



## Harvesting Seaweed and Other Aquatic Plants in Southcentral Alaska



coastline. Kelp is considered a rapidly growing large brown seaweed and there are several common species. Kelp species can form forests that are highly productive habitats, providing food and shelter for fish, invertebrates, seabirds, and marine mammals. Seaweeds do not have true roots like plants and can become dislodged from the substrate. When dislodged aquatic plants accumulate along the high tide line, they form piles commonly referred to as beach wrack that is both functional habitat and can be used as fertilizer for gardens.



### Aquatic Plant Fisheries in Southcentral Alaska

In Alaska, aquatic plants are very important in the marine ecosystem and are commonly harvested for food or used for fertilizer in home gardens. Although there are some true aquatic plants such as eelgrass, the most commonly harvested aquatic plants in Alaska are actually plantlike algae (members of the *Protista* kingdom) that are commonly referred to as seaweed. Like true plants, seaweeds get their energy from the sun, produce oxygen, and consume carbon dioxide. Seaweeds have more complex reproductive strategies than true plants.

Generally, seaweeds are divided into three groups by color: green, red, and brown. In Alaska, brown seaweeds are the most common but there are also important red and green seaweeds. Seaweeds are found and harvested in the subtidal and lower intertidal zones along Alaska's

There has been a long history of seaweeds being used for foods and other goods in Alaska. Although there are edible red and green seaweeds in Alaska, brown seaweeds like bull kelp, sugar kelp, and popweed are the most commonly consumed seaweeds. Some seaweeds are best eaten fresh while others are better dried or pickled. Herring spawn on kelp and collecting herring eggs from kelp has been a traditional food in Alaska that has also developed into a commercial fishery in some areas.



The stipe (the long stem-like portion) of bull kelp has been used to make rope and fishing line. The bulb portion of kelp has been used to store food. Seaweeds have also been consumed worldwide as a nutritious food source rich in minerals, vitamins, carbohydrates, and even proteins. Seaweeds have also been used in pharmaceuticals, to make gun powder, as garden fertilizer, and as a gelling agent in foods. In Alaska, wild seaweeds have supported commercial harvest and seaweed mariculture is a growing industry.

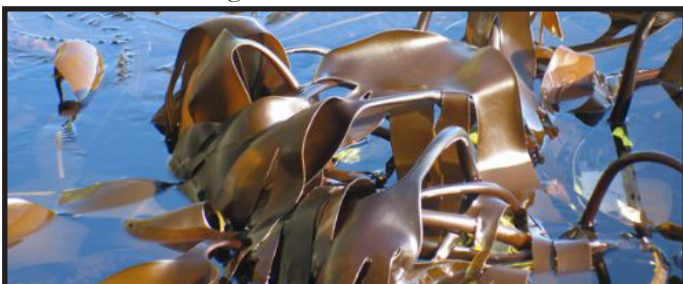


Bull Kelp photo by Sarah Traiger

Because of the biological and economic importance of aquatic plants (seaweeds), the Alaska Department of Fish and Game has been the regulatory agency overseeing harvest opportunities. In Southcentral Alaska, there are both subsistence and personal use aquatic plant fisheries that provide harvest opportunities for noncommercial purposes. Both aquatic plant fisheries are only open to Alaska residents and do not require a permit to harvest. A valid sport fishing license is required for the aquatic plant personal use fishery but not for the aquatic plant subsistence fishery. Make sure you know the regulations before harvesting aquatic plants.

### Aquatic Plant Subsistence Fishery

In Southcentral Alaska, there are two areas closed to aquatic plant subsistence fishing. The first one is the Anchorage, Matanuska-Susitna, and Kenai Peninsula area that occurs in Cook Inlet, Resurrection Bay, and North Gulf Coast. The second area is in the Valdez area in Prince William Sound. All other Southcentral saltwaters including Kodiak and Bristol Bay are open to aquatic plant subsistence fishing. This aquatic plant fishery is better suited to harvesting seaweeds for food.

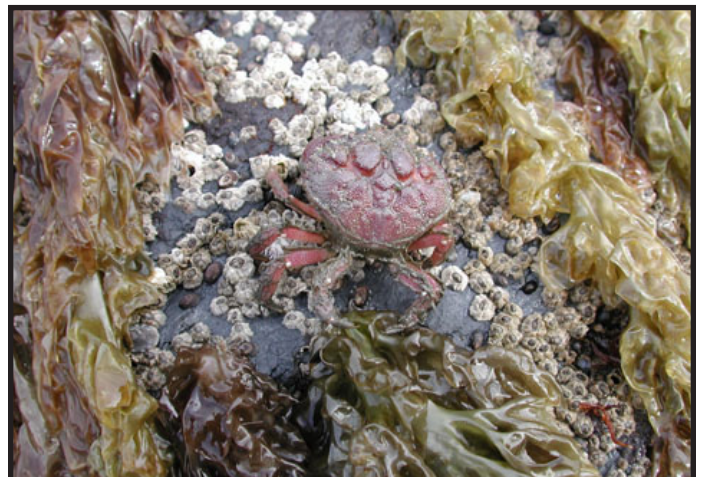


Laminaria Yezoensis photo by Mandy Lindeberg, seaweedsofalaska.com



Palmaria Hecateensis photo by Mandy Lindeberg, seaweedsofalaska.com

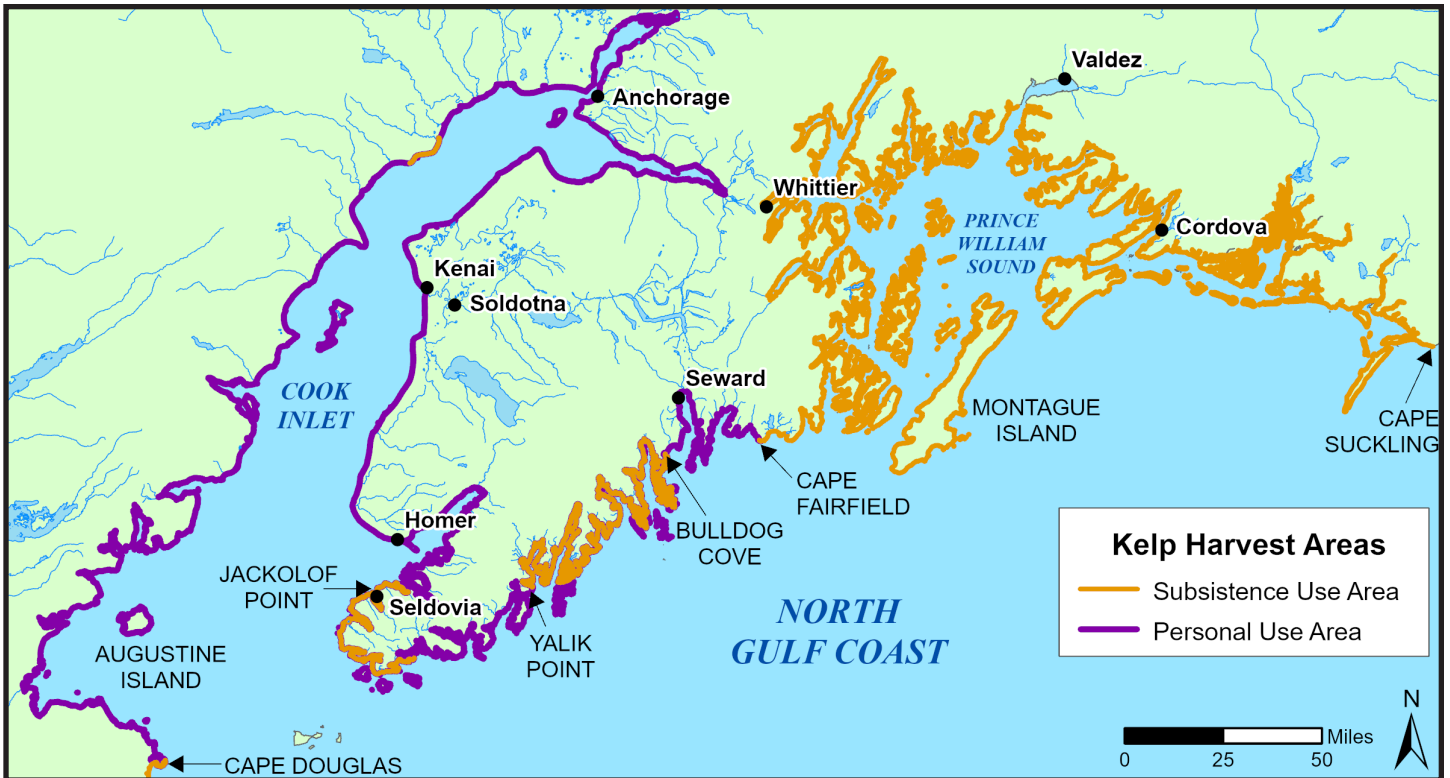
For Cook Inlet and North Gulf Coast aquatic plant subsistence areas, the daily bag and possession limits of aquatic plants are limited to 10 gallons per person and there is no annual limit. In Prince William Sound, Kodiak, and Bristol Bay there are no bag and possession limits for aquatic plants. Alaska residents may harvest aquatic plants attached or detached from substrate. Best practices need to be taken into consideration when harvesting aquatic plants that are attached, including cutting or thinning the seaweed and not harvesting the entire plant. Also consider collecting your seaweed harvest from several locations instead of gathering it all in one area.



Porphya Abbottae photo by Mandy Lindeberg, seaweedsofalaska.com

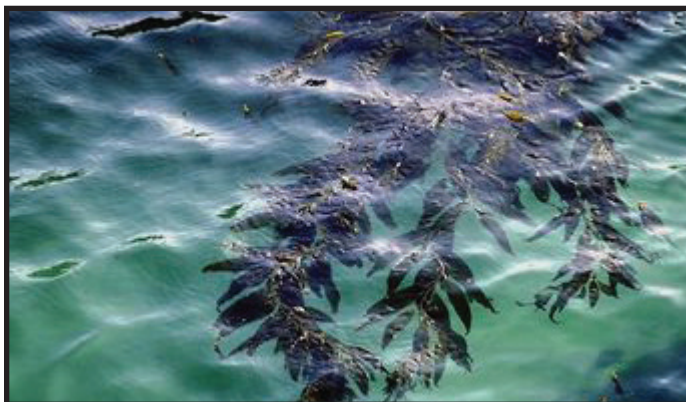
### Aquatic Plant Personal Use Fishery

In Cook Inlet and North Gulf Coast including Resurrection Bay, there is a personal use harvest opportunity for aquatic plants. This aquatic plant fishery occurs in both subsistence and nonsubsistence areas of these waters and you may only harvest detached aquatic plants (also known as beach wrack) that have been naturally dislodged from the substrate and are located at or above the daily high tide line. The daily bag and possession limits are 10 gallons per person and there is no annual limit. This aquatic plant fishery is open from January 1 through April 30, closed from May 1 through August 31, and reopens September 1 through April 30th. You may only use your hands to harvest the



detached seaweeds. The aquatic plants harvested in this fishery are better suited for garden use.

In the Homer area, the best access to beach wrack is found at Anchor Point beach, Bishop’s Beach, and Mariner Park on the Homer Spit. There is lots of shore access in the Prince William Sound and Resurrection Bay areas to harvest beach wrack.



### Resources for Harvesting Seaweeds for Food and Gardening

For those that are interested in harvesting seaweeds for food, there are many great resources for learning more about how to identify harvestable seaweed



seaweed with freshwater before using it to reduce the amount of salt being added to the soil. Seaweeds are also used as a mulch to block weeds while keeping the soil moist and reducing problems with pests like slugs.



species, including the best time to harvest, how to best process the seaweeds, and prepare them for the table. *Common Edible Seaweeds in the Gulf of Alaska* by Dolly Garza was published by the Alaska Sea Grant and contains lots of great information pertinent to Southcentral Alaska. For those that really want to learn more about the various seaweeds in Alaska visit [www.seaweedsfalaska.com](http://www.seaweedsfalaska.com). Seaweed is an easily harvested wild food to add to your pantry.

There are many benefits to using seaweeds or beach wrack for home gardens. Given the complexity of nutrients within seaweeds, they are ideal for enriching the soil to benefit plant growth. Seaweeds can be directly added to soil or composed first. Some prefer to soak or rinse the



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