



Backgrounder: Summary of key facts about southeast Alaska interception fisheries

Some Alaskan salmon fisheries are recognized models of sustainability. However, other Alaskan salmon fisheries, particularly those in southeast Alaska, present serious sustainability challenges. This backgrounder provides an overview of issues surrounding the fisheries and their problematic desire for eco-labels, such as the Marine Stewardship Council (MSC), to certify or recommend them as sustainable.

Southeast Alaska Chinook troll fisheries

- Over 90% of Chinook harvested in the southeast Alaska troll fishery are not from Alaska. These migrating Chinook are primarily from BC, Washington and Oregon, and include salmon from threatened, endangered and at-risk populations.
- The harvest of Chinook salmon in the southeast Alaska troll fishery removes prey for endangered Southern Resident killer whales.
- In 2022, a US court found the southeast Alaska troll fishery in violation of the US Endangered Species Act (ESA) because it failed to adequately mitigate the impact of this prey removal on the whales. The fishery was also in violation of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA).
- In 2023, a US District Court ordered the National Marine Fisheries Service to remedy the violations of the ESA and NEPA. These violations have not been remedied, and the southeast Alaska troll fishery continues to harm ESA-listed species like Southern Resident killer whales and Chinook salmon.

Southeast Alaska net fisheries

- Southeast Alaska seine and gillnet fisheries catch sockeye, chum, pink, coho, Chinook and steelhead salmon that are migrating to Canadian rivers.
- In 2023, these southeast Alaska fisheries harvested an estimated three million Canadian salmon and steelhead, many originating from river systems that Canadian fishery managers have closed to fishing in order to rebuild populations.

- The majority of interceptions occur in the District 104 fishery along the outer coast of southeast Alaska.
- Because Alaska does not collect data on bycatch, releases, release mortality, or stock composition for Chinook, coho, chum, pink and steelhead, the full extent of impacts on Canadian salmon is unknown.
- Alaska is now the largest commercial harvester of many B.C. salmon populations.

Fisheries certification by Ecolabels

- Southeast Alaska salmon has been certified as sustainable by the Marine Stewardship Council, an important ecolabel for international markets, since 2000. To recover certification costs, MSC receives a royalty for every piece of seafood sold with its label.
- Given the impacts on non-Alaskan salmon, Canadian NGOs (SkeenaWild, Watershed Watch, and Raincoast) have been raising concerns about these fisheries being afforded MSC's blue checkmark of sustainability.
- Alaska's salmon certification under the MSC expires in November 2024. It is currently undergoing recertification by MRAG Americas. Two objections to its recertification were accepted by MSC's Independent Adjudicator on April 25, 2024.
- The certification process allows a fishery to improve its sustainability by imposing conditions and setting deadlines by which they must be met. There are unmet conditions from Alaska's previous MSC certification process.
- Objections to the re-certification were brought by the three Canadian salmon NGOs, as well as the Society for the Protection of Birds, due to the mortality impacts on seabirds in gillnet fisheries.
- Ocean Wise is a British Columbia based ecolabel that provides public consumer advice for seafood buyers, and does not receive a financial benefit for recommending a fishery. Ocean Wise generally recommends MSC certified fisheries, but there are exceptions.
- The objections to MSC certification of southeast Alaska salmon fisheries, combined with the US NGO lawsuit against the National Marine Fisheries Service over the impact of the Chinook troll fishery on Southern Resident killer whales and US listed threatened and endangered Chinook salmon, triggered Ocean Wise to examine its recommendation of support for these fisheries.
- Last week, Ocean Wise made the decision to remove its recommendation to list salmon from southeast Alaska as sustainable. This removal will be in place until the sustainability of these fisheries is no longer in question.