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NORTH ALASKA PENINSULA SALMON
REPORT TO THE ALASKA BOARD OF FISHERIES
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INTRODUCTION

The North Peninsula is that portion of the Alaska Peninsula and Unimak Island draining into the Bering Sea between Cape Menshikof (the southwestern Bristol Bay area boundary) and Cape Sarichef (at the west end of Unimak Island). Bechevin Bay is included in the North Peninsula (Figure 1). There are approximately 62 salmon producing systems along the North Peninsula, of which 32 produce sockeye. The North Peninsula is comprised of two districts, the Northern (Figure 2) and the Northwestern (Figure 3).

Sockeye are the major salmon species along the North Peninsula with harvests averaging 1,960,000 during the period from 1982 through 1991. Chum salmon are generally the second most important species, averaging a 365,000 annual harvest during the past ten years. Coho salmon may be more important than Chums during some years. The 1982-1991 Coho harvest averaged 189,000. Chinook are important locally in specific locations such as Nelson Lagoon and Port Heiden but are of minor importance in the North Peninsula as a whole. The Chinook harvest has averaged 13,000 fish during the past six years. This is down from the average harvest of 22,000 during 1978-1985 even though parent escapements were at high levels. Pink salmon are the least important species although occasionally unexpected high catches occur as happened in 1990 when about 500,000 pink salmon were harvested in Herendeen Bay. During the past ten years, the even year pink harvest has averaged 129,000 fish while the average odd year pink salmon catch was only 3,000. Salmon harvests during 1982 through 1991 are listed in Table:

AREA M - T OVERLAP

There is an overlap area where both Bristol Bay (Area T) and Alaska Peninsula (Area M) fishermen are allowed to fish. Area T

fishermen are not allowed to fish in any portion of the Alaska Peninsula area during July. Until 1990, Area T fishermen were allowed to fish prior to and after July during the open season in the Inner Port Heiden, Outer Port Heiden, and Cinder River Sections. In addition, Area fishermen could fish in the entire Ilnik Section after July. The season did not open until August: in the Outer Port Heiden and Cinder River Section outside of Cinder River Lagoon. Consequently, the only place that Area T fishermen could fish prior to July was in Cinder River Lagoon and the Inner Port Heiden Section. At that time what is now the Outer Port Heiden Section was part of the Cinder River Section.

The overlap area was created about the time of Statehood so that Port Heiden fishermen could fish Chinook at home, then fish sockeye salmon in the Bristol Bay Area, and fish Coho at home during the fall. Cinder River is also close to the Bristol Bay villages of Pilot Point and Ugashik.

A Coho fishery has taken place at Cinder River since at least the early 1970's with fishermen from throughout Bristol Bay participating. To the author's knowledge, there has only been one incidence of an Area M permit holder fishing at Cinder River.

In 1986, non-Port Heiden Area T fishermen began fishing in the Ilnik Section and what is now the Outer Port Heiden Section. Area M fishermen complained of Area T fishermen targeting Bear River sockeye and Port Heiden fishermen expressed concern over coho salmon interception outside Port Heiden Bay. The approximate number of salmon caught by Area T fishermen fishing the Ilnik and Outer Port Heiden Section and the number of permit holders during 1986 through 1989 are listed in Table 2.

During its January 1990 meeting, the Board of Fisheries implemented the following regulation changes:

1. Eliminated Area T fishermen from the Outer Port Heiden Section and that portion of the Ilnik Section located outside of Ilnik Lagoon.
2. Closed the fishing season completely in the Outer Port Heiden Section.
3. Delayed the fishing season until July 15 from July 5 in that portion of the Ilnik Section located between Unangashak Bluffs and Strogonof Point as scale analysis indicated substantial numbers of Bristol Bay destined sockeye were intercepted by Area M fishermen near Strogonof Point.

In 1991, approximate North Peninsula salmon fishing effort by Area M permit holders was 10 seiners, 162 drift gill netters and 37 set gillnetters. Effort by Area T permit holders was 70 drift gillnetters and 12 set gillnetters.

INTERCEPTION ISSUE

Northwestern District and Black Hills Section

Fishermen from other management areas sometimes claim that stocks traveling to other areas are intercepted in the Northwestern District and Black Hills Section. If large numbers of migrant salmon were available in these locations, major interception fisheries would have begun there several decades ago. Bristol Bay sockeye do not migrate through False Pass, instead they travel through larger passes to the west. Ocean conditions will bring a few migrant fish into the southern end of the Bechevin Bay Section and for that reason the Bechevin Bay Section is managed as part of the South Unimak June fishery. The Dublin Bay Section is closed until July 1:.. The Black Hills Section receives extensive effort when the Bear River fishery is closed, yet the catch is small.

There are terminal salmon runs to the Black Hills and Bechevin Bay Sections. The major Northwestern District salmon harvests take place in or at mouths of lagoons at Uruia Bay or in the Izembek-Moffet Bay Section. Figures 4, 5, and 6 show the average and escapement for the Northwestern District, Bechevin Bay Section, and Black Hills Section during the past five years. Escapements are indexed totals, which are generally considerably lower than the actual escapement. The escapement size in relation to the harvest shows that the Northwestern District and Black Hills Section are terminal harvest areas.

Port Moller to Strogonof Point

Scale pattern analysis work was done during 1988 and 1990 to segregate the major stocks comprising the Port Moller to Strogonof Point sockeye harvest. These studies indicated that large numbers of Bristol Bay and Nelson Lagoon sockeye were at times present in this area. The results of these studies will be discussed in a separate report.

The Port Moller to Strogonof Point catch and escapement during 1962 through 1991 is shown in Figure 7.

Prior to 1983, the majority of the Port Moller to Strogonof Point sockeye catch was taken west of Cape Seniavin. Beginning in 1983, effort has shifted causing the Cape Seniavin to Strogonof Point harvest to equal or exceed the Port Moller to Cape Seniavin harvest. The reason for the shift in effort was due to the following:

1. Fishermen obtained larger and faster boats which made it possible to operate in rougher water and to often run to safe anchorages before the weather became too severe.