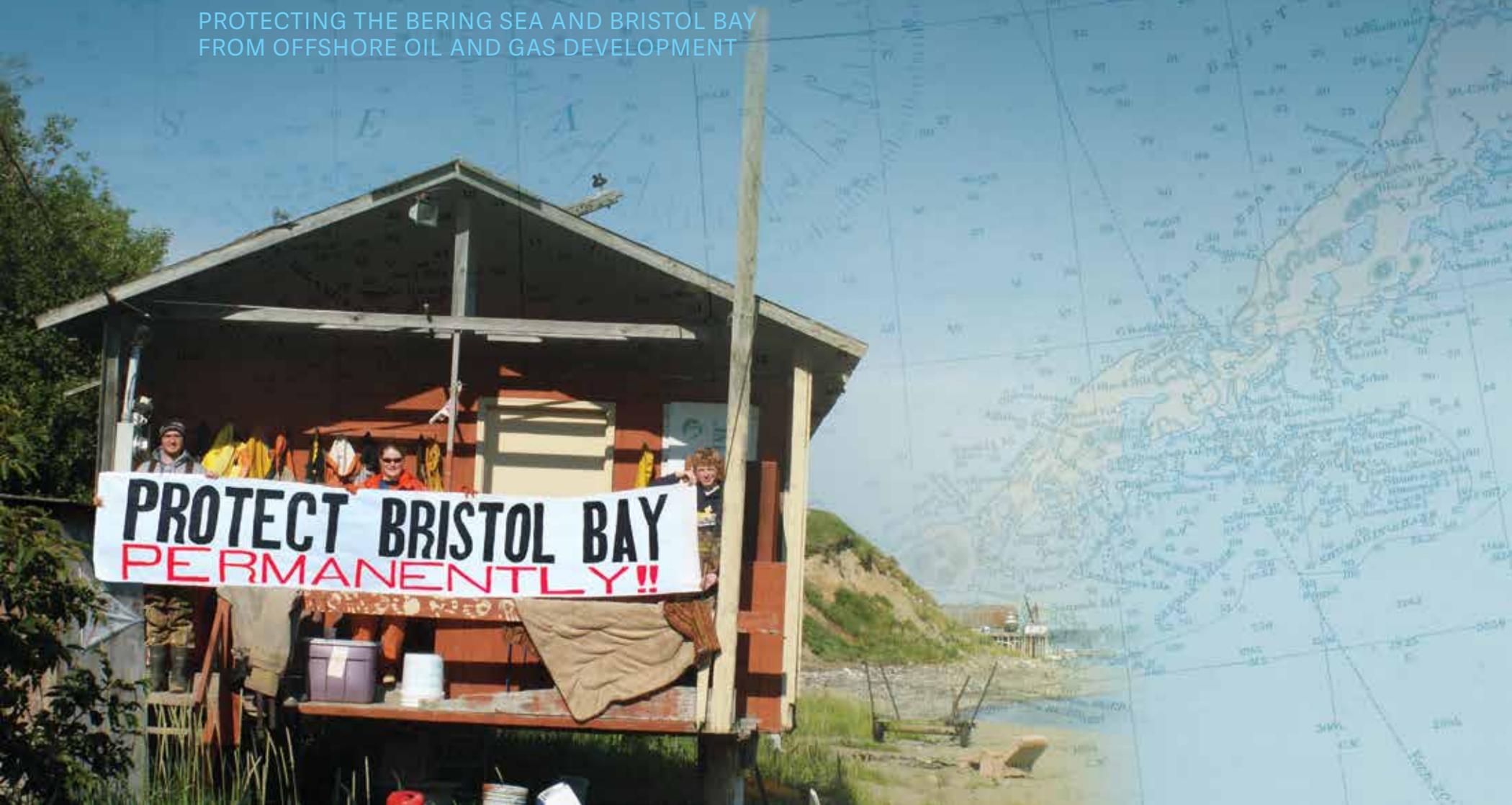


A Legacy Story:

PROTECTING THE BERING SEA AND BRISTOL BAY
FROM OFFSHORE OIL AND GAS DEVELOPMENT

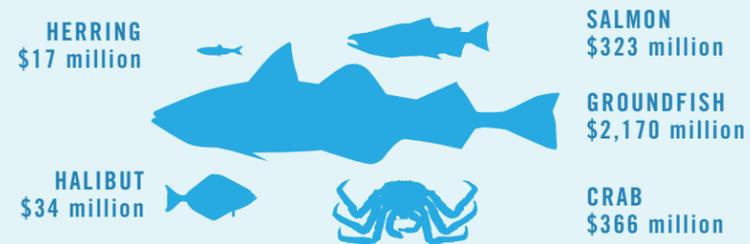


A LEGACY STORY chronicles the long struggle over decisions about opening Bristol Bay and the southeast Bering Sea to offshore oil and gas drilling. Over many decades, people dependent on the region's rich marine resources have been undaunted in an effort to protect these waters. In December 2014, the people of Bristol Bay breathed a collective sigh of relief when President Obama announced that the region would be permanently withdrawn from consideration for oil and gas leasing. The federal government agreed that the priority should be placed on sustaining traditional ways of life and the high value commercial fisheries in the region, and that offshore drilling presented risks that were not worth taking.

The story is told from the perspective of those on the front lines – leaders in the region and the seafood industry, past governors and former Interior Department secretaries. By documenting this story, future generations will remember the history, value the enduring effort made to permanently set Bristol Bay and the southeast Bering Sea aside from oil and gas leasing, and be supported in safeguarding the region into the future.

GROSS COMMERCIAL FISHERY PRODUCT VALUES \$2.9 BILLION

(Value through primary processing)



All five Pacific salmon species migrate through Bristol Bay every year on their way to spawning grounds throughout western Alaska. Bristol Bay hosts 50% of the global population of wild sockeye salmon,¹ supporting a sustainable commercial fishery and a traditional harvest that has been ongoing for thousands of years.

Bristol Bay and the southeast Bering Sea represent over 40% of U.S. domestic seafood production valued at more than \$2 billion annually, including salmon, red king crab, herring and groundfish.^{2,3} It is a principal juvenile halibut nursery for the whole North Pacific population and therefore important to fishing families throughout Alaska. Bristol Bay significantly contributes to Alaska's seafood industry, which accounts for more employment than any other private sector enterprise in the state⁴ and provides a tax base that supports our coastal communities.



My grandmother used to say, 'We're so rich.' I would ask her why did she think we were rich and she would say because of the fish, birds, seal, berries – abundant foods that we harvest right here in Bristol Bay. She thought this was the richest place in the world.

TOM TILDEN
Chief, Curyung Tribal Council



Bristol Bay is predicated on subsistence. The most important fish you catch is the one you're going to put on your plate.

ROBIN SAMUELSEN
Chairman, Bristol Bay Economic Development Corporation



The fishery is the economic and cultural engine of Bristol Bay. It provides thousands of jobs, millions of pounds of protein for the world and a lot of food for our people. And it's not only people. The forest needs the fish. The bears need the fish. It's a very important link in the ecosystem.

PETER ANDREW
Bristol Bay fisherman

EARLY DAYS

THE STORY BEGAN IN 1974 when President Ford's administration first pursued the possibility of offshore oil and gas development in the region. During this time Alaska Governor Jay Hammond (1974-1982) succeeded twice in persuading the federal government not to lease in Bristol Bay because of the high fishery values and overall sensitivity of the region.⁵

But in 1982, Secretary of the Interior James Watt under President Reagan created the infamous Outer Continental Shelf Oil and Gas Leasing Program in which nearly the entire U.S. coast was proposed for sale. This startled fishermen and local governments from New England to Alaska because it was a sweeping policy that did not account for fishing livelihoods, the interests of communities or ecological importance. As part of this controversial plan, the Interior Department scheduled Lease Sale 92 for 1985 in the 32-million acre North Aleutian Basin Planning Area encompassing Bristol Bay and the southeast Bering Sea.

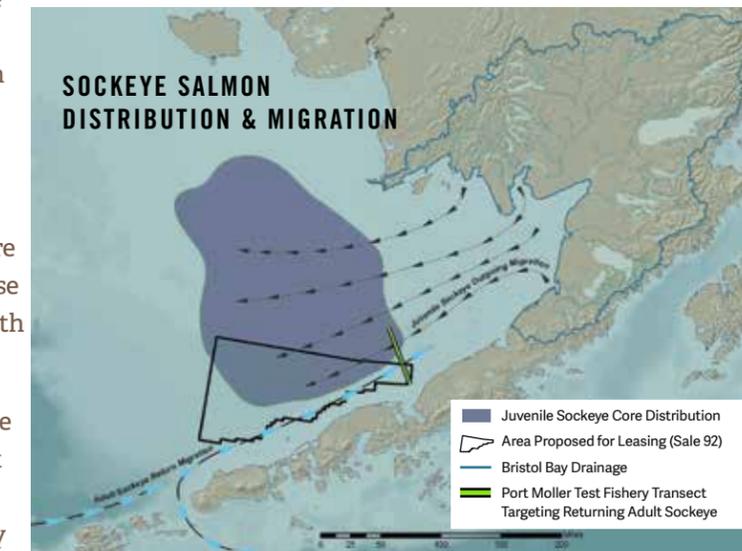
The State of Alaska, Alaska Legal Services representing tribal governments, and Trustees for Alaska representing conservation groups all challenged the Interior Department in court to stop the sale. The three cases were combined by the U.S. District Court with claims that offshore drilling would harm subsistence, commercial fisheries and the rich ecosystem. During the course of the litigation the sale was reduced from 32 million acres to 5.6 million acres concentrated north of the Alaska Peninsula, but that did not alleviate the concerns of most people.

There were several stages in which legal action temporarily stopped the sale. But finally the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals ruled that Lease Sale 92 could go forward.⁶ The Department of the Interior opened the bids soon afterwards in October 1988. Eight oil companies paid \$95 million for tracks in the heart of the Bering Sea's productive fisheries and the migratory route for western Alaska salmon.



BILL SHEFFIELD
Governor of Alaska (1982-1986)

I remember when Secretary Hodel came out to Bristol Bay for a hearing. It looked like thousands of fishermen outside the building when we drove up. But, you know, the idea of offshore drilling in an area that's so prosperous – the numbers of fish, the whales coming in, everything migrating and all of the product that comes out of the sea – and just to throw away billions of dollars and a way of life. We had a lot to talk about and he got an earful.



House Panel Votes to Ban Oil Exploration in Alaskan Bay

H. Josef Hebert, Associated Press Jun. 29, 1989

WASHINGTON (AP) — The House Appropriations Committee, citing concerns about a possible oil spill, approved legislation today imposing a year-long moratorium on oil or gas exploration in Alaska's Bristol Bay, one of the nation's premier fishing areas...

In Juneau, Alaska Gov. Steve Cowper called the committee action clear evidence that "our views are being heard in Washington." The Alaska congressional delegation had sought the moratorium on Bristol Bay exploration.



The oil spill galvanized the leadership in Bristol Bay to really take a hard look at this and do what was necessary to protect what we have here.

DAVID HARSILA
President, Alaska Independent Fishermen's Marketing Association



CONGRESS INTERVENES

EVEN THOUGH THE LEASE SALE might have dealt the final blow to the diverse opposition, resistance to offshore drilling did not subside. The next Alaska governor, Steve Cowper, carried on the job of resolving the controversy by asking Congress to stop exploration on the leases that had been sold. He sent a letter to the U.S. House Committee on Appropriations raising scientific questions that needed answers and highlighted the lack of oil spill response capability. Reflecting concerns raised by Alaskans, he requested a more reasonable balance between the federal government's quest for national energy security and the protection of our fisheries.

On March 24, 1989, a month after Governor Cowper sent his letter to Congress, the Exxon Valdez oil tanker ran aground in Prince William Sound and the devastating impact of a major oil spill in Alaska's waters became starkly obvious. The spill was an epic tragedy but it became the impetus for Congress to impose a moratorium on exploration drilling of the active leases in the North Aleutian Basin.⁷

You see what happens when there is no fishery. You see the social fabric of the community torn apart. So it really does matter to the region and the state what happens to the fishery.

Adelheid Herrmann
Representative, Alaska State Legislature (1982-1989)



In response to the argument that there is a national interest to be served by hydrocarbon development in Bristol Bay, I must insist that there are far more important national and international values involved which justify protecting the fisheries of this region.

ADELHEID HERRMANN
Representative, Alaska State Legislature (1982-1989)

(Excerpt from a letter to Interior Secretary Hodel, 1985)



We had to go back to Washington, DC and ask the Congress to put off any decision by the Interior Department in terms of opening up Bristol Bay.

STEVE COWPER
Governor of Alaska (1986-1990)

Watching the tragedy unfold on T.V. and seeing those fishermen lose everything was heartbreaking to me. I don't know if the spill was a blessing in disguise for Bristol Bay or what, but it caused the government to re-evaluate the wisdom of having oil and gas development in our traditional areas and the nation's most productive fishing grounds.

TOM TILDEN
Chief, Curyung Tribal Council

BRISTOL BAY BUYBACK AND THE STRUGGLE OVER A NEW LEASE SALE

IN 1995, the controversy over exploration on the active leases was resolved when the federal government bought the leases back from the oil companies.⁸ After the buyback Congress maintained an annual moratorium on new lease sales and President Clinton added a second layer of protection that prevented consideration of leasing in the North Aleutian Basin until 2012.⁹

However, the period of safety for Bristol Bay was brief. Attitudes changed in Congress and the White House, now occupied by George W. Bush. Congress ended its annual moratorium in 2003 and President Bush changed the end date for executive protection from 2012 to 2007. This cleared the way for the Interior Department to schedule North Aleutian Basin Lease Sale 214 for 2011 in the same 5.6 million acre area that was previously bought back.¹⁰

Although there were promises of jobs and economic diversity, the prevailing view was that drilling in the region was not worth the risk. When President Barack Obama came into office in 2009, community, seafood industry and conservation leaders urged the new administration to restore hard-won protections. Interior Secretary Ken Salazar came to Alaska for public hearings and witnessed overwhelming opposition to drilling. Leaders reinforced this outpouring with trips to Washington D.C. In March 2010, President Obama and Secretary Salazar announced a reprieve for Bristol Bay by cancelling Lease Sale 214 and extending protection until 2017.¹¹



Secretary Salazar addresses Verner Wilson at hearing in Dillingham.

In our quest to secure our energy future, we must not lose the places and values that set our nation apart. Bristol Bay is a national treasure that we must protect for future generations.

Ken Salazar
Secretary of the Interior (2009-2013)

(Press release March 31, 2010)



There was clear tension between two opposing forces. One was the overriding feeling among Alaskans that Bristol Bay needed to be protected. The other was the oil companies who had spent millions of dollars but weren't allowed by Congress to develop the leases. So something had to happen. As governor, I wanted to make sure the leases were removed and, as a matter of fairness, the oil companies needed to be paid back.

TONY KNOWLES
Governor of Alaska (1994-2002)



A coalition of tribes, regional Alaska organizations and fishing companies formed the Bristol Bay Buyback Coalition. We knew offshore drilling could affect salmon throughout western Alaska – so this was not just about Bristol Bay, it was an Alaska-wide concern.

KAREN GILLIS
Former Executive Director, Bering Sea Fishermen's Association



As a result of the fallout from the Exxon Valdez spill, it wasn't a big reach to tell President Clinton, 'You have the authority to cancel the lease sale.' He responded very quickly. It wasn't hard given the chaos and tragedy in Prince William Sound to say, 'We can't on our watch let that happen in Bristol Bay.'

BRUCE BABBITT
Secretary of the Interior (1993-2001)



December 16, 2014



Earlier today I took action to make sure that one of America's greatest natural resources and a massive economic engine not only for Alaska but for America – Bristol Bay – is preserved for future generations. Because of the great work done by communities, Native Alaskans and folks who care about... this natural wonder, we were able to take it off the bidders' block and make sure it is preserved into the future.

PRESIDENT BARACK OBAMA
December 16, 2014

PERMANENT PROTECTION

BY NOW IT WAS CLEAR that a permanent solution was needed to protect Bristol Bay once and for all. Fifty-four tribes and regional organizations throughout western Alaska passed resolutions, 20 seafood companies sent a letter to the Obama administration, commercial fishermen signed petitions, a diverse array of interest groups collaborated and leaders traveled to Washington, DC many times to make the case for the President to permanently withdraw the North Aleutian Basin from all future offshore oil and gas leasing.

On December 16, 2014, using his authority under the Outer Continental Shelf Lands Act, President Obama announced a landmark decision to permanently remove the North Aleutian Basin from the federal Outer Continental Shelf Oil and Gas Leasing Program, protecting Bristol Bay and the southeast Bering Sea into the future.¹² Seafood industry leaders and the people of Bristol Bay had succeeded in the effort to gain long-term protection for a way of life and the region's seafood economy. The President's declaration ended decades of uncertainty about whether the fishing grounds and traditional use areas of Bristol Bay and the southeast Bering Sea would be traded for an oil and gas field.



We have the nation's most important fisheries in Bristol Bay and the eastern Bering Sea worth billions of dollars. Wild salmon for all of western Alaska runs through Bristol Bay every spring. Herring, king crab, halibut nursery grounds and the large groundfish fisheries – all these bring economic benefits to our people and sustain a way of life that has been ongoing here for thousands of years. My father worked his whole life to protect our fisheries and create opportunity for the people. It's a great honor to my family that the federal government recognizes his legacy by putting Bristol Bay off limits to offshore drilling.

ROBIN SAMUELSEN
Chairman, Bristol Bay Economic Development Corporation



We have the largest wild salmon migration in the world coming through Bristol Bay and heading to spawning grounds in river systems along the Bering Sea. That's why 54 tribes and Native organizations from Bristol Bay to the Bering Strait support the Department of the Interior in putting Bristol Bay permanently off limits to offshore drilling.

RALPH ANDERSEN
CEO, Bristol Bay Native Association

As a young man I learned a lot from watching Bristol Bay leaders protect these natural resources and create opportunity for the people. Prominent among them was Harvey Samuelson, whose vision for Bristol Bay included opportunity in the region's productive commercial fisheries – for salmon as well as groundfish, crab, herring – and protection of the resources that we harvest to put on the table and share with other families. When the first proposal arose to open Bristol Bay waters to offshore drilling, they sprang into action to stop it.

TOM TILDEN
Chief, Curyung Tribal Council

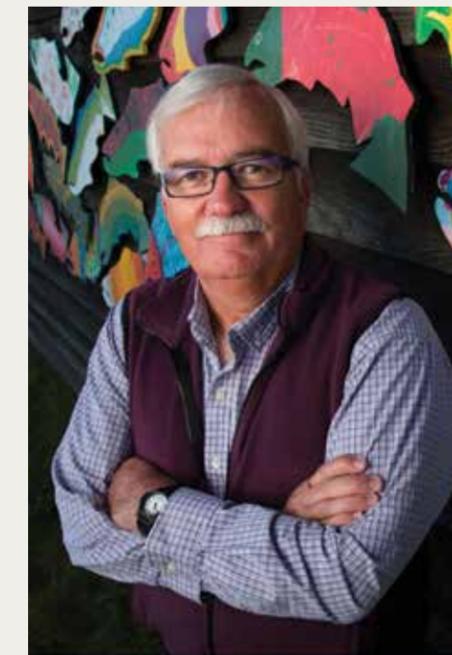


Families in our region practice subsistence. Even though they're commercial fishermen, they still practice subsistence. It's cross-generational so grandpas teach their grandsons. It's that information sharing that makes us stronger and it will give young people the resolve to say 'I learned from my grandpa and grandma and what's important is to make sure those re-occurring resources that we value for subsistence are always going to be here.'

KIM WILLIAMS
Executive Director, Nunamta Auluketai

By removing Bristol Bay from the federal offshore oil and gas leasing program in perpetuity, we have more certainty that our waters will be safe for the sustainable fisheries that make our jobs possible and provide a renewable economy. This has been a long-time coming and Bristol Bay fishermen are breathing a collective sigh of relief.

DAVID HARSILA
President, Alaska Independent Fishermen's Marketing Association



Fish Basket Coalition

OUR FISH, OUR FUTURE, OUR COMMUNITIES

www.fishbasket.org

Photo credit: Kaye Mathias



As long as future generations remain faithful to the charge of caring for the place where they live, they'll know what to do.

TERRY HOEFFLER
Former CEO, Bristol Bay Native Association

IN ALASKA, FISHING MEANS BUSINESS

“The fisheries in Bristol Bay and the southeastern Bering Sea feed the country, and they create jobs, fund scholarships, and build infrastructure in Alaska. With income from these fisheries, we invested \$24 million into 17 Alaska communities this year alone. To continue to grow economically sustainable communities, we need certainty that our world-class fishing grounds won't be opened to offshore drilling.”

Norm Van Vactor
CEO, Bristol Bay Economic Development Corporation
Dillingham, Alaska

Advertisements featuring seafood companies appeared in newspapers showing permanent protection support.



A Legacy Story is dedicated to Harvey Samuelsen (1926-2004) and future generations of Bristol Bay leaders.

HARVEY SAMUELSEN was born in 1926 in Akiachak on the Kuskokwim River. After World War II, he moved to Bristol Bay where he began a long career as a commercial fisherman and Alaska Native leader.

Harvey served the people of Bristol Bay with unwavering spirit, facing the issues of his time. He formed the Western Alaska Fisherman's Association in the early 1950s to negotiate with the canneries, enabling Native fishermen to get equal treatment and the same price for their salmon as those who traveled from other states. In 1951, when the fishery changed from company-owned sail boats to independent power vessels, Harvey helped establish the first credit union to loan money to Alaska fishermen for boats and gear. Harvey's leadership contributed to the rebuilding of the Bristol Bay salmon population that had been overfished under territorial management before Alaska statehood. He helped lead the creation of the Community Development Quota Program establishing opportunity for Bering Sea communities in the lucrative offshore groundfish and crab fisheries.

Despite countless hours working for the betterment of rural Alaskans, Harvey always found time for salmon fishing and teaching young people the skills. In addition to commercial fishing, Harvey's family always put up dried and smoked fish in the Yup'ik tradition.

Even at the very end of his life, Harvey issued instructions to others for tasks ahead, including preventing industrial activities that threaten the fisheries, from the headwaters to the deep ocean. He remained forever committed to protecting the way of life in Bristol Bay.

Acknowledgments

We appreciate participation in the production of A Legacy Story by the people and fishermen of Bristol Bay and government officials who were interviewed about their part in the story: Peter Andrew, Secretary of the Interior Bruce Babbitt, Gary Cline, Gov. Steve Cowper, Karen Gillis, David Harsila, Adelheid Herrmann, Terry Hoefflerle, Gov. Tony Knowles, Robin Samuelsen, Gov. Bill Sheffield, Tom Tilden and Kim Williams.

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Endnotes

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- ¹¹ Hagerty, 2011.
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Photo credits

PAGE 3 Lower map – Wild Salmon Center

PAGE 4 Exxon Valdez Oil Spill Trustee Council

PAGE 5 U.S. Department of the Interior

PAGE 6 left Gigi Marcantonio, right Luke Strickland

BACK COVER left courtesy of the Samuelsen family, right Gigi Marcantonio



Alaska Marine Conservation Council

