



DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

INFORMATION SERVICE

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

For Immediate Release

Consistent catches made by rapidly moving exploratory procedures in Alaskan waters indicate "a considerable population of King crabs available to support an industry," according to a report released today through the Seattle office of the Fish and Wildlife Service, United States Department of the Interior.

Over 13,000 of these submarine giants have been hauled up and more located. The largest caught was a 23 pound specimen.

Inasmuch as considerable data are now at hand as to the distribution of the King crab, it is planned that during the remainder of the present summer an attempt will be made to relocate various bodies of crabs indicating high productivity and test their ability to withstand sustained fishing.

To locate the areas in Alaskan waters where King crabs are found in greatest abundance is the main objective of this second part of the crab investigation, for which Congress last year appropriated \$100,000. The chief purpose of the entire venture is to determine the possibility of establishing an American commercial fishery for this species of crab.

Although Japanese packers have conducted a fishery for these crabs for many years off the Asiatic Coast, United States firms have not exploited a similar American fishery. This has been due principally to lack of adequate information

regarding the areas in which the crabs are found, their abundance, movement, or methods by which they can be taken commercially.

Two of the Government's 3-vessel expedition--the Dorothy and Champion--sailed recently to meet the Locks, already cruising Kodiak Island waters.

"The vessels proceeded into Bering Sea," the report said, "stopping first at Dutch Harbor (on Unalaska Island, far out on the Aleutians) to pick up supplies and to mend gear. The trip was made in a blizzard, and the Champion was navigated by means of its radio compass. Due to a flu epidemic among the crews, it was necessary for the two vessels to remain at Dutch Harbor (where) Captain Nilsen required hospitalization for ... six days."

Much valuable information is being obtained on the biology and habits of King crabs since the biologists have been able to make extensive observations on spawning habits, the moulting procedure, and the movement of population, as related to spawning and moulting. The fishing observers are also obtaining much instructive data as to the relative merits of different types of gear under varying conditions and of the selectivity of the gear as influenced by the changing physical conditions of the crabs themselves.

Both the Dorothy and the Champion have explored the waters between Cape Mordvinof and Ugashik (off Unimak Island). A number of excellent catches of the giant crab are reported which, according to the report, "no doubt indicate many large localized populations on the Bering Sea side of the Peninsula." The Locks has continued its survey--twice around Kodiak Island, and in Cook Inlet.

The total catch of the second expedition so far known has been somewhat over 13,000 crabs. The largest specimen previously taken weighed 16 pounds; the largest so far this spring had been a monster specimen weighing 23 pounds.

These two items--in the face of time lost on account of bad weather, and damage to gear from fishing practically all the time on unknown "bottom"--have been encouraging factors for continuation of the expedition.

"Although statistics on catch for the first and second expeditions are given," the Seattle report warns, "no attempt at comparison should be made. Catch during the first expedition was largely confined to Canoe Bay, the catches of the vessels of the second expedition extending from Cape Spencer to Ugashik in Bristol Bay."

During the first expedition an attempt was made to fish thoroughly only the places crabs were located in significant quantities. So far in the second expedition, on the other hand, an attempt has been made to cover as much territory as possible in order to determine the extent of the distribution of the Alaska crab population. Consequently, the vessels have been leaving large bodies of crabs as soon as some idea of the productivity of a particular area has been obtained. This means, of course, that the catch per boat is much less than would have been expected if the vessels had continued to work on the bodies of crabs located.

The Champion is commanded by Captain Anders Nilsen, and the Locks by Captain Harry Guffey, while Captain E. F. Trafton is again in charge of the Dorothy. Each vessel, in addition to a crew of seven men, has aboard a fisheries engineer and a fisheries biologist. The vessels are equipped for trawling, tangle net fishing, and crab pot fishing.

Assisting R. H. Fiedler, Chief, Division of Fishery Industries, in immediate charge of the entire expedition, is Roger W. Harrison, technologist in charge of the Service's Seattle technological laboratory. L. S. Christey, fishery economist, is in charge of the venture at sea; while C. B. Carlson, fishery engineer, is supervising experimental fishing operations for the entire party.

#