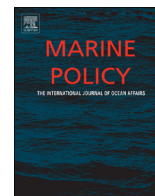




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Foregone harvests and neoliberal policies: Creating opportunities for rural, small-scale, community-based fisheries in southern Alaskan coastal villages

Steve J. Langdon*

Department of Anthropology, University of Alaska Anchorage, 3211 Providence Drive, Anchorage, AK 99508, USA

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ABSTRACT

Neoliberal policies of effort limitation and privatization have reduced commercial salmon and other fishing opportunities available to the coastal, predominantly Alaska Native, villages of southern Alaska. However, there are a variety of circumstances, including the manner in which the current commercial fishery is prosecuted, that lead to surpluses of unharvested salmon, and potentially other species, available in certain areas. This paper will define the concept of “foregone harvests”, discuss the environmental and managerial conditions that lead to “foregone harvests” and describe the possibilities such conditions create for the development of small-scale, local and community-based fisheries. Case studies of possible Huna Tlingit (Hoonah) and Kaigani Haida (Hydaburg) salmon fisheries will be presented. Alternative arrangements of salmon fisheries and institutions in southeast Alaska are presented through case studies of the villages of Yakutat and Metlakatla. These examples demonstrate how such fisheries could be built on local and traditional knowledge, as well as currently used subsistence technologies resulting in new economic opportunities compatible with local cultural patterns and interests and buttressing local identities and commitments.

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1. Introduction

Small-scale fisheries have been demonstrated to be a major contributor to human welfare and quality of life to populations throughout the world [1]. Though they are often overlooked or denigrated by governments and industries, small-scale fisheries are too big to ignore in regard to the critical role they play in the economic, nutritional and cultural well-being of the millions of people who are dependent upon them. Along the shores of the Gulf of Alaska in the North Pacific Ocean, neoliberal policies of effort limitation and privatized access to commercial fishing in Alaska and Canada premised on notions of economic “rationality” over the past 35 years have substantially reduced commercial salmon and other small-scale fishing opportunities available to the coastal, indigenous communities of the region [2–7]. However, there are a variety of circumstances, including the structure of the salmon fishery resource in terms of the number of streams and the timing of returns as well the manner in which the commercial fishery is organized technologically and managerially, that lead to significant quantities of unharvested salmon being potentially

available in certain areas at certain times. These conditions make it possible to advance the concept that unharvested or “foregone” salmon might be the basis for small-scale, community-based commercial fisheries that could provide earnings and employment in southern, coastal Alaskan Native villages distributed around the Gulf of Alaska where they are sorely lacking. This paper will discuss the possibilities for the creation of new, small-scale, local, indigenous community-based fisheries based on “foregone” returns, especially of pink (*Onchorynchus gorbuscha*) and chum (*Onchorynchus keta*) salmon. Examples of how such fisheries could operate from two communities, one Tlingit (Hoonah) and one Haida (Hydaburg), in southeast Alaska will be presented based on evidence for the occurrence of regular salmon surpluses above escapement¹ goals in the vicinity of the villages and the capacities of villagers with small-scale, skiff-based technologies to harvest those surpluses. Two other communities in southeast Alaska with alternative commercial salmon fishery arrangements, Yakutat and Metlakatla, will be discussed to show that small-scale, locally focused fisheries with technologies and institutional arrangements existing elsewhere in southeast Alaska represent far more

* Tel.: +1 907 227 3126.

E-mail address: sjlangdon@uaa.alaska.edu

¹ Escapement refers to the portion of an anadromous fish population that evades capture and reaches the freshwater spawning grounds.

compatible, productive and meaningful arrangements for indigenous village communities.

2. Gulf of Alaska native villages and neoliberal fisheries policies

In Alaska, Native (indigenous) populations such as Aleut/Unangan [2–4], Alutiiq [5,6] and Tlingit and Haida [7] reside in small, ancestral villages many of which predate the coming of Euroamericans. They have existed for hundreds, and in some cases thousands, of years based on a wide variety of locally available primarily marine resources—fish, shellfish, marine mammals and intertidal organisms. The harvest and consumption of those resources by rural residents, most of whom are the indigenous occupants of these communities, is termed “subsistence” in Alaska and the practice and governance of those activities has been distinguished from commercial and sports harvesting since Alaska became a state in 1960 [8,9]. Both state and federal legislation accords priority to harvests of fish and wildlife for subsistence uses but operate under different legal frameworks and regulatory principles to operationalize that priority [8,9]. In the 20th century, commercial and subsistence fishing, especially for salmon and halibut, were pursued with new technologies brought in by Euroamerican fishermen and were meshed with local food and materials production activities to provide for the monetary, nutritional and cultural needs of indigenous village residents [10]. These changes vitalized village communities which developed and sustained multi-generational commitments to these fulfilling forms of life into the second half of the 20th century.

A variety of circumstances gave rise in Alaska and British Columbia in the 1960s to declining salmon stocks (cold weather, overharvesting, increases in number of fishermen) and impoverished fishermen. In Alaska, the desire to exclude non-Alaskans seasonally migrating from Washington and California to participate in salmon fisheries throughout southern Alaska was also a factor in early efforts to limit the number of participants in the fisheries. Effort limitation, the leading edge of the neoliberal strategy of creating property rights in common pool resources, had its origins in these conditions. While permits created by initial Alaskan programs developed in the mid-1970s did not necessarily require market transferability, economic theoreticians soon entered the political lists to argue for the economic efficiency of transferability and were able to convince politicians to opt for this approach. However, there was substantial resistance to the concept among many fishermen who believed an elite class would come to own the permits and dominate the fisheries. In Alaska, a constitutional amendment was required to override the common property clause regarding fisheries access, thereby creating the legal context for transferable limited permits to be justified. Program designers and implementors gave no attention to the auxiliary institutions (loans, credit, collateral, education, bureaucratic familiarity, brokers) that would be brought into play by market transferability nor to the differential positioning of user groups (such as Alaska Natives) in regard to both qualifying for permits and subsequently being able to acquire permits to enter the fisheries. By 1980, it was evident that the sale of permits by rural Alaska Natives to non-Natives elsewhere in Alaska had dramatically reduced fishing opportunities in rural indigenous villages, particularly in southern Alaska. Subsequently in the early-1980s, a federal effort to create property rights in halibut and sablefish fisheries took shape which culminated in the awarding of transferable quota shares (known as ITQs) to individuals. The loss of quota shares for these fish by initial indigenous holders due to sales became evident, following the same pattern of permit decline of rural indigenous holdings of salmon permits. Over time it has been clearly demonstrated that rural indigenous villagers have felt substantial negative consequences of the aforementioned effort-limitation policies

including reduction in fishing opportunities, employment, income, local processing capacity, support businesses and ultimately migration of young adult populations from the villages in search of employment elsewhere [5,10].

As the number of species brought under these privatized regimes has expanded, the availability of certain types of resources to local populations who have traditionally used them has also diminished, reducing the suite of certain species available and previously central to the welfare of village residents [11]. Efforts to redress the impacts of lost fishing opportunities by state and federal governments have proved to be cosmetic and ineffectual [5,12,13] causing substantial cynicism and alienation among indigenous village residents [14].

3. “Foregone harvests”

The concept of “foregone harvests” was initially mobilized by commercial fishermen in the Bristol Bay region of southwestern Alaska where salmon are harvested by drift and set gillnet gear types [15]. Here, as in the Gulf of Alaska, indigenous village residents are highly dependent on these fisheries to provide for monetary, nutritional and cultural needs [16]. Bristol Bay is home to the largest wild sockeye (red) salmon (*Onchorynchus nerka*) run in the world. The harvest, sale and processing of the fish are the foundation of the regional economy as well as contributing significant earnings to non-Alaskan resident fishermen. The concept of “foregone harvests” was developed by fishing leaders in Bristol Bay in 2008 to address their concerns that substantial quantities of salmon that should have been available for commercial capture, in the context of conservative management based on escapement goals and in-stream monitoring of returns, were not being made available to them. The definition of “foregone harvest” that was used was: “Actual salmon escapement that is surplus to pre-season spawning goals established by ADF&G management policies” [15]. The issue was developed and advanced by a regional task force of fishermen and leaders who were able to obtain the Governor’s attention (who directed regional biologists and managers to participate in discussions with the fishermen) and engaged processors as well. A task force was developed to look at the issue, develop findings and make recommendations. Findings of the task force revealed that over the period from 2003 to 2008 [15]:

- * 6.2 million fish annually were foregone;
- * 76% additional salmon spawners above escapement goals resulted;
- * \$131 million total ex-vessel value was foregone over the period;
- * \$21.9 million average annual ex-vessel value was foregone;
- * \$1.6 million average local, regional and state tax revenue was foregone.

Taken in the context of the regional economy, such foregone earnings constitute a major loss to the fishermen and others directly tied to the salmon industry and other residents indirectly through the loss of services provided through tax revenues. For the local residents with few other income earning opportunities, the additional fish can make a substantial difference in household economies for the winter.

“Foregone harvests” could be estimated in the Bristol Bay region because of structural and technical features of fishery management. Structurally, there are only six primary freshwater systems to which sockeye return that have to be monitored and escapement assured. Technically, the limited number of systems which provide in excess of 90% of sockeye salmon returns (harvest

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