

TO: THE ALASKA BOARD OF FISHERIES RE: HERRING 1/18/18

Our family has not only gathered herring eggs on seaweed for human consumption, but we have also used herring eggs on seaweed for fertilizing our gardens for many years.

Beginning with the herring spawn of 1983, we paid close attention to the high tide line all along Sitka's two main shoreline roads. Anywhere from one day to two weeks after a herring spawn, Sitka would typically have stormy weather. The weight of herring eggs was so great on the seaweeds in the intertidal zone that the seaweeds would break from their holdfasts when challenged by the powerful tides and currents. Enormous amounts of seaweed robed in herring eggs would wash up on the high tide line of nearly every beach. The larger beaches hosted as many as a dozen windrows of a wide variety of seaweeds. The windrows were as tall as four feet and stretched the full length of the beach. Each stormy high tide would leave its' reminder of the recent, massive spawn.

We never removed attached seaweed from beaches for garden use. Using hands, pitch forks and shovels, we filled both buckets and wheelbarrows with the loose garden seaweed from the high tide line. We carried or wheeled it up into the back of our pickup.

Each year, as soon as we witnessed this phenomenon, we would immediately go to work. We had observed that the ocean giveth... and the ocean taketh away! No sooner would this amazingly fertile mixture show up, it might just as suddenly disappear. Increasingly higher tides would sometimes reach up and pull it all back into the ocean. Get some while you can! When we would have a season of unusually calm seas, the windrows would remain at the high tide line and gradually transform into gooey, stinky piles. So, once again, quickly get what you need before it turns into goo!

Once we had transported the garden seaweed home to our garden beds, we would hurriedly spread it and rototill it into the soil. Right from the first year, that one annual dose of fertilizer was all it took to produce a wide variety of beautiful, healthy food. I was hooked.



028 08

Times have changed. After decades of never giving a thought to the availability of garden nutrients because of herring spawns, we have watched that availability dwindle gradually and dramatically. On most beaches the past several years, there has been none at all.

My husband and I gave it considerable thought. We decided to go hunting for garden seaweed on remote beaches away from the Sitka road system.

Have you ever noticed old, dead Bayliner type boats resting alongside homes in Southeast Alaska? Well, we decided to transform one of those moldy old boats into a small barge. The plan was to skiff far and wide throughout all of Sitka Sound and beyond. We hoped to locate egg laden seaweed on high tide lines and then return with our little barge in tow.

It turns out that it was wishful thinking. We put a lot of time and energy into making that barge, but found very little to fill it. For the past three years, we have searched for stashes of garden seaweed. We searched each of the three weeks after the spawn. We started in Silver Bay. We then went west, east and north through and around all of the islands in Sitka Sound on up to Katlian, Nakwasina and, finally, Salisbury Sound. We found very few beaches with any garden seaweed. There was not enough seaweed collectively to even minimally meet our needs. We did not return with our barge.

Please understand that I mean no disrespect. And, I am not a scientist. I was a scuba diver in the past. Nowadays, I no longer dive, but observe both at low tides and snorkeling. I find the areas included in the miles of spawn reported by the Department of Fish and Game for the year 2017 very confusing and inconsistent when compared with my observations of several of the same areas.

(I will make an appointment with ADF&G and share my concerns).

That our garden soil needs nutrients is incidental.  
That the ocean needs its herring is monumental.  
Please be conservation minded.

Sincere thanks for your time and consideration.

Florence Welsh [sitkavore@gmail.com](mailto:sitkavore@gmail.com) <http://sitkavores.blogspot.com/>