



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Partnership between commercial fishermen and Sealaska brings 49,000 pounds of donated salmon to Southeast Alaskan families

Sitka, AK – This month, a regionwide effort to help Southeast Alaskans reliant on subsistence salmon fisheries is culminating in the distribution of 49,000 pounds of wild salmon to families from Yakutat to Hydaburg. The distribution is the result of the cooperation of dozens of individuals, tribes, businesses and communities in Southeast Alaska to help both local residents and commercial fishermen reeling from a difficult summer season.

The coronavirus pandemic's impacts on Alaska's seafood markets and fish prices coupled with lower-than-expected returns for several species of salmon has been devastating for Southeast Alaskans, in particular commercial and subsistence fishing families. Pandemic precautions have forced closures and strict limits on capacity at restaurants, resulting in plummeting fresh seafood demand. According to the Alaska Sustainable Fisheries Trust 2019 SeaBank Annual Report, seven of the top 100 fishing ports by value in the entire country are in Southeast Alaska, so the impacts on fishing families and communities are being felt widely throughout the region. Meanwhile, salmon returns this season were among the lowest recorded in more than 40 years. Pink salmon have not had a worse year since 1976, and the Alaska Department of Fish & Game reports sockeye catches at 70 percent below 2019 – among the lowest ever. Coho is 50 percent behind last year, and king salmon are 14 percent below 2019.

Given Southeast's low salmon returns, Alaska Longline Fishermen's Association (ALFA) through its community supported fishery program, Alaskans Own, identified communities where families were unable to put up fish for the winter. They successfully secured \$250,000 in funding to distribute salmon to Angoon (8,000 round pounds); Hydaburg (8,000 round pounds); Kake (5,000 filleted pounds); Klawock (5,000 filleted pounds) and Sitka (5,000 filleted pounds). The salmon will be processed by Seafood Producers Cooperative and Northline Seafood and delivered to outlying communities by ALFA member fishermen with freezer trollers.

But that was just the beginning of a relief effort that eventually totaled \$376,000. In the course of reaching out to communities, ALFA Executive Director Linda Behnken said she realized the need was substantially greater than the original \$250,000 grant would cover.

Behnken sought additional assistance from Sealaska CEO Anthony Mallott, and the company quickly committed to donating another \$126,000, allowing Sealaska to provide 18,000 pounds of sockeye salmon fillets from Sealaska subsidiary Orca Bay Seafoods. Sealaska's salmon

donation includes 5,000 pounds for Haines and Klukwan; 4,000 pounds for Craig; 4,000 pounds for Hoonah; 1,000 pounds for Kasaan; and 4,000 pounds for Yakutat.

“This initiative illustrated once again the strong commitment of local fishermen to provide food to families in need and the powerful connections between Southeast Alaska’s coastal communities. We were able to draw on the networks and connections of people throughout Southeast to really magnify the impact of this initiative and bring more Alaska salmon to more Alaskans,” said Behnken. “While the coronavirus pandemic has been a time of crisis, it’s also been a catalyst for new partnerships that will make our region stronger and more resilient in the end.”

The original \$250,000 came from the Alaska Community Foundation and Catch Together, a Massachusetts-based nonprofit that helps small-scale fishing communities ensure long-term, sustainable fisheries. Alaska Community Foundation funds, supplemented by a donation from Hames Corporation, supports contributing fishermen with Sea Mart grocery gift cards.

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About ALFA: Founded in 1978, the Alaska Longline Fishermen's Association (ALFA) promotes sustainable fisheries and thriving fishing communities through policy engagement, collaborative research, and innovative programs that improve resource stewardship and the viability of small-scale fisheries. www.alfafish.org

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