

A Problem New or Old— **Are Bristol Bay Salmon U. S. Citizens ?**

The recent action by the President in declaring Bristol Bay an emergency disaster area has brought into focus on a nationwide basis the need for immediate action by our government. If we are to head off the destruction and extinction of yet another of our rapidly dwindling resources our elected representatives had best tune their ears to the voices of our own Alaskan fishermen. Their cries of warning, and pleas for action have too long gone unheeded.

In this era of the seventies, in this time of "instant" shortages, one may be startled, but not totally surprised to pick up his paper and learn that another of his taken for granted, everyday needed food or energy resources is in dangerously short supply.

"It's the times," he cries. "Why didn't they see this coming and *do* something 10 years ago?"

In the case of the Bristol Bay fishermen, they cannot be accused of blissful ignorance in watching their salmon resources slowly dropping to the crisis level. Their cries for controls and regulations are echoed by their fathers and even grandfathers who fished those waters in the pre-conservation '30s.

As early as the 1937 season, when American fishermen caught virtually no salmon, the Japanese fleet was reaping a record harvest. Through the use of gear legal and illegal, in season and out, our Alaskan salmon were being "emigrated" to Japan. Reports of Japanese fishermen camping on shore, shooting caribou, trading whiskey to the Natives for supplies, and other irresponsible acts prompted the Americans to threaten to arm their crews with rifles and ammunition for the 1938 season.

All of this, plus proof of the operation of Japanese floating canneries in the area caused some government action to be taken. A Seattle-based representative of the Japanese fishing industry agreed that their fleet would abide by an agreement originally made in 1935.

A scientific study was embarked upon, and for three years, under the auspices of the United States Government the Hakuro Maru, a Japanese Government ship, fished the Bristol Bay waters in a "scientific study" of the salmon problem.

The result was the canning of several hundred cases of salmon, and new warnings from the American fishermen that unless the Japanese were excluded from the area, the Bristol Bay fisheries would be destroyed within 10 years. Remember, this was *35 years ago*.

During a meeting of the Institute of Pacific Relations at that time, a Japanese scientist is alleged to have remarked to an American member:

"You evidently think those salmon bear the Stars and Stripes on their backs."

Were this statement to be posed to today's fishermen, I'm sure the response would be, "You bet your banzai they do!"

Are Bristol Bay salmon United States citizens?

I think so.

Our fishermen think so.

Now, if the Congress and administration can be made to think so, the necessary legislation to close the Bristol Bay area to all but American fishermen must take priority as quickly as possible.

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