

# Alaskan fishing fleet catching huge proportion of B.C. salmon: New report

*Alaska harvests millions of Canadian salmon while Canadian fishermen tied to the dock*

VICTORIA, BC, CANADA, January 11, 2022 /EINPresswire.com/ -- As salmon runs in British Columbia hit record lows, commercial fisheries along the Alaska panhandle are catching a growing share of salmon bound for B.C. rivers, according to a new technical report.

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*Greg Knox, Executive Director,  
SkeenaWild Conservation  
Trust*

The report, which includes a detailed analysis on each B.C. salmon species caught in Southeast Alaskan interception fisheries, was commissioned by Watershed Watch Salmon Society and SkeenaWild Conservation Trust and comes as Canada and the United States begin their annual review of bilateral management under the Pacific Salmon Treaty.

Many of B.C.’s largest salmon runs pass through Alaskan waters on their way home to spawn in Canadian rivers. While commercial fishing was nearly non-existent in B.C. last summer, Alaskan fleets just across the border logged

over 3,000 boat-days and harvested almost 800,000 sockeye (most of which were of Canadian origin). In addition to sockeye, tens of thousands of Canadian Chinook and coho were also harvested, as well as large but unknown numbers of co-migrating Canadian pink, chum, and steelhead, many of which come from threatened and endangered populations.

The report also highlights the potentially severe impacts of Alaskan harvest on endangered salmon and steelhead populations, and gaps in Alaskan catch monitoring and assessment that prevent responsible management of the fisheries.

“We knew the Alaskans were intercepting a lot of B.C. salmon,” said Greg Knox of SkeenaWild, “but the numbers in this report are staggering. I’m also appalled at their failure to report their bycatch of non-target species, which Canadian fishers are required to do.”

B.C. salmon numbers have hit record lows in recent years, prompting former federal fisheries minister Bernadette Jordan to close 60 per cent of B.C.’s commercial salmon fisheries in June, 2021. She also announced a major licence buyback program as part of Canada’s \$647 million

Pacific Salmon Strategy Initiative to rebuild depleted stocks. Indigenous and recreational fisheries have also had unprecedented closures in B.C.

Much of the interception of Canadian-bound salmon takes place in Alaska's District 104, on the outer coast of the Alaska panhandle, where local rivers do not support significant salmon populations. Nearly all the salmon and steelhead caught in District 104 are bound for streams in Canada, elsewhere in Southeast Alaska, or other US states such as Washington and Oregon.

"Canada eliminated interception net fisheries similar to the District 104 fishery beginning in the early 1990s because of the risk they posed to non-target stocks," said Greg Taylor, fisheries advisor to Watershed Watch and SkeenaWild. "It is difficult to monitor and control the impacts of large mixed-stock fisheries on smaller non-target salmon populations, which is why Alaskan managers avoid similar fisheries elsewhere in the state where their own salmon might be put at risk."

"Alaskan fisheries are now the biggest harvesters of a growing number of depleted Canadian salmon populations," said Aaron Hill, executive director of Watershed Watch Salmon Society. "Canadian fishers and taxpayers are making incredible sacrifices to protect and rebuild our salmon runs, while the Alaskan interception fishery continues unchecked. It is irresponsible of both countries to continue to allow this."

"The Pacific Salmon Treaty will not be renewed until 2028, and history suggests Canada and the United States will likely come away from the negotiations with only incremental improvements," said Misty MacDuffee of Raincoast Conservation Foundation.

"The Pacific Salmon Treaty has failed to protect our salmon and our fishers and we can't wait until 2028 to fix it," said Hill. "The governments of Canada and B.C. need to stand up right now and do something about this Alaskan plunder."

Knox, Taylor, Hill and MacDuffee argue that Alaska could close the worst of its interception fisheries, and reduce the impact of others, by locating its fisheries closer to its own streams, and still sustainably harvest its own salmon.

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Read the full report and summary: <https://www.mccpacific.org/2022/01/southeastern-alaska-catch-of-bc-salmon-summary-and-reports/>

B-roll and photos:

[https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/14px\\_wnDC5NndDEWtk1ad3Lw5tj6ouS7N?usp=sharing](https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/14px_wnDC5NndDEWtk1ad3Lw5tj6ouS7N?usp=sharing)

Backgrounder on the Impacts of Alaskan Interception Fisheries on Canadian and Southern U.S. Salmon and Steelhead

How many Canadian salmon and steelhead are killed in Southeast Alaskan interception fisheries?

In 2021, nearly 800,000 sockeye salmon were caught in southern Southeast Alaskan (SEAK) interception fisheries (Districts 101-104, 106). Based on data from past years, the majority of this catch was of Canadian origin.

Nearly 34 million pink salmon were caught in these same fisheries, with an unknown proportion of Canadian origin. Over 1.2 million chum were also caught, and while many of these were produced in Alaskan hatcheries, an unknown number of co-migrating B.C. chum were harvested, at a time when many B.C. north and central coast chum populations are at very low abundance.

About 51,000 Chinook were harvested in Southeast Alaskan troll fisheries, the vast majority of which were returning to B.C. and Washington. An additional but unknown, number of Chinook and steelhead were caught and released (likely dead) in seine fisheries. 540,000 coho were also harvested, with an unknown proportion of B.C. origin.

It is difficult to estimate the number of Canadian and southern U.S. origin salmon and steelhead caught in Alaskan fisheries. Catches in each fishery are monitored in a different manner, and estimates are made using different methods for different species. For some combinations of areas, fisheries and species, (e.g. Skeena, Nass and Fraser sockeye in seine fisheries, Chinook in troll and recreational fisheries), Alaska provides relatively good information. However, for most other species caught SEAK (e.g. coho, pink, chum and steelhead), Alaska provides little to no information.

The lack of assessment information is even more problematic when the analysis dives deeper, into the sub-population level. For instance, even though there are 82 genetically distinct Nass, Skeena, and Fraser River sockeye populations with varying vulnerability to Southeast Alaskan interception fisheries, little attempt is made to understand the Alaskan impact on these populations. The same holds true for other salmon species caught in these fisheries.

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