

THE ALASKA Fish Factor

Covering
Alaska's
Commercial Fisheries

By Laine Welch

Special to the Tundra Times

The State has taken up the charge to create more user friendly pink and chum and salmon products and get them onto supermarket shelves at home and abroad. To accomplish this goal, a special group was formed to find and eliminate obstacles getting in the way of value-added processing.

In Jan., the Dept. of Commerce convened a Salmon Initiative Committee (SIC) including representatives of aquaculture organizations, processors and other industry groups and agencies. During the upcoming months, the SIC will survey the national food industry to find out what kind of fish products are wanted. At the same time, they will try and determine the most cost efficient ways to increase the salmon industry's product options.

State Fisheries Specialist

Donna Parker says a lack of cold storage facilities and technology are keeping Alaskan fish out of the convenience sections of supermarkets. 'One of the biggest deterrents to successful value-added production is the lack of proper pinbone removal technology,' explains Parker. 'Those bones must be removed by hand which boosts the costs of production. It puts the cost of skinless, boneless blocks of salmon above competing products, like whitefish. We also have to compete with the price and quality of poultry and pork. We can't do it because we lack the cost effective technology,' Parker says.

It's been suggested cooperative cold storage and processing facilities could be built in certain regions, so fish can be stored and processed over longer periods. A successful joint venture agreement is operating in Sitka, where state and federal funds were used to build such

facilities on land donated by the city, which leases it to area processors.

To get over the major roadblock of inconsistent price and supply, aquaculture associations and private non-profit hatcheries have formed a consortium. They are investigating the possibility of offering five million pounds of cost recovery fish per year for three years at a set price. To guarantee availability, the consortium will pool its collective fish resources. 'Hatcheries are a real point of light because they're in a position to control price and supply. This is extremely important to the national food industry,' Parker believes.

(Editor's note: See last week's Tundra Times for a related story.)

Within a few weeks, the Commerce Dept. will suggest to the legislature the state provide incentives to help with value-added marketing and technology costs, perhaps in the form of tax credits, low

interest loans or grants. 'Pioneers who are moving ahead with their machetes trying to make inroads into the national food market need to be rewarded by having the risks reduced,' Parker says. An in-

depth strategy to get Alaska's salmon industry into successful value-added ventures will be unveiled in Sept.

KETCHIKAN FISHERMEN failed to stop the April herring sac roe fishery at Kah Shakes. The Board of Fisheries rejected a request to close the fishery by emergency order, but they did agree to review it next Jan. However, some fear there may not be a fishery to consider if Kah Shakes opens this spring.

In recent years, the Kah
Continued on page six

Shakes has been between 800 and 3,000 tons. Nearly 10,000 tons were taken each year during food and bait fisheries in the 1960's and 70's and that's a far cry from the whopping 100,000 tonnages taken in unregulated reduction fisheries in the 1930's. Andy Rauwolf of the Ketchikan Herring Coalition believes Fish and Game doesn't know what effect the Kah Shakes harvest has on other area herring stocks. "I don't think there's enough herring out there for them to touch them at all," Rauwolf says.

State Fish and Game biologists believe there's a difference between Kah Shakes stocks and others found around Ketchikan. They claim other factors besides commercial fishing may also be responsible for the declines. ADF&G's Phil Dougherty cites the filling in of intertidal areas to accomodate commercial development and log dumps in those same areas as two possible factors affecting habitat for young herring.

The April 3, 1992 nine hour herring sac roe fishery at Kah Shakes totalled 1,256 tons. The 115 permit holders received \$1,375 per ton for hefty herring with roe yields topping 14 percent. Kah Shakes is the State's first major herring sac roe fishery. This year's catch is expected to

be between 800-900 tons.

FISHERMEN FROM all along the Yukon River gathered in Emmonak to prepare management recommendations for the Board of Fisheries, and to hear updates on US/Canada salmon treaty negotiations. They are vying for reduced numbers of the pricey Yukon kings and dividing the catch always draws contention.

Fishermen hoped to come up with ways to boost dwindling subsistence harvests for both king and chum salmon. The Yukon River Drainage Fisheries Association hope members would approve recommendations of a fall management plan to help conserve the Toklat River chum stock, which failed several times over the past 10 years to meet escapement goals. Many are concerned fishermen in other districts are taking too many chums for dog food.

Yukon River fishermen also heard Fish and Game's plans for spending nearly a million dollars collected from the Shank Processing Co., nabbed last year for buying subsistence king catches. Biologists would like to use the money for salmon restoration and enhancement programs. The YRDFA and the Fish and Game will present recommendations to the Fish Board meeting March 16-27 in Anchorage.

SMALL PROCESSORS who are developing new products can have shelf-life tests done at the Fishery Industrial Technology Center in Kodiak. The FITC, part of the University of Alaska can also help improve formulas and packaging. The lab recently evaluated smoked and pickled fish and salmon spreads. Their number is 486-1550. (*Rhonda McBride, Bethel and Dave Kiffer, Ketchikan contributed this week.*)
