

AL WILSON
FEBRUARY 23, 2015
Board of Fisheries Testimony

I have lived in Sitka for 50 years. I am here today to speak in support of Proposal 122 to expand the commercial herring fishery closed waters of District 13 in Sitka Sound. This will provide a more reasonable opportunity for subsistence needs to be met.

In 2012, the Board of Fisheries passed a similar proposal that included a closed area approximately half the size that was requested and is now referred to as the "core area." Since the proposal has been in effect, the amount necessary for subsistence has not been met for two of the three years. The expanded closed area is largely believed to be a staging area for herring before moving into the core area to spawn. In past years, the first significant spawn suitable for harvest occurs along the Halibut Point road system. This is also the only herring spawn accessible from the Sitka road system, which is an important economic factor in the subsistence harvest.

In a published paper, Identifying Essential Habitat (Source vs. Sink Habitat) for Pacific Herring in Sitka Sound Using Otolith Microchemistry by Heather Meuret-Woody and Nate Bickford, 2009, the statement is made that one of the most important rearing areas for juvenile herring is along the Halibut Point road shoreline from Katlian Bay in the north to Halibut Point Marine and Cove Marina in the south. This information was not available for the 2012 BOF meeting and may have affected how the board established the boundaries of the closed area. Unfortunately, the new dock at Halibut Point Marine has recently become a place for net pen rearing of

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Hypotheses concerning the decline and poor recovery of Pacific herring in Prince William Sound, Alaska

Abstract

This paper updates previous reviews of the 1993 stock decline of Pacific herring (*Clupea pallasii*) in Prince William Sound, Alaska, and focuses on hypotheses about subsequent poor recovery. Recent age structured assessment modeling with covariate analysis indicates that the population dynamics of the sound's herring are influenced by oceanic factors, nutrition, and, most substantially, hatchery releases of juvenile pink salmon. For the 1993 decline, poor nutrition remains the most probable cause with disease a secondary response. Concerning poor recovery, we examined 16 potential factors and found three to be causal: oceanic factors, poor nutrition, and hatchery releases of juvenile pink salmon. Absences of strong year classes at both Sitka and Prince William Sound after 1993 indicate the action of large-scale ocean processes. Beyond regional-scale environmental factors, two factors specific to the sound influence the population dynamics of herring and are likely impeding recovery. First, pink salmon fry releases have increased to about 600 million annually and may disrupt feeding in young herring, which require adequate nutrition for growth and overwintering survival. Juvenile pink salmon and age-1 herring co-occur in nearshore areas of bays in late spring and summer, and available data on dietary overlap indicates potential competition between the age-1 juvenile herring and juvenile pink salmon. Field studies demonstrate that juvenile herring reduce food intake substantially in the presence of juvenile pink salmon. Second, overwintering humpback whales may consume potentially large amounts of adult herring, but further studies must confirm to what extent whale predation reduces herring biomass.

Jack W. Anderson—Deceased.