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ALASKA FISHING REGULATIONS ISSUED

Alaska salmon operators and fishermen have joined with the Department of the Interior in unprecedented conservation measures for 1954, designed to aid in restoring the pink salmon runs in Territorial waters, Secretary Douglas McKay announced today.

The measures include the closing of more than half the fish traps in southeast Alaska and a virtual halt for a two year period in pink salmon fishing in Prince William Sound.

Bristol Bay operators, fishing for red salmon, have voluntarily curtailed the amount of gear to be used in 1954.

A quota of 50,000 barrels, about half the annual take in recent years, is placed on the herring catch in southeastern Alaska. Use of mechanical drum-seines is barred in the southeastern Territorial waters.

The run of pink salmon in Alaska waters has been seriously depleted in recent years. Results of the 1953 season were among the poorest on record.

Secretary McKay lauded the Alaska fishermen and the operators for their voluntary participation in the 1954 salmon conservation program, despite the individual sacrifices that will be borne by many.

"The Department's interest is in a healthy fishing industry for Alaska," Mr. McKay said. "It is vital to the Territorial economy. It was plain after the 1953 season that drastic action would be necessary to reverse the downward trend of the salmon catch. The spirit of cooperation which has been shown by the Alaskans in meeting this situation augurs well for that future day when Alaskans assume sole responsibility for this important resource."

The regulations, which were issued today, will become effective 30 days after publication in the Federal Register.

Southeastern Alaska purse seiners dramatically demonstrated their support of the new regulations by recommending closure of many of their best seining grounds. Trap operators in this same section agreed to the closure of 148 of the 266 trap sites held in 1953.

The herring fishery of Southeastern Alaska has been at low ebb for the last four years, producing only about 100,000 barrels in each of these years. A regulation against the taking of herring for any purpose other than bait was considered. Biological studies, however, indicated that the lack of herring was not due to

overfishing but was related to survival of the various year-classes comprising the stocks of this area. The entering year-class in 1954 is expected to be larger than in any recent year.

To permit continuity in sampling operations, the 1954 regulations place a quota of 50,000 barrels on the take of herring. This is about half the annual take of recent years and only slightly more than last year's take for the bait fishery alone. This small quota will permit a safe operation and continued study until the herring stocks increase.

"As in the case of the pink salmon curtailments," Director John L. Farley said today, "the herring operators and fishermen are cooperating admirably in the restoration effort upon which the new herring regulation is based."

Major changes in last year's regulations are as follows:

1. In Bristol Bay, the size of the fishing districts has been drastically reduced so that fishing within each district will be confined to local runs and thus can be more properly controlled by weir count. In addition, any migration of fishing boats from one district of Bristol Bay to another will require a 48-hour waiting period. This has been incorporated in the regulations in order to discourage indiscriminate migration from district to district. In addition, all fishing, except in Port Heiden, has been prohibited in the eastern portion of the Peninsula district on the approach routes of the runs to Bristol Bay.

2. In the Alaska Peninsula area, it has been necessary to close the eastern portion of the southside of the Peninsula because of the extremely poor condition of the pink salmon runs there.

3. In the Kodiak area, it has been possible to reduce the 2-week midseason closed period to one week in anticipation of much improved runs of pinks.

4. In the Cook Inlet area, no changes of major importance have been made. Fishing will again be on the basis of 2 days per week.

The Fish and Wildlife Service has explored the possibility of reducing the effort in Cook Inlet to one-half in order to provide for a longer fishing week and better distribution to the spawning grounds. In attempting to implement this objective, however, no means of reducing the fishing effort equally among the various forms of gear could be found, and the matter was accordingly deferred for at least another year until it can be studied at greater length.

5. The pink salmon runs in Prince William Sound are in a very depleted condition and it is proposed by the Service to close fishing in that area for the next two years, except in the Eshamy section. The small red salmon run in that section is in good condition and since the catch is controlled by weir count, this district is left open.

6. In the Copper River area, a continuous season from May 1 to September 18 has been provided. This should help in small measure to compensate to Cordova fishermen for closure of the pink salmon fishery in Prince William Sound during the next 2 years.

7. In southeastern Alaska, the fishing effort will be reduced about 50 percent for a two-year period to rehabilitate the seriously depleted pink salmon runs in that area. During 1954, 148 of the 266 trap sites in the region will be closed, and the number of bays closed to purse seine fishing will be greatly increased.

Seasons in this area have been adjusted to open and close earlier and extend over a longer period, permitting a greater take of early-run red and chum salmon and thus compensate the fishing industry in some degree for the closure of traps and seining grounds. At the same time, the Fish and Wildlife Service will step up its streamguard program so that catches sacrificed by the trap operators and seiners will not be lost to poachers.

8. It has been necessary for the Fish and Wildlife Service to restrict the use of so-called "drum-seines" in southeastern Alaska. Experience in British Columbia and Puget Sound indicates that the use of mechanical drums increase the effectiveness of purse seine gear, particularly at times when salmon are relatively scarce, because of the greatly increased number of sets which may be made per day. It is believed that the use of drums should not be permitted while the pink salmon restoration program is under way.

Director Farley expressed his appreciation of the wholehearted support given to his Alaskan program by all segments of the fishing industry.

"The splendid cooperation we have received assures success of the program," he said.

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