

High seas salmon protection close

by Senator John Binkley
for the Tundra Times

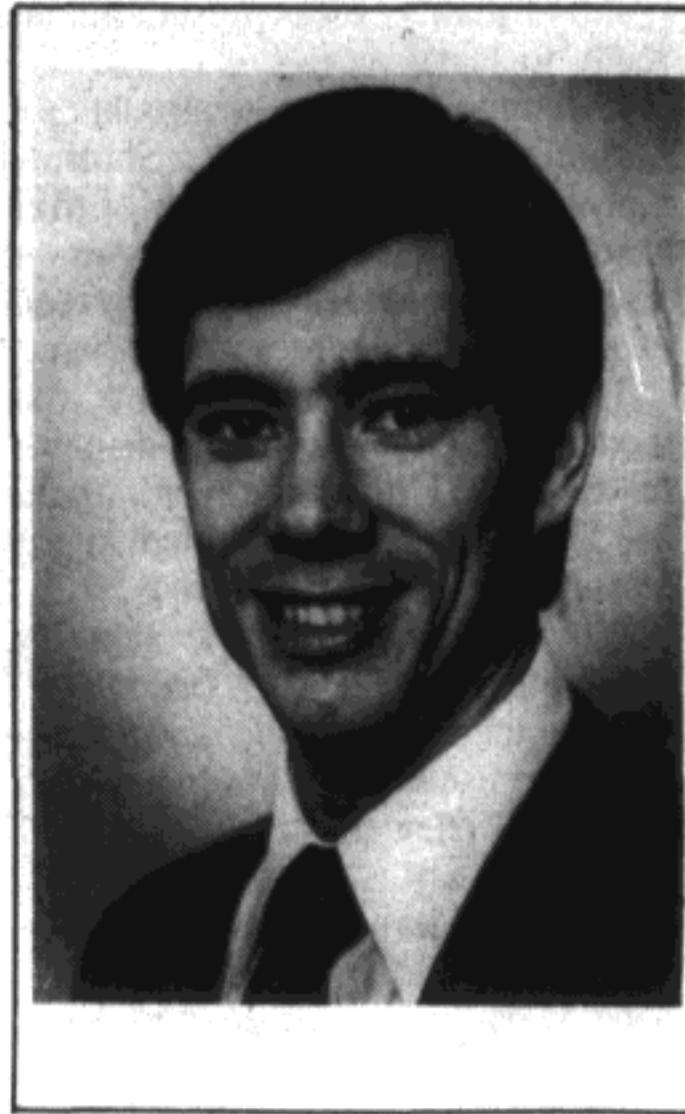
I have just returned from the city of Leningrad in the Soviet Union, where United States and Soviet fisheries negotiators came close to reaching agreement on what will be a new international treaty aimed at protecting migrating salmon stocks on the high seas.

As an advisor to the U.S. State Department, I worked to ensure that the interests of Western Alaska fishermen were protected in the agreement reached by the two nations.

Although a final document was not signed because of some small language changes that are still necessary, I am confident that what we agreed to will soon have the force of an international treaty.

The fact that the two most powerful countries in the world — and the two largest salmon producers in the North Pacific — are taking the lead on protecting salmon is highly significant.

I hope that Canada and Japan — the other two salmon-producing nations of the other North Pacific — will join with us and sign the final product.



Agreement by all four nations will signal the end of more than 35 years under the INPFC — the current treaty regulating migrating salmon — which, as a relic of the Cold War, completely excludes the Soviet Union.

Of course, getting the Japanese to

buy off on this agreement might not be easy. After all, its main premise that high seas fishing for salmon and steelhead is irrational and wasteful — and should be stopped — does not have much support in Japan.

The current INPFC treaty authorizes the Japanese to fish for salmon on the high seas with some regulation. However, Alaska fishermen know all too well that without complete, 100 percent observer coverage to keep them in line, Japanese fishermen could care less about those regulations.

In addition, Japanese squid fishermen, together with those from Taiwan and Korea, intercept and often illegally target large numbers of North American and Soviet salmon.

Although we agreed not to release complete details of the agreement at this time, I can give you some general highlights:

- It would create an eventual ban on all high seas fishing for salmon.
- It would create a very strong enforcement provisions designed to prevent illegal fishing for salmon.
- And it has provisions for increased cooperation on scientific research.

Fisheries officials also made much progress on dealing with the unregulated pollock fishing in the Central Bering Sea — or so-called "Donut." Both sides agreed that the catch from the regulated fishing in both zones, combined with the catch from the unregulated fishing in the donut, was too high.

We agreed to form a bilateral group called the Bering Sea Fisheries Advisory Body to advise us on how best to control and reduce the unregulated fishing in the donut.

The huge factory trawlers which target pollock catch a lot of herring and salmon in addition. Any reduction in pollock fishing in the donut is good news for western Alaska fishermen that target these other stocks.

The American negotiators were ably led at this latest round of talks by Ambassador Edward E. Wolf of the State Department. I would also like to commend the state of Alaska's representatives. Fish and Game Commissioner Don Collinsworth and External and International Fisheries Affairs Director David Benton did an excellent job representing Alaska's interests on both the salmon and donut issues.