, which range in size from 18–24 feet, and 900' longlines—still



Giving subsistence and commercial fishermen a voice in the sustainability & development of Bering Sea and western Alaska fishery resources.

Bering Sea Fishermen's Association

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significantly smaller than typical commercial longlines—with 50 hooks pulled by hand, since mechanical gear was beyond the means of the region.

As proof of their tenacity, in 1982, local fishermen landed over 26,000 lbs. of halibut during that first season's 19 day opening. The communities, assisted by BSFA, began work to convince the International Pacific Halibut Commission to divide Area 4 (Bering Sea) into a north and south region, and to ensure

that they were allowed to develop their fishery before it became limited entry. That way, the northern Bering Sea would have its own catch quota. If heavy fishing by big boats took the

quota in the southern Bering

Sea, fishing by small boats in the north could continue.

Enforcement hampers progress

A lot of hard work and extensive negotiations began to pay off for the communi-


ties. They succeeded in extending their halibut season, and by winning protection from a moratorium on new entrants to the commercial halibut fishery, they had a chance to develop their halibut fishery. But progress was hampered by lack of enforcement on the influx of large boats fishing out the quota within days, lack of adequate processing facilities, and low market prices. Western Alaska was in it for the long haul, and focused efforts on producing the best halibut for the market, and securing check-in regulations for non-local fishers. With the assistance of BSFA, village councils received funding through the Administration for Native Americans (ANA) for the development of a comprehensive fisheries industry plan.

Developing infrastructure

This comprehensive fisheries industry plan helped establish a local fisheries development review committee, employ marketing and business plans, develop fisheries industry training programs, plan shore-based fish processing infrastructure, extend offshore fish harvesting and processing options, as well as fisheries

resource and policy planning for rural communities.

Funds provided by ANA were utilized to construct small, shore-based processing facilities at Mekoryuk, Quinhagak, Toksook Bay and Tununak. Initially, these facilities consisted of cold storage and processing equipment.

In addition to generating direct employment in the fish processing industry, construction promoted the development of local businesses in fishing, transportation, and marine equipment and supply operations. The processing facilities extended the fishing season, facilitated entry into additional fisheries, and established new markets for local fish processors. Local governments benefited through fish and local sales tax revenue. 

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