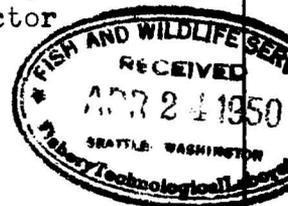


United States Department of the Interior, Oscar L. Chapman, Secretary  
Fish and Wildlife Service, Albert M. Day, Director



-----  
Fishery Leaflet 298

Washington 25, D. C.

Revised, April 1950

EMPLOYMENT POSSIBILITIES IN THE ALASKAN  
FISHING INDUSTRY

By R. Paul Elliott,  
Fishery Products Technologist  
Branch of Commercial Fisheries

During World War II there was a serious shortage of manpower in the fishing industry in the Pacific Northwest and Alaska; however, that condition no longer exists. People experienced in fishing or in the work of the canneries are now much more readily available than they were during the war years. As a result, inexperienced personnel must now compete for jobs with experienced workers whose capabilities are known to the management. Obviously, applicants with special skills stand a better chance of obtaining jobs in their particular line of work than do inexperienced ones.

Hiring in nearly all cases is done on a personal interview basis. This applies both to cannery help and to help on fishing vessels. Because of this, many people are tempted to travel to the Pacific Northwest or even to Alaska to seek work. Applicants for positions should not come to these areas without having obtained a definite commitment of a job unless they have sufficient funds for their return if work is not available. In addition to the expensive transportation, the applicant must remember that the cost of food and lodging in Alaska is from 25 to 30 percent higher than similar necessities in the United States.

For work either on fishing vessels or in canneries, union membership is an asset, although the Taft-Hartley law now permits employment subject to later union membership where "union shop" contracts are negotiated. Most branches of Alaska's fishing industry are heavily unionized.

For information on employment in Alaska in general, applicants may write to the Alaska Territorial Employment Service, Box 159, Ketchikan, Alaska. Applicants should know that there is an increasing pressure on the Alaskan fishing industry to consider Alaskan citizens before outside help is hired.

Alaska is not the untouched wilderness many people believe. Although there are still many undeveloped fishery resources, the majority of these require the expenditure of large amounts of capital for exploitation. Principal undeveloped fisheries include shellfish, such as crabs, shrimp and

clams, and bottomfish (See the references at the end of the report). Salmon and halibut are being fished to the limit at present, and herring are now being fully exploited on all known fishing grounds.

### Employment in Salmon Canneries

There is no central employment agency for cannery workers, either in the States or in Alaska. Each cannery does its own hiring, usually in Seattle from about March to May of each year. Letters of application should be addressed to the individual company. Applicants must give age, physical condition, training, working experience, and any other qualifications. A list of salmon canners can be obtained upon request from the Director, Fish and Wildlife Service, U. S. Department of the Interior, Washington 25, D.C., or field offices of the Service in Juneau, Alaska, and 2725 Montlake Blvd., Seattle 2, Washington.

Workers hired in Seattle, Washington, are provided transportation and travel time pay at the cannery's expense. Most canneries provide monthly employees with room and board. Where these are not provided, the employee receives additional subsistence compensation. Most cannery workers receive two to five months' employment (summer and early fall).

Wage rates for cannery employment are subject to revision each season through negotiations between the labor unions and the cannery operators. Salaries for the various classes of employees in the 1950 season are as follows (Board, room and transportation are furnished in addition. With few exceptions, overtime is paid for all work in excess of 48 hours per week.):

- (a) Craftsmen: (machinists, electricians, pipefitters, carpenters, firemen, etc.) \$317.50 to \$578.33 per month for a 48 hour week. Helpers: \$250.00 to \$281.00 for a 48 hour week.
- (b) Outside crews. (Tender captains and personnel of other company-owned vessels, piledriver crews, rigging crews, beach crews, web crews, etc.) \$271.00 to \$386.00 per month for a 48 hour week. In place of overtime some of these workers are paid a percentage based on the size of the pack.
- (c) Cannery and culinary workers: (Department heads, iron chink feeders, fish slimers, jitney drivers, box pilers, can-loft workers, cooks, bakers, waiters, dish-washers, etc.) \$221.56 to \$400.00 per month for a 48 hour week.

### Employment in Fishing Operations

Although high earnings often are made in fishing, in most cases hours are long; work hard; and income, moderate. Very often the fishermen actually lose money when the fishing or marketing conditions are poor. Furthermore, seasickness is often a problem. Usually the hiring is done by personal interview with the captain of each individual fishing vessel. The reluctance of the captain to hire inexperienced personnel is not surprising in view of the fact that the crew on a fishing vessel must be a well integrated team if the fishing is to pay. A "green" hand is often an obstruction rather than a help. Captains with good catch records are

always able to obtain excellent, fully experienced crews; those who have a record of mediocre earnings often must hire some inexperienced persons. Thus anyone entering the fishery for the first time must usually expect low earnings for the first two or three seasons.

In the Alaska salmon trolling industry, vessels are small power boats 25 to 50 feet in length. These are privately owned, and the crew consists of one or two men. The extra man is often a personal friend of the owner, or at any rate, a man experienced in fishing.

In the Alaska salmon gillnet fishery, many of the vessels are owned by the canneries, thus employment applications should be made to the canning companies. The pay is based on the number of fish caught. Usually the boat is operated by one or two men. Privately owned vessels are usually similarly operated by one or two men who share the proceeds of the catch. Gillnet vessels in Bristol Bay are sailing vessels at present, but in the 1951 season motors will be permitted.

Alaska salmon purse seiners are vessels carrying two to eight men. Most of these vessels are privately owned and hiring is done through personal interview with the individual captains. Earnings are usually based on shares and vary from a few hundred to several thousand dollars per year.

Alaska herring purse seine vessels carry approximately nine men. Vessels are owned by either individuals or herring reduction plants, but in any case, hiring is done by the individual captains. Earnings are on a share basis.

The halibut industry is probably the most difficult fishery to enter since the catch is strictly limited by law, and competition among the vessels is intense. Each vessel carries three to eleven men who are paid on a share basis. The individual captains hire the crew by personal interview. Earnings have been good during the war and postwar years, although as is the case in all fisheries, fishermen often lost money in depression times.

Otter trawlers, which are vessels used to catch bottom fish, are privately owned and operate with four to six crew members, all hired by the captain. As yet the otter trawl fishery has not been fully developed in Alaska.

#### Employment in Other Fishery Industries

Opportunities for employment in cold storage plants, herring reduction plants, and other branches of Alaska's fisheries are much less numerous than those in salmon canneries, and in the fishing operations. The operators usually hire employees by personal interview. The prospective worker should write for "Alaska fishery operators other than salmon canners."

#### REFERENCES 1/

CARLSON, CARL B.

Commercial possibilities of shrimp resources in certain southeastern Alaskan areas, Fishery Market News, July, 1945 supplement

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

The Alaskan king crab. Fishery Market News, May, 1942 supplement.

Firms canning salmon in Alaska.

Alaska fishery operators other than salmon canners

Laws and regulations for protection of the commercial fisheries of Alaska. (Revised yearly).

STANSBY, MAURICE E.

Opportunities for small business in the fisheries of the Pacific Northwest and Alaska. Fishery Leaflet 107, February, 1945.

THOMPSON, SETON H. AND WEYMOUTH, F. W.

Condition of razor clam fishery in vicinity of Cordova, Alaska. U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of Fisheries, Investigational Report No. 29 (1935).

---

1/ These publications may be obtained free of charge by writing to the Director, Fish and Wildlife Service, U. S. Department of the Interior, Washington 25, D. C.

---

ADDITIONAL REFERENCES 2/

ANONYMOUS

On what basis do Pacific fishermen share earnings? Western Fisheries. Vol. 29, no. 5, 20-22, February, 1945.

CHAPMAN, WILBERT McLEOD

The latent fisheries of Washington and Alaska. California Fish and Game, Vol. 28, no. 4, October, 1942, pages 182-198.

DeLOACH, DANIEL B.

The Salmon canning industry. Oregon State College, Corvallis, Oregon Economic Studies, No. 1, February, 1939.

TURNER, DAVID B.

Professional opportunities in the wildlife (and fisheries) field Wildlife Management Institute, Washington, D. C. (1948) \$1.00

---

2/ Not available from the Fish and Wildlife Service.

---