

EXPORTATION OF FISH

In reference to information reported previously, and posted on the website, on the capacity and impact on infrastructure, support services, etc, it was stated that Alaska Airlines “moves about 1 million pounds [of fish] per year as baggage,” in comparison to 4.7 million pounds of commercially caught fish exported by air.

Is the issue the amount of fish, how it is done, or who is doing the exporting of fish?

In either instance, it is important to look a little further. According to the National Marine Fisheries Service (www.st.nmfs.gov/stl/commercial/landings/lport_hist.html) there were 37.5 million pounds of commercially caught fish landed and exported by barge or aircraft from Sitka, in 2005. So, if 4.7 million pounds left on Alaska Airlines, 32.8 million pounds of fish left Sitka, in shipping containers.

A plane load is equivalent to one shipping container, holding about 45,000 pounds of fish. So, in 2005, sport caught fish filled 22.2 planes; commercially caught fish filled 104.4 planes, and commercially caught fish filled 728.9 shipping containers.

In comparison to the annual average of 40 fishboxes (holding 50 lbs), leaving daily, as baggage, 2.3 containers, holding 45,000 pounds each, of commercially caught fish, leave daily.

Because most species of fish are managed with a total allowable harvest figure, (king salmon in SE AK, 80% commercial, 20% sport, halibut in Area 2C averages 80% commercial, 20% sport, demersal shelf rockfish in SE AK, 86% commercial, 14% sport, lingcod in SE AK, 70% commercial, 30% sport), a decline in the sport catch allows more fish to be harvested commercially.

If there were no visitors sport fishing in the Sitka area, the 1 million pounds of fish exported as baggage, would still likely be caught and exported by barge or aircraft.

Nonresidents, whether they travel here as visitors to sport fish, or stay home and purchase fish from the grocery stores or restaurants, account for the exporting of over 90% of the fish harvested in Alaska.

The IPHC, National Marine Fisheries Service, Alaska Department of Fish and Game, and the US Geological Survey, have conducted a number of tagging and satellite tracking of fish studies, which can be found at the following websites.

www.iphc.washington.edu

www.absc.usgs.gov/research/fisheries/halibut/popup_tags2.htm

www.absc.usgs.gov/research/fisheries/fish_proj_species.htm

www.absc.usgs.gov/glba/habitat_halibut.htm

www.adfg.state.ak.us/pub/afrb/vol10_n2/seitzv10n2.pdf

With respect to the most important species to sport anglers, such as king salmon and halibut, these studies show both species are wide ranging, while maturing and reproducing. While local depletion of the halibut remains an issue near all population centers, the IPHC considers the Northeast Pacific halibut population to be a single population that mixes throughout their range, along the northwest coast of North America.

Thus, for all intents and purposes, all halibut in the Eastern North Pacific could repopulate Sitka Sound, if they are not intercepted by any harvesters.