

Around the World: Fishing for Cordova salmon



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Alaska

Located on Prince William Sound in southeast Alaska and framed by the Chugach Mountain Range, Cordova, AK, was home to Eyak native peoples when named "Puerto Cordova" after a Spanish admiral by explorer Salvador Fidalgo in 1790.

In 1886 the New England Fish Orca Cannery was built three miles north of present-day Cordova. It at one time processed most of Prince William Sound's salmon harvest and employed hundreds of workers. It remained in operation until 1986.

When the railroad reached the area in the early 1900s, Cordova was established as a shipping port for copper ore extracted from the Kennecott mines. 200 million tons of ore made its way through town between the years 1911 through 1938. After the boom went bust, Cordova's main industry returned to fishing and has remained so ever since. Accessible only by boat or aircraft, half of the households in the settlement of 2000 people have at least one member involved in the fishing industry.

Priced at about \$175,000 apiece, around 500 salmon fishing permits are issued every year in Cordova. They are divided into three categories: drift gillnets, set gillnets, and purse seines.

PHOTOS BY DAVE GIBSON

Checking out the harbor and the catch

Above; Cordova's scenic boat harbor. Below; A dock worker stays happily busy all summer unloading salmon brought in by the fish tenders.

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- Quote of the Week -

"Do not tell fish stories where the people know you; but particularly, don't tell them where they know the fish." ~Mark Twain

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PHOTOS BY DAVE GIBSON

Commercial salmon fishing

Top; A rare sunny day for a boat ride. Middle, left; The Jackal has seen better days. Bottom, left; Ocean Beauty Seafoods is one of four canneries in town. Bottom, right; Fishermen on vessel Double Trouble untangle nets in preparation for another trip to sea.

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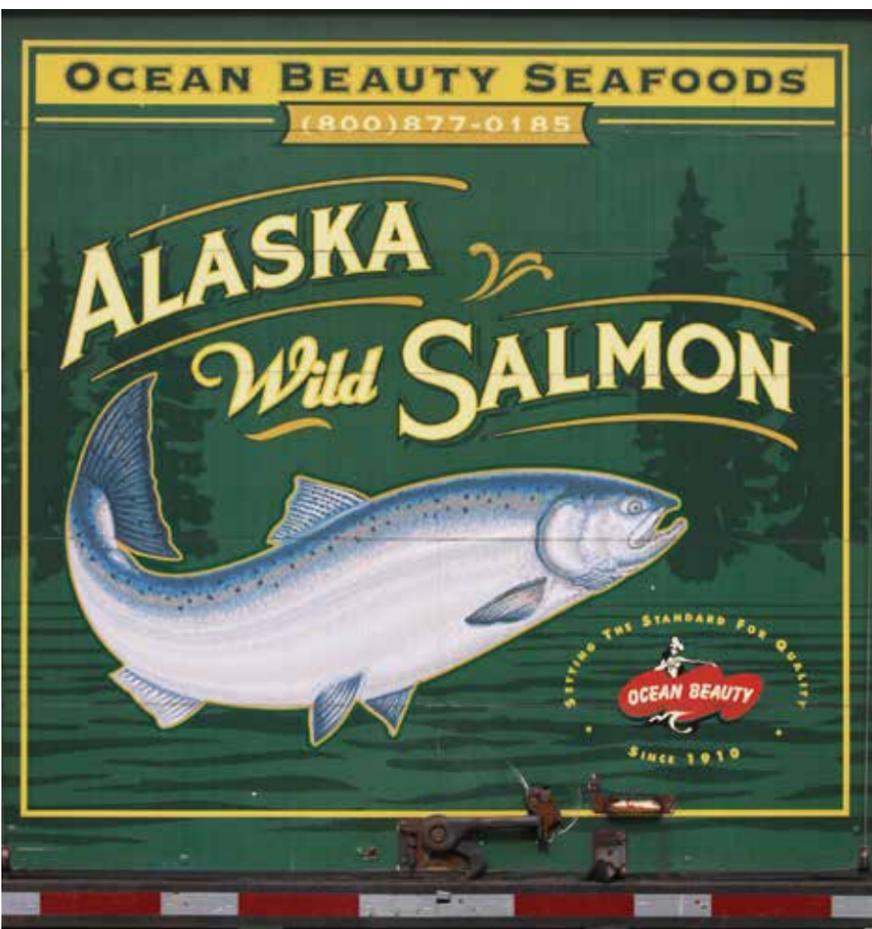
Purse seine fishermen encircle schools of fish with their nets and scoop them into the boat. Their method produces the highest quality fish since the salmon have less contact with the net. Openings are announced every week declaring what areas are legal to fish.

King salmon from the Copper River Delta region near Cordova are the first salmon commercially harvested in Alaska each year. Sometime during the middle of May, a red carpet is rolled out when Alaska Airlines delivers the highly-

anticipated initial shipment of fresh king salmon to Seattle. Those fish fetch the year's steepest prices from high-end restaurants.

Trident, Ocean Beauty, 60° North, and Copper River canneries process the season's bounty. Large fishing vessels including the Wizard and Northwestern, as seen on Discovery Channel's *Deadliest Catch*, serve as fish tenders collecting the catch at sea thereby saving the fishing fleet time and fuel costs. Shuttling from the ocean to harbor, the twenty or so

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Fishing in Cordova

Top; Fishing buoys line the starboard side. Bottom, left; Orca Cannery was the first in the Cordova area. Bottom, right; Salmon is hoisted from the ship's holding tank, poured into containers, iced, and whisked away by forklift to be processed.

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tenders at times must wait their turn in Orca Inlet to unload. 204 million king, red, silver, pink, and chum salmon were

harvested from Alaska in 2019. Roughly one-third of those came from Prince William Sound and nearby waters.

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