

## FACT SHEET 3 ADVOCACY & RESPONSIBLE STEWARDSHIP

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### *Attention to salmon*

Many Chinook salmon runs across western Alaska have seen significant declines in recent years. In 2008, Chinook salmon returns to the Yukon River came in even lower than expected. There was no directed commercial fishery for Chinook salmon on the Yukon River, and the commercial fishery to target summer chum salmon (whose run timing overlaps considerably with the Chinook salmon run) was significantly restricted to protect the migrating Chinook salmon. Subsistence harvesting times were reduced by half during much of the summer, and many subsistence fishermen reported that they did not meet their subsistence needs. Lower Yukon commercial salmon fishermen typically do not make a substantial amount of money, compared to other commercial fishers across the state, but the money they make is tremendously important in a region where cash and jobs are scarce.

Also in 2008, the Chinook salmon return to the Unalakleet River—the largest Chinook salmon run in the region—was the lowest on record. There was no commer-

cial fishery, and the subsistence fishing opportunity and harvests were dramatically reduced.

### *Western Alaska voices concerns*

The groundfish fisheries off the coast of Alaska have undergone significant management changes in the past four decades. Prior to the adoption of the Magnuson Fishery Conservation and Management Act (MFCMA) in 1976, groundfish harvests by foreign fleets (and their associated bycatch) had been largely unregulated and un-monitored off the coastline of Alaska. After the passage of the MFCMA—now simply known as the Magnuson-Stevens Act—these largely foreign-operated fisheries continued, but with some US oversight and regulation.

The Act first created an Exclusive Economic Zone to regulate fishing, and oil, gas and mineral development. Additionally, a number of regional fishery management councils were established to



*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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regulate fishing within the newly identified “zones.” These measures and actions helped give rise to BSFA, and offered a platform for the residents of western Alaska to begin voicing concerns and influencing regulations to secure a strong hold on their abilities to be responsible stewards of the resources they cling to.

### *Bycatch in the pollock fishery*

Wherever Chinook salmon occur throughout the North Pacific, they are fully allocated and utilized by the subsistence, commercial and sport users that depend upon them. According to several studies, between 50 to 60% of the Chinook salmon taken as bycatch in the pollock fishery are of western Alaska origin. The salmon taken as bycatch never make it to the intended user, nor reproduce, and the impact is felt throughout the state.

In 2009, the North Pacific Fishery Management Council (NPFMC) adopted Amendment 91 which was intended to limit Chinook salmon bycatch in the Bering Sea pollock fishery. This effort was closely monitored by BSFA, as previous attempts by the NPFMC had failed

to limit bycatch of non-target species, including Chinook salmon. These new Chinook salmon bycatch management measures, approved by the NPFMC, will go into effect January 1, 2011.

### *Exploration in Bristol Bay*

In the early 1980s, the United States Minerals Management Service (MMS) attempted to offer virtually all waters around the US to exploration by oil and gas companies. There was widespread community outcry from Barrow, Alaska to Key West, Florida. Each year since 1982, Congress has passed a measure in the Interior Appropriations bill to prohibit oil and gas leasing, and exploration on the Outer Continental Shelf of the vast majority of the nation's coastline.

Bristol Bay lost congressional protection with the enactment of the 2004 Interior Appropriations Act in which Congress lifted its ban on offshore drilling in Bristol Bay. This left only the presidential withdrawal safeguarding Bristol Bay from oil and gas drilling. Without the congressional moratorium, the US Department of the Interior chose to include the federal waters of Bristol Bay in their Proposed

5-Year Program for Outer Continental Shelf Leasing 2007–2012.

Then in January 2007, ending nearly twenty years of bipartisan protection, President George W. Bush lifted the ban on offshore drilling in Bristol Bay by rescinding the presidential withdrawal, which led the MMS to announce its Final 5-Year Program for Outer Continental Shelf in April 2007. The plan includes a lease sale in Bristol Bay scheduled for 2011.

So, what's next? Bering Sea Fishermen's Association will continue to monitor the process. BSFA supports the objectives of the federal government to reduce America's dependence on foreign oil supplies. Coastal waters cannot be sacrificed for this purpose, and BSFA will continue to argue for permanent protection. ~



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