

# U.S. missed chance to protect salmon

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for the Tundra Times

BETHEL — Alaskan salmon fishermen missed a golden opportunity to develop and implement with the United States and Soviet Union an effective 1989 salmon policy that would have prevented a repeat of the 1988 largescale illegal high seas salmon interceptions.

## OPINION

At the third U.S.-USSR fish negotiation meeting in Washington, D.C., earlier this month, the American negotiator failed to achieve any new understanding that would have helped both countries.

The Russians have taken a tougher stand on Japan's distant water salmon fleets in recent years. The Soviets have reduced the Japanese high seas allocation by 55 percent since declaring their 200-mile zone in 1976. Recently, the Soviet Union has announced that the Japanese high seas salmon fishery will be over by 1992.

Underscoring their tougher policy, the Soviets sent a majority of the Japanese land-based fleet back to port in 1988 because of illegal fishing. The Soviet Union also seized three Taiwanese "squid" boats fishing salmon on the high seas beyond 200 miles in 1988.

Japan and its Asian allies won the negotiations. They weren't even in the room. They did not have to be. Reagan's ghost won it for them.

The guiding ocean principle of the Reagan years was let Japan decide U.S. North Pacific fish policy. The economic and conservation misery that

Japan's fishing practices wrought on the Pacific Northwest fishing industry was considered a regional issue of limited interest to U.S.-Japanese trade policy by Reagan.

Seven hundred plus Japanese squid boats fish at will on salmon. Their owners market their booty through complicated "laundering" schemes into Japanese and European markets. Japan's success in knee-capping effective response from the Superpower salmon spawning states encouraged an additional 300 Korean and Taiwanese boats to join the "squid" fleet.

By failing to reach common ground, U.S. negotiator Ambassador Ed Wolfe made the job of conserving salmon in 1989 more difficult. For example, the Soviets could have agreed to eliminate all mothership allocations to Japan in 1989. Such an agreement would have eliminated the need for the Bush administration to act on Japan's newest request.

The United States could have moved in concert with the Soviets to insist on Certificates of Origin for all salmon sales to deny market opportunities for illegal "squid" sales.

For U.S. salmon interests, the missed opportunity will be soon evident in 1989. The Soviets will now meet with Japan on 1989 salmon allocations in Moscow at the end of this month as part of the USSR-Government of Japan Joint Fisheries Agreement.

The United States will meet with Japan and Canada at a special meeting to discuss the mothership catcher boat conversion proposal.

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The Soviets do not have a clear indication of how the United States would view any of its actions to eliminate, relocate fishing effort or reduce allocations of any one of the five Pacific salmon species per fishing area in 1989. Mutual curbs on the "squid" fleet were never discussed. Joint Doughnut fishing concerns will languish until the next meeting.

The next U.S.-USSR meeting is tentatively planned for May in the Soviet Union, long after the United States and the Soviets have made their 1989 salmon decisions with Japan.

It is hoped that by May Bush will make his selections at key fish negotiating positions within his administration. The United States and the Soviet Union can then start planning for 1990.