



Fisheries crackdown

An undercover operation by the State Troopers' Division of Fish and Wildlife Protection led to the largest crackdown ever by the troopers in Bristol Bay.

The areas targeted were the four major fishing districts, Ugashik, Egegik, Naknek and Kvichak. Seventy-seven fishermen were arrested and 18 vessels seized. Hit hardest were flagrant violators and previous offenders, according to the troopers.

The action came as the result of an undercover operation by five officers. It was started after the state was alerted to the numerous cases of fishing in closed waters — the boats seized average well over one mile into closed waters — or fishing before or after a legal commercial period.

Trooper Sgt. Joe D'Amico, commander of the state investigations unit, said many honest fishermen were complaining to the troopers about violations. He said the troopers looked into ways to solve the problem because having uniformed officers on the scene wasn't going far enough.

The Bristol Bay red salmon fishery is probably the most competitive in the world. Ramming and corking off are the rule rather than the exception. Incredibly, 1,800 boats are out there, all trying to get fish.

That makes it all the more unfair to pit fishermen who go by the regulations against those disregard them.

We note that many of those arrested were Outside fishermen or at least people who are not from the local areas. In fact, fewer than five were local fishermen, according to D'Amico.

We believe the troopers were right on the mark this time and that this action could prove to be quite beneficial to rural Alaska.

Some of the fishermen arrested may wind up losing their valuable limited entry permits. The troopers could hardly send a stronger message to the entire fishing community.

But this is precisely the type of action that must be undertaken to make sure that state fishing regulations are enforced. Competition in the fishery will only increase, and violations will increase, too, unless continued efforts are made to put a halt to them.

