

Eastern Aleut Society under Three Decades of Limited Entry

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Abstract.—New schemes of proprietary control are being considered to recover and improve Alaska’s salmon industry, even though the industry is already structured through the nonquota permit-based regulatory regime of limited entry. Most U.S. fisheries are currently being evaluated for new restructuring and privatization plans, which forever change the fisheries and the fishermen. The socioeconomic fates of many coastal indigenous peoples are being determined without finer understandings of potential benefits and ramifications of such policies. The tortoise pace of anthropology will almost certainly never catch up with the rapid policymaking process, but more than three decades of the Limited Entry Permit Plan can provide a useful means of evaluating the lasting effects of programs already in place and predicting future effects of new policies. Based upon multiyear ethnographic fieldwork and quantitative data acquired in four eastern Aleut fishing communities, this paper summarizes and critically examines long-term effects of Limited Entry on the culture and society of Aleut people. From the social structure before Limited Entry through permit allocation to the current fisheries system, this plan was a defining moment for modern social relations and ultimately exaggerated as well as generated other social, economic, and political limited entry systems in Aleut society.

Introduction

When Alaska’s commercial salmon fisheries became overcapitalized and in danger of losing their market share in the 1960s, urgent calls for restricting nonresident fishermen’s access led to the Limited Entry Permit Plan of 1973.¹ Decades of nonresidents “vacationing” in the fishing industry and the formerly widespread use of fish traps had endangered resource abundance and commercial value. Limited entry was created to reduce the number of fishing vessels and fishermen at sea, raise fishermen’s earnings, and keep the fishery in the hands of Alaskans. While an

alleged success of this legislation is measured by the fully utilized, yet strong salmon runs, limited entry only delayed and exacerbated some of the more socioeconomic problems it tried to solve, especially economic distress and outsider control of the fisheries (Alaska Statute 16.43.010 et seq, section 8.15). This chapter focuses on the role of the Limited Entry Permit Plan among the eastern Aleut, many of whom have enjoyed a successful commercial salmon industry both before and after this policy was created as the new rules of engagement changed social, political, and economic relations and, ultimately, eastern Aleut society. Limited entry determined who received permits, which were more easily attained within these Native communities by those with greater social resources. Permit

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¹ Alaskans originally called for limiting entry for Alaskans only, which was deemed unconstitutional.

ownership has subsequently shaped village structure by driving both immigration and out-migration, it has shaped family structure by privileging a generation of fishermen in work and subsistence, and it has solidified the structure in which men can achieve individual and community status. These trends are shown statistically and qualitatively.

Limited entry initiated a trend in Alaska's fisheries management that is ongoing and fast-paced, where privatization plans now apply to every commercial fishery in the state. Alaska's salmon industry is once again facing reform because of its diminishing market share, due in large part to the expanding global farmed salmon market. Prices have fluctuated dramatically, fuel and other production costs are higher than ever before, and fishermen are struggling to break even. As part of this reassessment of the industry, a Salmon Industry Restructuring Panel was created within the Alaska Board of Fisheries in 2004 to facilitate consideration of restructuring proposals that strive to improve the value of the fishery while consolidating effort, ultimately changing who participates, changing harvest methods, and/or allocating quotas (SIRP 2006). The panel questioned whether limited entry was the best model for the future of the salmon industry. It also recommended applying lessons learned from recent crab rationalization and other fishery management plans to salmon fisheries, which are seen by many fishermen as certainly reducing the numbers of fishermen and vessels but not reducing effort in the end.

Thus, changes are imminent. The state's goal again is to raise revenue generated from fish, lower fishing costs, improve conservation, and protect those who are dependent upon fishery resources (SIRP 2006). Specifically, protecting Alaska Natives, their communities, and their commercial fisheries are not priorities. A dialogue over a resident-only fishery has reopened, and Alaska Native enti-

ties are exploring litigious routes to creating tribal fisheries.

This chapter describes how three decades of the Limited Entry Permit Plan has shaped eastern Aleut villages and advocates applying finer scale studies of this plan to the future of salmon fishing. Limited entry has been studied by the very agency that administers the permits (Commercial Fisheries Entry Commission; for example Tide et al. 2005), as well as study groups created by the state legislature (e.g., blue ribbon commissions) and the Alaska Department of Fish and Game, but multiyear studies of communities are really only possible by anthropologists with large budgets and have not been feasible (exceptions include Langdon 1980, 1982a, 1982b, 1986, 1989; Orbach 1980; Petterson 1983; Braund et al. 1986). It is not my intent to argue for an alternative to limited entry, but instead examine where the fisheries have been in a holistic way before discussing where the fisheries should be headed. The goals of Aleut fishermen are to keep their villages economically and socially stable, which also means protecting the resource and the market. Subsistence alone cannot sustain people in a market economy, and although the state does manage for a subsistence priority, this is not the same as sustaining Alaska Native communities, especially for the Aleut who have merged subsistence and commercial practices.

Limited entry was the first statewide fisheries restricted access plan in Alaska, and yet it is still rather new in the minds of many fishermen, since only two to three generations have experienced it. All fisheries policies have long-term effects on individuals, communities, and entire societies, and as new levels of restricted access are proposed, fishermen resist these plans because they already know how this one plan forever changed their fisheries and communities.

This chapter is based upon 20 months of fieldwork since 2000 in the Aleut villages of

Sand Point, King Cove, False Pass, and Nelson Lagoon (Figure 1). The Aleut in these eastern communities have a distinct culture from the Aleut of the Aleutian Chain and Pribilof Islands in that they have been shaped by different historical circumstances, they marry among these villages more so than with the other Aleut villages, they are organized around the salmon industry, and they seamlessly combine commercial and subsistence practices. Data also come from the Commercial Fisheries Entry Commission (CFEC) database on Alaska's salmon fisheries and interviews with state managers. I have examined limited entry elsewhere with regards to its lasting effects on King Cove (Reedy-Maschner 2004, 2007).

This chapter expands this discussion to all four salmon fishing villages of the Alaska Peninsula/eastern Aleutians, as well as the recently abandoned villages in the region, comparing these for what limited entry has done for and done to these Aleuts. King Cove and Sand Point are comparatively large (between 700 and 900 people), with grocery stores, bars, restaurants, and other amenities. False Pass and Nelson Lagoon are small (fewer than 100 people), with most supplies moving in from the other communities or on barges. Considering the conditions when limited entry was introduced, I will show some examples of how the plan produced inequalities within the fisheries and the villages.

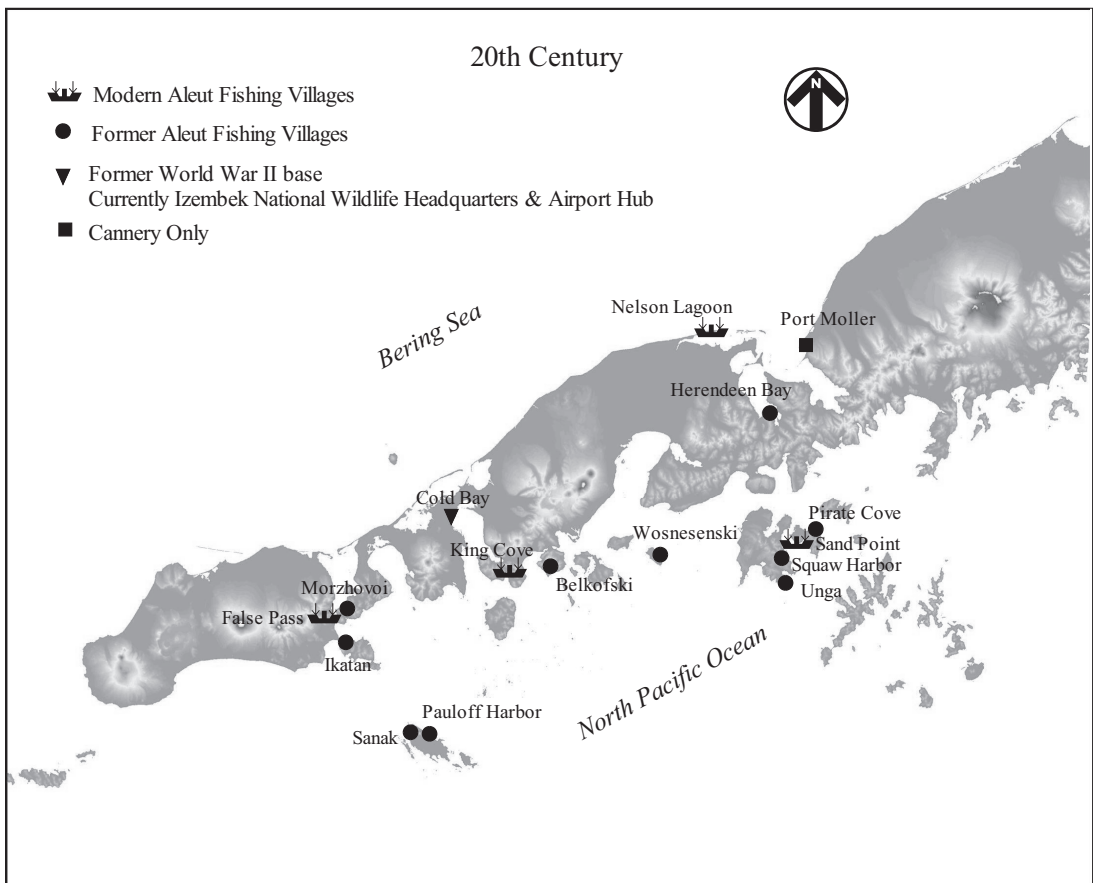


Figure 1. Map of the eastern Aleutian region.

Brief History of Fishing among the Aleut

The Aleut have experienced a tumultuous two and a half centuries under Russians and Americans (e.g., Berreman 1953, 1954, 1956, 1964; Jochelson 1933; Spaulding 1955; Jones 1969, 1972, 1976; Lantis 1970, 1984; Laughlin 1980; Townsend 1983; Black 1984; Black et al. 1999; Liapunova 1989, 1996; Veniaminov 1840). They have endured foreign intrusion, violent encounters, indentured servitude, and mass relocations. They have experienced language shifts and religious passages. They have had roles in multiple industries for economic export. But what has not changed is their 9,000-year relationship with the sea and its resources. When the Russians began arriving in 1741, they found ranked sedentary hunter-gatherer-fishermen who were already exchanging fish, goods, slaves, and women to solidify relationships with neighboring villages. Status was both ascribed among the largest families and achieved through success in sea mammal hunting, fishing, and warfare. Aleuts traded fish for Russian goods but were often tied through debt to the Russian America Company, paying tribute in sea mammal furs, whale products, and fish. Aleuts and especially Russian Aleuts (Creoles) eventually gained rank in the Russian America Company and became ships' captains and merchants, even developing companion markets to the Russian markets (Elliot 1887), and thus were integrated into a global market economy by the mid-19th century.

In the Alaska Peninsula region, the sea otter trade was concentrated at Belkofski, Sanak, and Unga. Aleut men remained fur hunters after the American purchase of Alaska in 1867 until the industry collapsed from overharvesting. Aleuts and Russian Aleuts began to develop industries for which there was a market, such as fox farming and cattle

ranching on small islands and commercial whaling and fishing. Cod fishing attracted first-generation Scandinavian men from the Pacific Northwest, many of whom married locally and further developed commercial whaling and fishing, moving on to salmon fishing that was the mainstay for much of the 20th century (Bjerkli 1986). Thus, the economic development in the region remained sea-oriented, and the Aleut readily absorbed these new industries because they were variations on the same maritime theme. Aleuts were not carried along as labor in larger economic schemes; rather, they commercialized themselves, and today, they combine subsistence and commercial practices together such that one does not occur without the other (Figure 2).

The four study communities of King Cove, Sand Point, Nelson Lagoon, and False Pass formed in the late 19th and early 20th centuries around cod stations and salmon canneries. There were several other villages in the region, and their populations began to dwindle as Aleuts relocated to these centers to fish and work in processing fish (Figure 3). These villages are close-knit, family-oriented communities, where life buzzes around the docks, beaches, and uplands with the annual harvesting cycles of fish, birds, caribou, and wild plants.

Sand Point is located on Popof Island in the Shumagin Islands on the Pacific side of the Alaska Peninsula. Founded in 1887 by a San Francisco trading company as a cod fishing station, it attracted many Scandinavian fishermen on schooners from California to Washington. Aleuts from Unga, Wosnesenski, Pirate Cove, Squaw Harbor, Sanak Island, and other nearby villages eventually moved there. Sand Point's 2005 population was 951 (44% Aleut; U.S. Census, www.census.gov). Peter Pan Seafoods, Inc. manages a storage facility and transfer station. Trident Seafoods manages a large groundfish, salmon, and fish



Figure 2. F/V *Aleutian Star*, Aleut-owned seiner near Deer Island, North Pacific Ocean.

meal plant and provides fuel and other services. In 2005, 89 of the residents held 108 commercial salmon fishing permits, with permits and quota holdings in crab, Pacific halibut *Hippoglossus stenolepis*, herring, sablefish *Anoplopoma fimbria*, and other groundfish. The seiners have organized locally to lobby on their behalf due to an historic

conflict with Chignik area fishermen to the north. Sand Point has direct flight service to Anchorage, a large harbor, and services including grocery stores, a bank, a medical clinic, several restaurants/bars, and hotels.

Nelson Lagoon is located on a sand spit between a lagoon and the Bering Sea on the north shore of the Alaska Peninsula in a re-

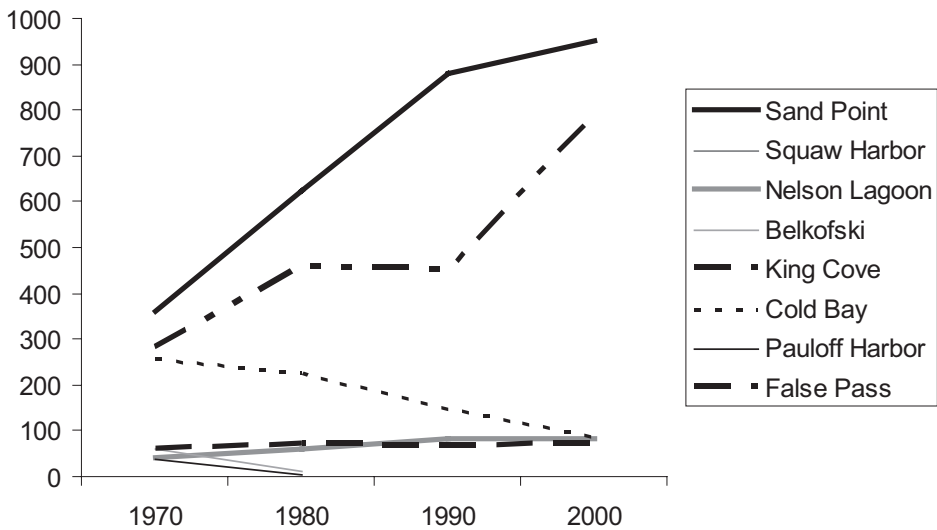


Figure 3. 1970–2000 village populations. Squaw Harbor, Belkofski, and Pauloff Harbor were deserted by the early 1980s.

gion that was traditionally used by Aleuts for fish camps and hunting grounds. In the lagoon itself, on Egg Island, a salmon saltery/cannery operated between 1906 and 1923. This facility was then moved to Port Moller under the ownership of Peter Pan Seafoods, Inc., and residents and fishermen were scattered around the lagoon, coming together only during commercial fishing seasons. The modern town site grew up around a school beginning in 1960 and attracted families from Port Moller, Bear River, Herendeen Bay, and Ilnik. In 2000, there was a population of 83 (82% Aleut; U.S. Census).² In 2005, 24 residents held 27 commercial salmon fishing permits, the majority of which are for set gill netting. Residents are also avid trappers and bird and caribou hunters, and many residents maintain cabins around the lagoon and along the Bering Sea coast. Nelson Lagoon is a member of the groundfish Community Development Quota (CDQ) program for their region, the Aleutian Pribilof Island Community Development Association (APICDA). Nelson Lagoon imports food and supplies by barge at Port Moller twice annually. Food is also air freighted from Anchorage, King Cove, and Cold Bay. All of these shipping options are very expensive. A store is only open for a few hours each day and is stocked mostly with beer and snacks. There are two hotels and a health clinic.

King Cove is located on the south side of the Alaska Peninsula in a protected bay. Founded in 1911 around a salmon cannery, the village attracted Scandinavians, Europeans, and Aleuts from Belkofski, Sanak, Pauloff Harbor, Morzhovoi, and other nearby villages. Aleuts initially sought employment in the Pacific American Fisheries cannery but rapidly began to fish for the cannery us-

ing dories and, eventually, larger privately owned vessels. The cannery burned in 1975 but was rebuilt by Peter Pan Seafoods in the ensuing years. There are two boat harbors. In 2005, King Cove had 748 residents (48% Aleut) and 55 fishermen held 67 salmon permits, with many also holding permits and quota in crab, Pacific halibut, herring, and other groundfish. King Cove also has two grocery stores, a health clinic, one restaurant, two bars, and a hotel.

False Pass is located on the eastern end of Unimak Island, having established around a P.E. Harris cannery in 1917, with people from Morzhovoi, Ikatan, and Sanak Island. The cannery burned in 1981, but the facility continued to be a supply base, although in 2003, Peter Pan Seafoods announced closure of its facility altogether. False Pass also participates in the groundfish CDQ program of the APICDA. In 2000, Bering Pacific Seafoods opened as a subsidiary of APICDA, which had limited success before it also closed. There are plans to reopen the plant in 2008. The city also constructed its first boat harbor in 2007. False Pass had a population of 59 (66% Aleut) (U.S. Census), with six fishermen holding six commercial salmon fishing permits fishing in 2005, with additional permit holdings in Pacific halibut, herring, sablefish, and other groundfish fisheries.

Cold Bay (population 81 in 2005; 18% Aleut) is a former World War II base and is currently a regional airport hub. Several Aleuts live there but return to the other villages to fish in the summers. In 2005, four permit holders from Cold Bay held three salmon permits, but these are left out of this discussion since Cold Bay is not a fishing town.

King Cove, Sand Point, False Pass, and the Aleutians East Borough rely on fish tax revenue generated by salmon. Nelson Lagoon benefits from tax revenue within the borough. As the salmon industry becomes

² 2005 Census data do not yet exist for Nelson Lagoon.

more volatile, the village governments have had to scale back their city services, and at the same time, families have been less able to pay their bills for city services. Thus, the survival of these villages is dependent in many ways on the survival and success of the salmon industry. The differential scales of size, amenities, access, fishing facilities, fleet size, and local organizations influencing policy has implications for how each community responds to change.

The Fisheries before Limited Entry

In the decades before the limited entry plan was established, fishing was open to all who could afford the gear. Until 1959, fish traps were the preferred method for harvesting salmon, but each required only two men to operate. Many Aleuts instead fished from skiffs and vessels in areas away from the traps and sold their catches to the local canneries owned by Seattle-based companies such as Pacific American Fisheries and P.E. Harris. They also leased cannery-owned boats, but most Aleut men strove for boat ownership despite high maintenance and fuel costs.

Fishermen fished three gear types: set gill net, drift gill net, and purse seine. Many of these men switched between gear, depending on the season and the crew they were able to recruit, since seining requires a larger, experienced crew. Salmon fishing was an intensive summer activity, lasting from the end of May to September. Sockeye salmon *Oncorhynchus nerka*, chum salmon *O. keta*, and Chinook salmon (also known as king salmon) *O. tshawytscha* were fished in the early to midsummer on the south and north sides of the Peninsula using all three gear types; pink salmon *O. gorbuscha* were primarily fished on the south side with seine gear in August; and coho salmon *O. kisutch* were fished on the north

and south sides with all three gear types in September.

The local Aleut fishermen were (and are) not only salmon fishermen. During the rest of the year, they followed other species, such as tanner crab, herring, and cod, as the markets shifted and the canneries diversified to process these species. However, the salmon fishery has always been paramount because it has been the most consistent fishery that binds families and the villages together. Fishing crews consisted of extended families. Gear licenses were inexpensive before limited entry, and for convenience, families would combine their catches onto a single license when they delivered their fish to the canneries. Salmon are also the preferred food, and families jar and freeze larger quantities of salmon than any other wild foods.

Many fishermen's wives worked in the canneries at an industrious pace, since the more fish they processed, the more fish the men could catch. Unscrupulous practices by the canneries' managers meant that fishermen were often tied to their companies with debt, and tokens and punch cards were issued instead of payment in dollars to force them to shop at the company stores or risk losing their fishing jobs. As fishermen gained independence and local governments strengthened, they were able to ameliorate their subordinate relationships to the canneries.

The nonlocal portion of the fleet originated primarily in Washington and Oregon. These fishermen would travel by vessel from Puget Sound to the Unimak Island region. As the season progressed, they would move northward into the Gulf of Alaska and eventually end their season in Southeast Alaska, returning to Puget Sound (Langdon 1982b).

Although fish traps were banned at statehood, unrestricted open fishing continued by both American and foreign boats up to the

3-mi state boundary, which was not curbed until the Magnuson-Stevens Act in 1976. Consequently, salmon runs were weakening in the 1950s and 1960s, and the state of Alaska needed to act or risk losing its salmon industry, upon which the state increasingly relied for revenue.

Implementation and Permit Distribution

To address the declining salmon runs and increased fishing participation, the state needed to reduce capitalization while maintaining the existing locations and structure of the salmon fisheries (Young 1983). After several legislative attempts, limited entry licensing finally passed in 1973. The plan created two main structures: a system of entry permits for the commercial harvest of fish under state jurisdiction, and the CFEC to administer the permits.

Limited entry allocated a fixed number of transferable fishing permits to those fishermen who qualified under a points system of prior participation between the years of 1969 and 1972. Points were given for residency (simply a recorded address, so many nonresidents maintained addresses in the state or even with a cannery knowing this legislation was coming), consistent participation (measured by frequency of fishing in a season), crew participation (although licenses previously held by crewmen did not indicate the fishery or vessel the holders had fished), vessel and gear ownership, availability of alternative occupations, and anticipated economic hardship if excluded (CFEC 1975, 1984).

Structural impediments to obtaining permits abounded, and the burden of proof was on the fishermen to meet these criteria. Communication by state officials with dispersed fishing communities was poor, even though there were permit application as-

sistance programs. In other parts of Alaska, there were language barriers. The most cited barriers for the Aleut were

- The “cartel.” Several men described this as the collusion between certain fishermen and those state officials who were in control of the permit distribution. Those with money and the right connections got the permits.
- The Vietnam War. As many as 20 young Aleut men from the villages missed out on fishing because of the draft and they were at war during the qualifying years. The CFEC considered this a legitimate factor for appeal, but the few Aleuts who petitioned for a permit because of the war were denied.

The designated salmon fisheries for these Aleut villages are to the north and south of the lower Alaska Peninsula and are called “Area M” by the state. These are the same waters they fished before limited entry. Three permit types became available for the Area M fishery, determined by the preexisting character of the fishery: purse seine, set gill net, and drift gill net. Figure 4 shows this distribution of active permits in Area M from 1975 to 2005. Drift permits have always dominated the fishery. Seine and set gill net have swapped positions beginning in 1992, and set gill netting is more prevalent now. Continual litigation against the CFEC resulted in more permits issued, and a number of permits were lost permanently as explained below, so the total number has varied over three decades because not every permit is fished every year.

For the Area M salmon fisheries, the initial permit distribution in 1975 was favorable to local Aleut fishermen. Figure 5 shows that most permits were in Aleut hands, initially, since they could more easily meet the qualification criteria. Most of these permits (96%) went to men, and the few in women’s hands

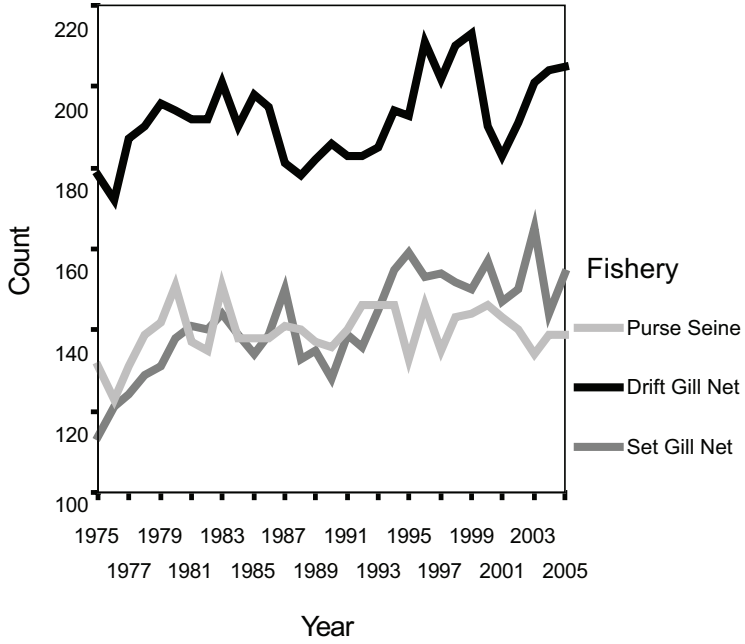


Figure 4. All Area M salmon permits, 1975–2005.

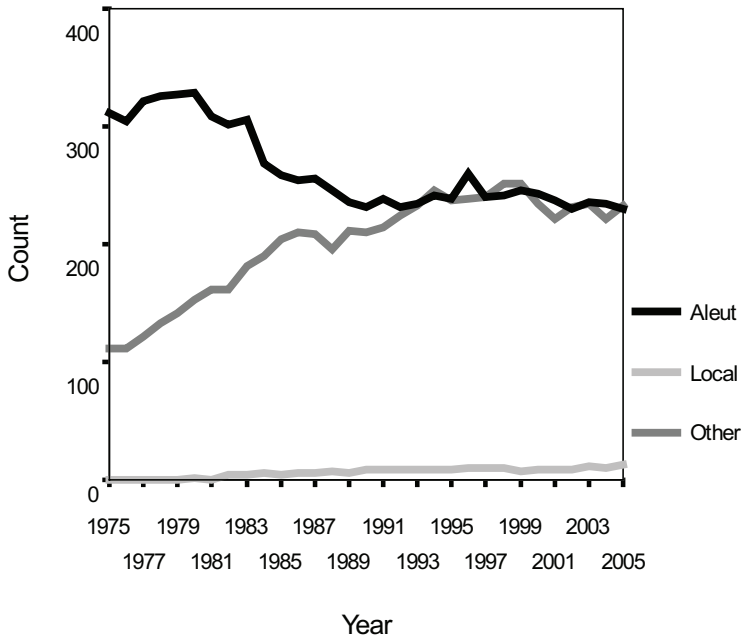


Figure 5. Area M salmon permits held by Aleuts and others, 1975–2005.

were usually transferred to male relatives, so this discussion focuses on men. Figure 5 also shows a rather rapid trend of others gaining ownership while Aleuts lost permits until they are fairly even beginning in approximately 1992. Locals are men who are considered local by their communities; they married Aleut women and now have Aleut children and grandchildren, and their permit ownership has only risen slightly over the years.

Aleut fishermen were strategizing with gear to maximize their catches, so if drift gill netting was the best strategy for catching fish during the qualifying years before limited entry, then that is the permit one received regardless of other time or experience. Given the practice of using multiple gear types in the fishery, fishermen received between one and three permits depending upon the points they were able to accrue: for the Aleut fishermen in 1975, 46 received one, 61 received two, and 47 received three permits. Fewer Aleuts received set gill-net permits, but now

hold more of them than any other because this is a more reliable means of fishing, and these fishermen handpick each fish from the nets, minimizing bruising, and thus can participate in local direct marketing schemes (Figure 6).

The development of each community and local fishing capacities of each also played a role in the allocation. In 1973, when the process of limited entry permit allocation began, the other villages of Belkofski (population 59), Port Moller (unknown population), Pauloff Harbor (population 39), and Squaw Harbor (population 65) were inhabited (Rollins 1978), and several men qualified for permits from these communities (Figure 7). However, the village characteristics determined to some extent the type and quantity of permit these men received. Port Moller is located across the lagoon from Nelson Lagoon; there were homes scattered there and between the Bear and Ilnik rivers. Hunting and fishing cabins are still scattered in the lagoon system,

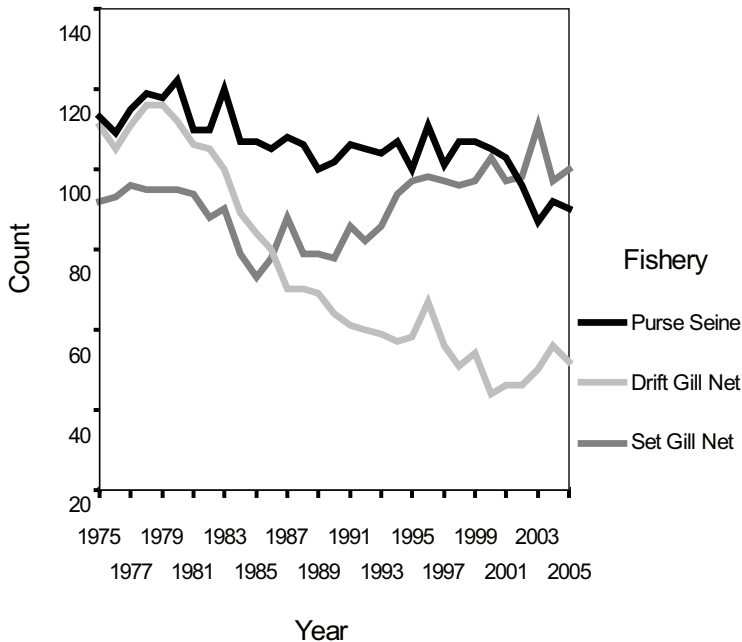


Figure 6. Aleut-owned Area M permits, 1975–2005.

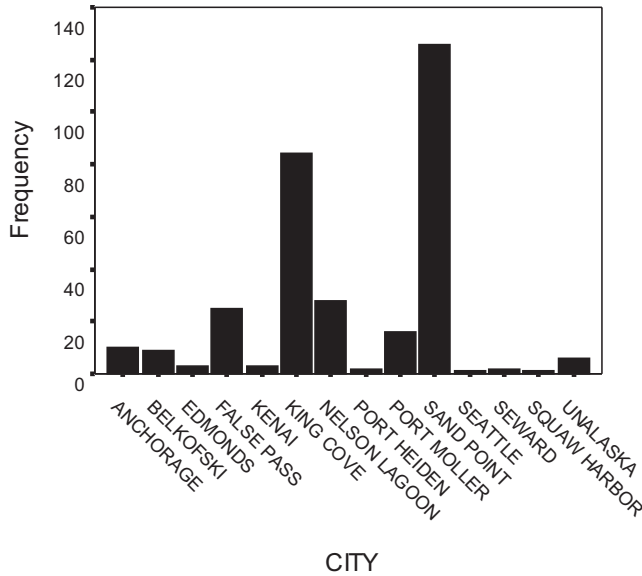


Figure 7. 1975 permit distribution for Aleuts by residency.

but most who own these permanently reside in Nelson Lagoon. Port Moller operated as a seaport since the late 19th century. Large numbers of set and drift gill-net permits were allocated to Port Moller residents, some receiving two and three permits because of their fishing history.

Squaw Harbor hosted the first salmon cannery in the Shumagin Islands beginning in 1920. In the 1960s, Squaw Harbor was still a small village with a Pacific American Fisheries Company processor and harbor. The growing community of Sand Point, and its harbors and processors, drew in many members of this community until it was abandoned in the early 1980s. A few fishermen from Squaw Harbor qualified for seine and set gill-net permits due to their community's infrastructure. The crab fishery in Sand Point was very lucrative in the 1950s and 1960s, so much so that many had temporarily stopped salmon fishing for a few years and thus did not earn enough points to qualify for salmon permits (Jacka and Black 1999).

Belkofski had a long history as a sea otter

hunting base since its establishment in 1823 and was instrumental to the Russian America Company (Black 2004). The village was not located near salmon streams and there was never a harbor, so a cannery was built in nearby King Cove. King Cove was slow to form into a modern village, beginning with the cannery offering seasonal work, and thus Belkofski remained a viable village until fish traps were closed and the cannery diversified to process other species, staying open year-round. Gradually, Belkofski was abandoned, and the bulk of the population moved to King Cove, retaining their own tribal council. Four Belkofski men received both drift gill-net and seine permits due to their seasonal participation in the salmon fisheries and having stored their vessels in King Cove. Langdon (1982b) identified a pattern 6 years after limited entry in which Russian Aleuts who moved to King Cove from Belkofski did not own any of the larger, newer vessels at the time, suggesting that Belkofski fishermen only participated in the salmon fisheries seasonally, which prevented them from joining

the larger vessel class that allowed multispecies diversification.

Ikatan and Morzhovoi also had canneries at the turn of the 20th century, so men in the False Pass region had been fishing and delivering to these communities for decades. When these closed, a cannery was built in False Pass in 1917, attracting residents from the other communities, but a boat harbor was never built in the 20th century. Fishermen stored their boats on the beach near their homes, supported by wooden palates. A boat harbor was only recently constructed in 2007 in False Pass to provide safe moorage for 88 fishing boats, meant to boost the community economically and increase its low population. False Pass fishermen were very successful in earning permits in 1975 (12 men received 24 permits).

Many of these men from the small villages moved to the larger villages almost immediately instead of commuting during fishing seasons, and their families soon followed. But the permit distribution generally was based upon the nature of the community one came from.

Since many of the larger extant communities formed with a strong Scandinavian-Aleut population base, it might seem reasonable to draw a comparison to the Kodiak Island case in which Mishler and Mason (1996) claim greater material prosperity and social status in a village that is predominantly Scandinavian over villages that are predominantly Alutiiq. This does not apply to these Aleut communities, since village characteristics and capacity for fishing appear to be the only factors that determined the extent to which men were able to fish prior to limited entry. Social stratification is entirely related to fishing success in these Aleut villages, which is associated with Scandinavian influence, regardless of whether there is Scandinavian ancestry or

not in every family. The family status differences based on former village residency and, as newcomers to the communities identified by Langdon (1982b), are barely recognizable today. However, the differences in permit holdings are still based on family status, which has more to do with family size and fishing success.

When presented with the list of initial permit owners, Aleuts are first to mention that they went to certain families across the villages, that there was indeed a cartel. These were the larger, more prestigious families who shared gear and labor. Permit ownership or potential inheritances also play a role in marriageability. Men who own permits, or are in line to inherit one, tend to be viewed by young women as more marriageable. Of course, one marries outside their family, but elite families tend to marry or partner with each other while non-elite families tend to marry or partner with each other. Thus, some families who did not get permits now have access to them as crew and access to the resources they bring in through marriage ties, but generally, the majority of Aleut families who initially received permits are the ones who still have them, only they are now spread out among more males within those families (Figure 8).

From the time permits were available, they could be traded on the market. Permit brokers advertise online and in fishing magazines. Permits are also sold using bulletin boards in post offices and grocery stores and by word of mouth. There was brief period of selling permits after they were distributed by those who received more than one. These were sold for cash for new boats and gear. A significant number have since been sold and/or lost by various unfortunate circumstances (these include the sale to cover extensive debt, the permit owner's death and subsequent family mismanagement, or



Figure 8. 1975 and 2005 permit distribution by family for all Area M.

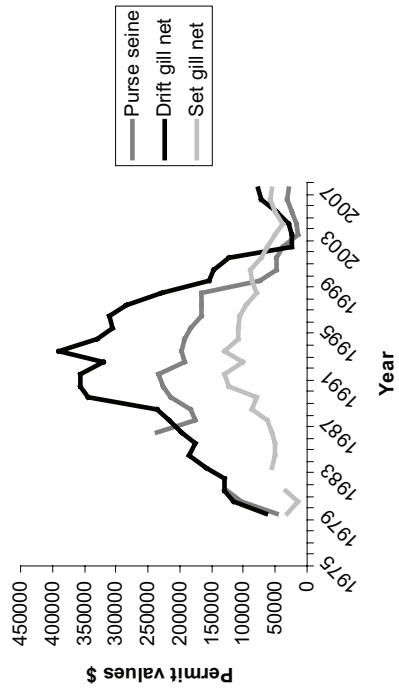


Figure 9. Area M salmon permit values (\$), 1975–2007.

the sale to a high bidder from outside) and are now out of Aleut hands. Further, fishermen had been using their valuable permits to guarantee loans for boats and gear, many of which are now in default. In the early 1990s, Area M permits were among the costliest and most valuable in the state (Figure 9). Throughout the 1990s, however, low salmon prices and increased restrictions on time and effort made this fishery less lucrative.³ Permit values began to crash and, in 2003, had dropped by as much as 95% for seine and drift gill-net permits (Alaska Commercial Fisheries Entry Commission Web site, www.cfec.state.ak.us). Today, there are several Area M permits available for purchase; yet, permits are expensive (from tens to hundreds of thousands of dollars)—they too have renewal and maintenance fees—and many are finding that just owning a permit is cost-prohibitive. Many permits lay dor-

mant in poor fishing seasons since it may be more costly to fish than “sit on the beach,” as a local saying goes.

Figure 10 shows local resident versus nonresident permit ownership. The major shift in ownership is with drift permits. Drifters tend to fish the north side of the Peninsula, so many Aleuts sold those in favor of seine and set net permits so they could fish closer to home. Aleuts who were not given permits initially could not afford to purchase these. Nonresidents also sought drift permits in Alaska, particularly after the 1974 Boldt Decision, which displaced many fishermen when it affirmed treaty rights to salmon fishing for Washington’s indigenous peoples. Although the chart looks similar to Figure 5, the margin is expanded, showing that several Aleuts are no longer living in the villages year-round. Since 2000, fewer nonresidents have been making the annual trip to Area M to fish because the expense outweighs the benefits, so while it appears that nonresidents are taking over the fishery, in fact this shift is a combination of Aleut out-migration in search of jobs and Aleut permit loss.

³ A primary reason for these restrictions handed down by the Alaska Board of Fisheries beginning in 1998 was due to a collapse of western Alaska salmon stocks in which Area M was blamed for intercepting sockeye, chum, and Chinook salmon.

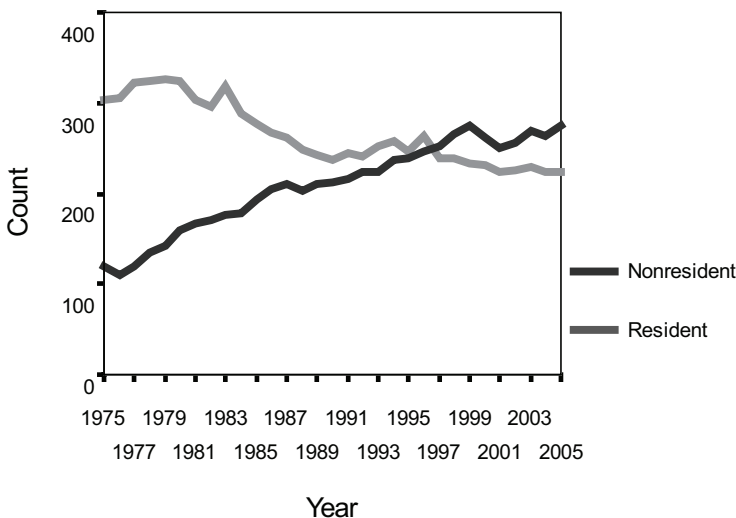


Figure 10. Area M salmon permits held by local residents and nonresidents, 1975–2005.

Limited Entry Today

Among the many possible ways to look at the effects of limited entry, village comparisons regarding fishing, subsistence, life history/family status, and political power imbalances are revealing ways to examine these effects. Examining those who received permits is straightforward since there are fishing records for them and they are still living in their home communities. It is more difficult to look at those who were left out of the permit process, and while these men have been identified through extensive genealogical work, many are no longer living in the Aleutians and are difficult to find. Thus, I am primarily focused on those men who did not get permits and stayed in the villages.

Village Vulnerability and Resilience

Statistical trends show that permit retention for Nelson Lagoon and False Pass is precarious. Between 1975 and 2005 in Nelson Lagoon, local, resident permit holders declined from 27 to 24, but the number of locally owned permits declined from 51 to 27. On the ground, the greater Nelson Lagoon region experiences a flood of seasonal nonlocal, non-Native fishermen every summer to Port Moller. These fishermen only occasionally come into the village of Nelson Lagoon, but they fish both inside the lagoon and outside in the Bering Sea. Most of these lost permits have been sold to these seasonal fishermen after poor fishing seasons, and although some have now fished the area for many years, there is increasing resentment from locals towards them. Local fishermen tend to fish inside the lagoon, and the outer shore fishermen are blamed for taking too many fish before they return to the lagoon. These outside fishermen are highly organized as Concerned Area M Fishermen who aggressively attend all policy meetings with their lobbyists in tow.

Despite the drop in local permits, Nelson

Lagoon has recently built a new boat storage yard, replaced its water treatment facilities, and is working on funding a new fish processing plant. Similarly, False Pass has recently constructed a boat harbor, but the town is equally vulnerable, having lost some of its fisheries infrastructure when Peter Pan Seafoods closed its operation there because it was not economically feasible for the company to maintain. A local processing barge also recently closed after only 2 years of operation, but may reopen in 2008. Between 1975 and 2005, resident permit holders in False Pass dropped from 9 to 6, but the number of permits declined from 21 to 6. Again, most of these permits were sold to nonlocal fishermen during hard times, and they will likely never return to local hands.

If these trends continue, these two villages may cease to be fishing towns, or they may cease to exist altogether. Populations have increased only slightly. These two communities continue to improve and expand infrastructure, but may be planning for a future that does not exist. Better access and infrastructure does attract people from Nelson Lagoon and False Pass to the larger centers, but there is movement the other direction as well, with people seeking a smaller village atmosphere.

By virtue of size, King Cove and Sand Point are in far more stable positions, although they too have lost permits. Between 1975 and 2005, King Cove (including Belkofski) saw a decline from 89 to 67 permits, and Sand Point (including Squaw Harbor) saw a decline from 118 to 108 permits. On the other hand, both communities saw an increase in numbers of local permit holders. King Cove grew from 44 to 55 permit holders, and Sand Point grew from 70 to 89. Thus, although there are fewer permits overall, they have been distributed into more hands, increasing fishing opportunities within and between families (Figure 11).

These communities are also investing heavily in expanding their infrastructure, which supplies temporary land jobs.

Larger villages have the membership for captains to organize into fisheries associations, hire lobbyists to advocate at fisheries meetings, and protect their interests, such as the Sand Point Seiners Association. They contend that the state is not interested in maintaining the villages, only in maintaining the resource, and their future is for them to protect. Younger fishermen, and thus crewmen, tend not to participate in these organizations until they are captains. The smaller villages do not have these same resources, and the Aleut have not united across the villages with an ethnically based fishing association (like, for example, the Alaska Eskimo Whaling Commission).

Subsistence and Sharing Networks

Aleut subsistence practices changed with limited entry. These four villages are located in

the best places for canneries but in poor subsistence places, so people must leave the villages to get their subsistence fish and game. A vast array of subsistence foods is also gathered or hunted on the beaches while out fishing. Most subsistence salmon fishing happens in the context of commercial fishing, that is, fish are taken from commercial catches and delivered as “homepack” to relatives and friends of the captain and crew. Data from the Alaska Department of Fish and Game illustrate this point (Fall et al. 1993a, 1993b, 1996). Figure 12 shows single study years comparing annual salmon management reports, which contain numbers of salmon reported on subsistence permits, with subsistence salmon numbers recorded during single-year household surveys from their Community Profile Database. This shows that the amount of unreported harvest is two to three times the amount of reported harvest made on subsistence permits. Thus, the majority of subsistence fish are entering the villages on commercial boats.

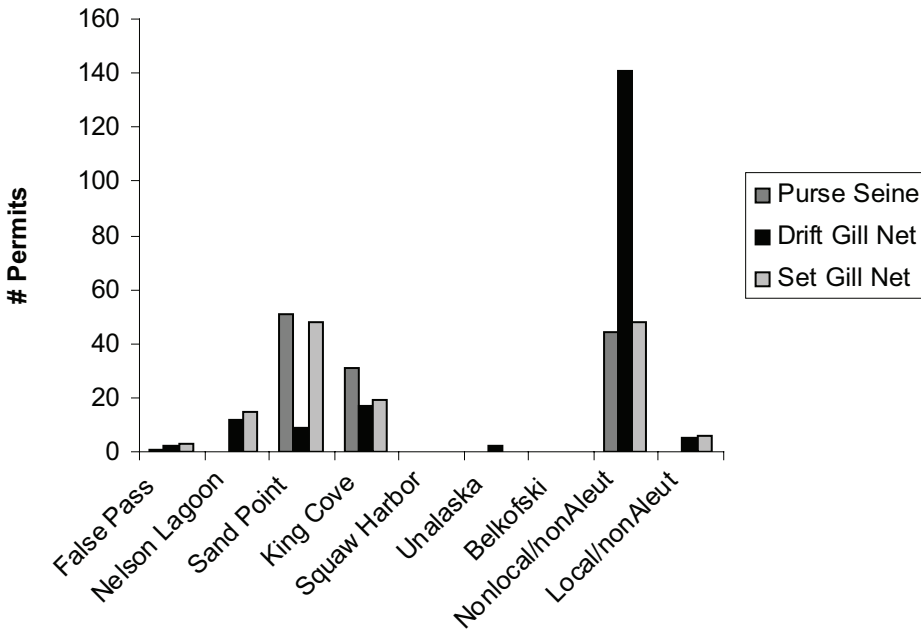


Figure 11. 2005 permit holders and residency.

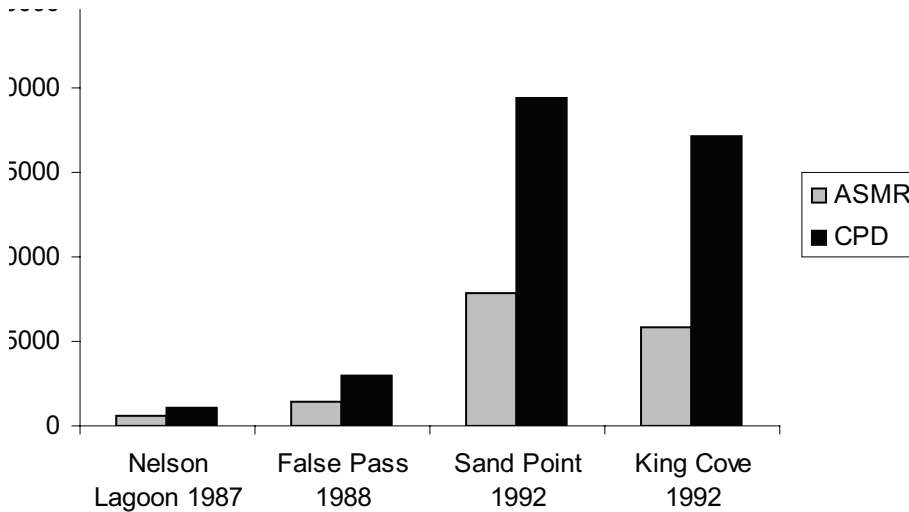


Figure 12. Numbers of subsistence fish recorded in annual salmon management reports (ASMR) versus the Community Profile Database (CPD).

The responsibility to provide subsistence fish is that of adult men, and that includes crewmen. Captains bring as much fish into their households and the communities as they need and want. Young crewmen often have substantial obligations to bring in subsistence fish; they may be supporting a wife and children of their own as well as extended relations. Captains decide how much fish each crewman can take from the boats' commercial catches. For the individual, this can mean security or stress. If you are a member of an elite permitted family then you have several links to captains and the resources they bring in. You may have a father, uncles, nephews, and several cousins with permits. If you are a member of a nonpermitted family, then you may have only one relative with a permit, such as a cousin or an in-law. Depending upon how many links there are between yourself and a permit, there can be uncertainty about getting your subsistence foods. Friendships and people looking out for elders mitigate this, but there are no guarantees. Thus, access to commercial fishing operations is critical to subsistence access.

Family History and Status

Families with multiple permits organize around the permits and fisheries access: they share labor and gear, share the permits themselves, collude on the fishing grounds, often vote as a block in local politics, and generally take care of one another. They tend to act as a large corporate group. Historically, family size and fishing/hunting success determined political power (Veniaminov 1840), and the same is true today. Those from the largest families tend to have more political authority because they have more constituents. It is also the wealthier and more influential men from these families who formed a cartel and were awarded permits, which certainly solidified their status, but also set a new course in the lives of those left out of the permitting process. Access to permits appears to have had a radical effect on family and sharing network sizes. Those Aleut men who did not get permits and stayed in the villages are heads of significantly smaller families (Reedy-Maschner 2004), which indicates that these two groups of men have had very different life histories. Members of families

without permits tend to spread themselves out and attach to permitted families through marriage and friendship for subsistence and commercial fisheries access, which creates smaller networks for them.

Fishermen try to keep their permits and fishing assets within their families. Permit transfer patterns typically favor sons followed by other immediate male relatives; however, fathers are often faced with choosing which son gets a permit. The other sons are still firmly within the family network and may even receive a temporary permit transfer and captain a vessel. Occasionally, fishermen were unable to transfer a permit within their community because they needed money from its sale. There is also some competitive behavior that prevents fishermen from selling permits within a community in order to diffuse their social competition.

The role of fisherman is the most prestigious in these communities. Most men who did not get permits still call themselves fishermen three decades later, in part because many have been able to work in local/tribal governments on fishing issues. These men will occasionally occupy formal leadership roles, and these roles are filled by women as well; yet, the force behind them comes from the fishing fleet and they will defer to the fleet on all major issues.

Crewmen also describe themselves as fishermen first, even though their time on the water may be sporadic. Sons of nonpermitted fishermen have a far more challenging existence and usually have careers as crewmen with occasional land jobs. Sometimes the land jobs are more attractive than the crewing jobs because of the salary, but it is always assumed that they will return to the boats. These men rarely have leadership roles in the villages. If they crew on a successful boat, their status increases only temporarily.

Things are not equal at sea either. Fishermen are competitively altruistic; they help

each other find fish but only to a point. At sea, many captains are distinguished as hard fishermen who fish every possible hour in every opening. They are the first to set their nets and the last to pull them. There are also the highliners, which refers to the captains and their crewmen with the highest catches and can vary from opening to opening and season to season. These men experience short-term rewards in bursts of enthusiasm and attention surrounding them. There is also fishing competition between villages in the sections of each district, but this is less pronounced than individual competition.

Therefore, the fishing world is the arena that counts where men can change their position through hard work and success, and it is not available to all. The future is very much in doubt for those crewmen who want to be captains, as well as those who are permit and vessel owners.

Future of Area M Salmon Communities

The way limited entry has been experienced has had a substantial impact on the stability of families and villages and may determine the long-term viability of the villages themselves. I have presented just a sample of some of the effects of limited entry, that it accelerated the abandonment of the smallest villages for these commercial fishing centers, prompted a brief out-migration, solidified the structure in which men can achieve individual and community status, further disenfranchised those on the margins, changed the nature of subsistence obligations, delayed or ended the younger generations' abilities to attain fishing positions, and produced different life histories between men with permits versus men without.

Many of these trends have continued. There is a real fear region-wide that Nelson Lagoon and False Pass will become ghost

towns while nonlocals continue to fish those waters seasonally. The largest Aleut community is now in Anchorage. All villages are also experiencing an increase in infrastructure improvements with state and federal monies, and while this means employment for those who cannot fish, many are concerned that this may become the new economic base.

The Area M fisheries are highly politicized and challenged across Alaska for the appearance that this is a nonlocal, non-Native, and nonresident fleet. The roots of this perception lie in the limited entry permit allocation for Area M and the ways in which permit ownership has shifted over the past three decades. Area M is also scrutinized because the fishermen are positioned in an area that harvests the salmon on their return migration to Bristol Bay, the Yukon and Kuskokwim rivers, Norton Sound, and Asia. They are often held responsible for every change in the salmon runs on those rivers, so all eyes are on this little corridor. These other fishermen still point to limited entry in the Alaska Peninsula/eastern Aleutians as the beginning of the end for them, claiming it tripled that fishery by issuing as many as three permits to one fisherman. Still, the numbers of men fishing before limited entry are unknown, so it is impossible to know how much effort increased, if at all. My own surveys suggest that at least one-third of those fishing before may have been left out of limited entry. Indeed, there has been a shift to nonresident fishermen, and Aleut and nonAleut local fishermen are represented about equally today.

In the political arena, the four communities do not always effectively organize to achieve fishing rights for the whole. This is due in part because the needs of seiners, set gill netters, and drift gill netters do not always overlap, but also because intervillage interaction is sporadic and often occurs at

airports, in Anchorage, or on the fishing grounds. The lack of Alaska Native-based political institutions aimed at garnering fishing access is a significant weakness. However, there is new discussion of pursuing tribal permit ownership in the salmon fishery using the legal system.

Elder Aleuts still describe limited entry as a key moment in their lives, and as they experienced other privatization plans for other fish species, like Pacific halibut, sablefish, and crab, they stated that they should have anticipated their effects, given the model of limited entry, and better established their fishing records. Other places facing changes in fisheries should learn from these kinds of cases. The Aleut are now looking to the Gulf of Alaska rationalization plans and new salmon plans and bracing themselves. They are also turning to new economic ventures that pose risks to fishing. Oil and gas development is currently in its early stages, with the goal of bringing economic opportunities to these villages since fewer and fewer people are able to fish. However, since all other economic developments have centered on the sea and its resources, these developments will have an entirely new set of challenges for the local people.

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