

## 1000' Tow Lines = Wanton Waste?

1999 was the year that farmed salmon production surpassed that of Alaska wild salmon and began to capture the lion's share of world seafood markets.

In the years that followed the Alaska salmon industry was thrown into turmoil and bankruptcies soared. Seafood leaders embarked on restructuring efforts to prevent widespread insolvency and the collapse of rural fishing economies.

Subsequent years saw changes marked by new product forms — fillets, portions and value added products — made possible by onboard refrigeration and improved handling practices that eventually replaced canned salmon as the dominant Alaska's salmon product for more than 120 years.

The industry continues to evolve, and improved ex-vessel prices, made possible by a combination of fortunate natural circumstances and wise management have provided the capital to finance a new style of harvesting vessels that prioritize production capacity over product quality.

The evolution of high speed shallow draft jet boats capable of setting nets in less than a foot of water and using tow lines of more than a quarter mile in length and drag fish across mud flats as the tide drops are producing salmon of a quality opposite of what rescued the state's wild salmon industry from bankruptcy in the year's following the early 2,000s.

The technique, one processor says, "is hated" for the sand, rock and dirt blemished fish it produces. Industry estimates are that in 2022, a record year for Bristol Bay, nearly 30% of the salmon harvest has been designated "Number 3s," industry parlance for fish not suitable for high value products.

Extraordinarily long tow lines contribute to lower quality salmon, a trend Alaska can ill afford if it hopes to remain competitive in world markets.

\* <https://agrpartners.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/AGR-Partners-Salmon-Healthy-Wealthy-Wise.pdf>

\*\* [https://www.adfg.alaska.gov/index.cfm?adfg=wildlifeneews.view\\_article&articles\\_id=115](https://www.adfg.alaska.gov/index.cfm?adfg=wildlifeneews.view_article&articles_id=115)