

# Fishing Jobs Rebound

Most regions, species see growth in 2017 after a dismal 2016

By **JOSH WARREN**

**A**fter a steep drop in 2016, seafood harvesting employment rebounded in 2017, growing 8.3 percent and hitting a record of 8,509 average monthly jobs.

The employment growth was widespread, covering most species and regions, which was a departure from previous years when certain fisheries' or regions' growth tended to offset losses elsewhere.

The 8.3 percent growth for seafood harvesting in 2017 was the largest in percent terms among Alaska industries. Health care, which has been marked by strong job growth for decades and has been one of the few industries to grow throughout the state recession, grew by just 2.3 percent. (For more on how we generate fish harvesting employment estimates, which differ from other industries' data but are useful for general comparison, see the sidebar on page 7.)

## Biggest gains were in summer, which easily offset early losses

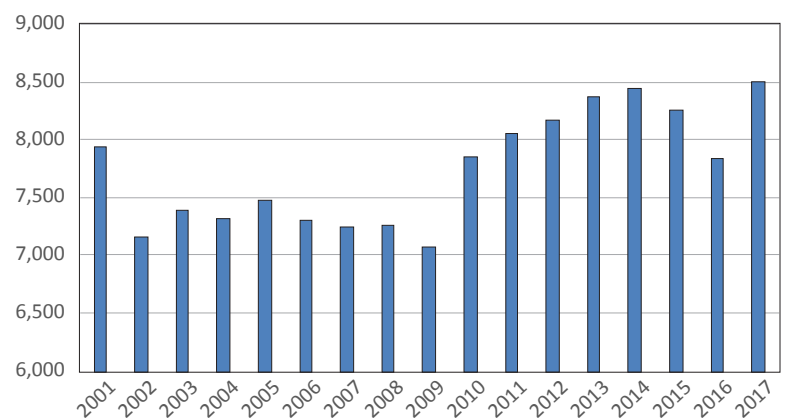
Summer and fall brought impressive growth in harvesting jobs after a weak start to the year. Most of the year's growth came during the summer. July has always been the seafood harvesting peak, and in 2017 it went up by another 634 jobs, bringing the July total to 24,459. (See Exhibit 2.)

The biggest jumps came on the edges of the summer, however. June, September, and October each gained more than 1,000 jobs from 2016's levels. June's employment grew the most, up 1,877 jobs from June 2016.

# 1

## A Big Jump in 2017

ALASKA FISH HARVESTING JOBS, 2001 TO 2017



Sources: Commercial Fisheries Entry Commission; National Marine Fisheries Service; and Alaska Department of Labor and Workforce Development, Research and Analysis Section

The year's few losses came in the early months. January, February, and March levels were all down from the year before. Those months are more important for crab fisheries than other species, which is why crab harvesting was one of the few fisheries that lost jobs in 2017.

Even with the poor harvests and lower job counts early in the year, however, the strong growth later in 2017 was more than enough to offset losses and break job records.

## Salmon jobs grew overall, but varied considerably by region

Some regions lost salmon harvesting jobs in 2017, and levels fluctuated considerably by region, but the fishery's employment still grew overall.

The Yukon Delta was hardest hit, with every month's job levels down from 2016 and a loss of 12.7 percent

overall. Salmon harvesting jobs alone fell 11.6 percent.

Southeast also sustained some job loss in salmon harvesting, with some months down more than 200 jobs from 2016, but strong growth in April and September partially offset those losses.

Alaska's most dramatic seafood harvesting job growth still came from salmon fishing, despite those regional declines. Bristol Bay's job counts grew most. They were up more than 900 in June as the fishery started. Even some of the smaller salmon fisheries, such as those in Kodiak and the Northern Region, gained jobs.

## Groundfish jobs up because of Aleutians

Groundfish is a grouping of species (primarily walleye pollock and Pacific cod) that's reported mainly out of ports in the Aleutians, so its employment is tied to that region.

Groundfish harvesting employment in the Aleutians was up by an average of 264 per month in 2017, with growth during all months. At least some of that growth was due to new entrants to the fisheries, as reflected by new permit numbers.

All other regions' groundfish harvesting employment

declined, however, and the Northern Region's disappeared. Kodiak's losses were steepest, at 81 lost jobs each month on average.

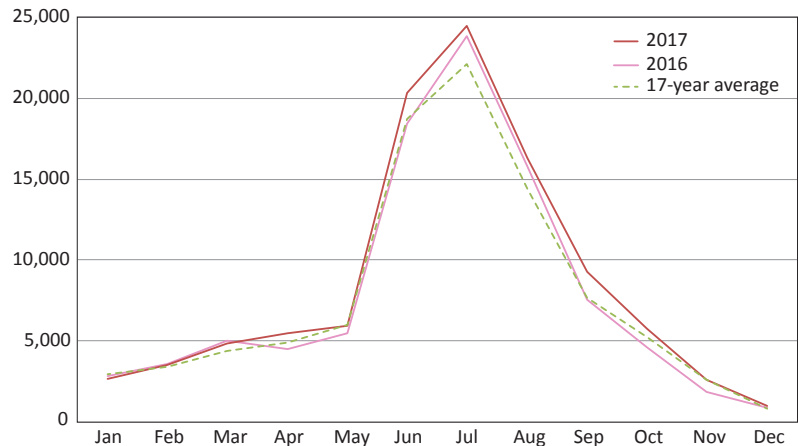
Similar to salmon harvesting, groundfish employment grew overall because the regional groundfish losses were much smaller than the growth in other areas.

## Sablefish employment grew everywhere but Bristol Bay

While technically a type of groundfish, we report sablefish as a separate category. Employment harvesting sa-

# 2 Jobs Consistently Spike In the Summer

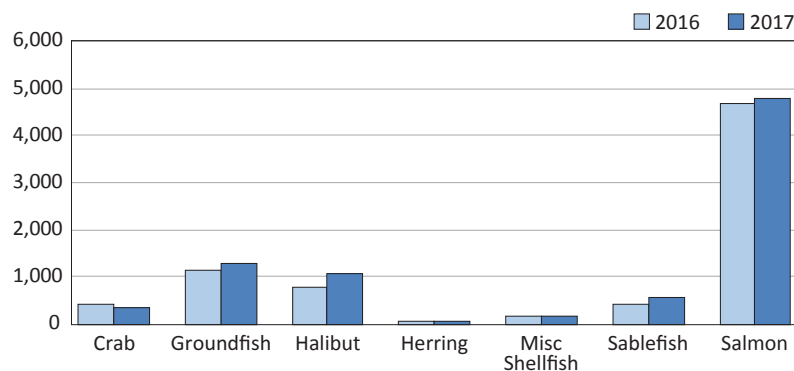
## SEAFOOD HARVESTING JOBS BY MONTH, 2016 AND 2017



Sources: Commercial Fisheries Entry Commission; National Marine Fisheries Service; and Alaska Department of Labor and Workforce Development, Research and Analysis Section

# 3 Harvesters Up For Most Species in 2017

## ALASKA SEAFOOD HARVESTING, 2016 AND 2017



Sources: Commercial Fisheries Entry Commission; National Marine Fisheries Service; and Alaska Department of Labor and Workforce Development, Research and Analysis Section

blefish, also known as black cod, is spread wider across regions than other groundfish, with the largest regional workforce in Southeast. Southeast gained 88 sablefish harvesting jobs per month on average in 2017.

Bristol Bay lost its sablefish employment, but had just one job to begin with. Other than Bristol Bay, all regions' sablefish harvesting grew,<sup>1</sup> resulting in total growth of 166 monthly jobs from 2016.

## Modest growth in smaller fisheries

A number of smaller fisheries gained a modest number of jobs in 2017. Herring harvesting employment was up by five jobs per month, the result of a sharp increase in Bristol Bay herring harvesting (up seven jobs, or 118 percent) making up for minor losses elsewhere in the state. Miscellaneous shellfish harvesting employment was up by 17 per month, mainly in Southeast.

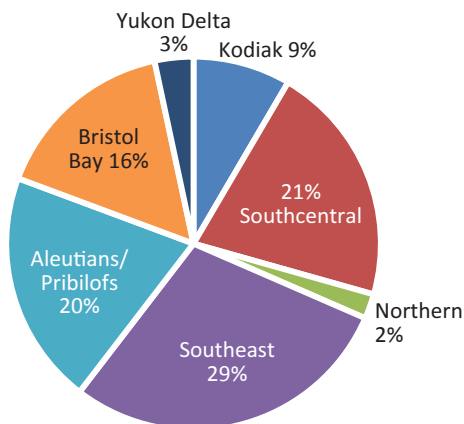
## Crab fisheries had the only employment loss by species

By species, only crab fisheries lost jobs overall. Most crab is harvested in Southeast and in the Aleutians, and those regions sustained the most loss. The Aleutians lost 56 jobs and Southeast lost 47. Statewide, crab harvesting monthly employment was down by 96 from the same months in 2016.

<sup>1</sup>Exceptions were the Northern Region and Yukon Delta, which have no sablefish harvesting.

## 5 Fishing Jobs by Region

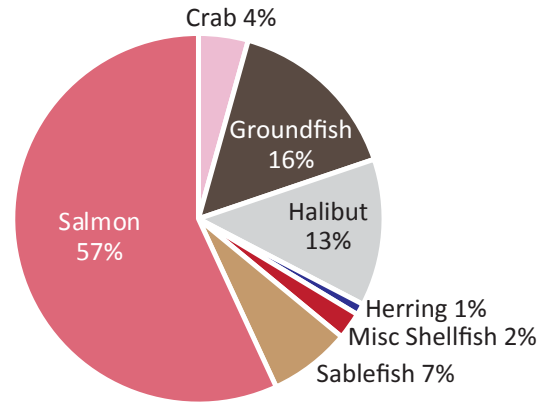
### SOUTHEAST HAS LARGEST SHARE, 2017



Sources: Commercial Fisheries Entry Commission; National Marine Fisheries Service; and Alaska Department of Labor and Workforce Development, Research and Analysis Section

## 4 Most Jobs Are in Salmon

### EMPLOYMENT BY SPECIES, 2017



Sources: Commercial Fisheries Entry Commission; National Marine Fisheries Service; and Alaska Department of Labor and Workforce Development, Research and Analysis Section

## The employment picture by region

### Aleutians

The Aleutians' total harvesting employment jumped by nearly 20 percent, or 286 monthly jobs, mostly through growth in groundfish harvesting but also via small gains in halibut, sablefish, and salmon harvesting.

Groundfish represents more than half the area's harvesting employment. While that growth easily made up for crab harvesting losses, the drop in crab harvesting put a small damper on total gains. Regional crab harvesting employment fell by over 22 percent.

### Bristol Bay

Bristol Bay's harvesting employment also grew overall (6.2 percent, or 79 jobs), with growth in salmon, small growth for herring, and minor losses for sablefish and groundfish. Over 99 percent of harvesting jobs in the area are for salmon.

Most of the increase came in June, which was up by 935 jobs from June 2016. Overall, this seasonal increase produced an average gain of 73 monthly jobs for Bristol Bay.

### Northern Region

The Northern Region made small job gains in almost all of its fisheries, for an overall gain of 33 jobs (21.8 percent). The only exception was groundfish, with zero recorded landings, although the region had just two landings the year before.

The rest of the region's growth was large in percent terms, though small numerically compared to other regions. Northern Region gained eight jobs in crab harvesting, six in halibut, and 23 in salmon.

### ***Southcentral Region***

Southcentral Region continued its trend of major overall gains despite the losses in groundfish harvesting jobs. The region added 116 jobs, for 7.0 percent growth.

The main fishery is salmon, where harvesting employment grew by 14, but most of Southcentral's gains came from smaller fisheries. Halibut and sablefish harvesting were up by 54 and 64 monthly jobs, respectively.

### ***Southeast Region***

Southeast's harvesting employment was up 7.7 percent in 2017 (176 jobs), with halibut, shellfish, and sablefish harvesting all recording gains.

Halibut harvesting jobs grew the most, by 150. The other fisheries — crab, salmon, groundfish, and herring — all had lower employment compared to 2016. The increases in halibut and sablefish (88 average monthly jobs) were much larger than those losses, however.

### ***Kodiak and Yukon-Delta***

Kodiak and the Yukon Delta both lost seafood harvesting jobs in 2017.

While some Kodiak fisheries grew, including halibut and salmon, the groundfish job losses were bigger. Kodiak lost about eight jobs overall (-1.2 percent).

The picture was different in Yukon Delta, where the only two fisheries lost jobs. Groundfish was down by an average of six jobs per month and salmon decreased by 35, an overall loss of 12.7 percent.

## **2018's picture looks mixed so far**

The picture emerging for 2018 is mixed after a strong 2017. For example, the Gulf of Alaska has had a rough salmon year while Bristol Bay harvests have been stellar.

So far in 2018, the fisheries that employ the most people have had the biggest harvests. Late or closed fisheries tend to affect jobs more than harvests do, as a larger physical haul doesn't necessarily mean more boats are on the water or fishing longer.

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## **How we estimate fishing jobs**

Unlike the employment numbers state and federal statistical agencies publish each month for wage and salary jobs, fish harvesting employment can't be estimated simply by asking employers how many people were on their payroll that month. Instead, we infer employment from landings — the initial sale of the catch — which signals fishing activity and jobs for permit holders and crew.

Because of the way the fisheries are managed — by permits that are generally associated with a specific type of gear, including boat size — a landing under a certain permit requires about the same number of people, which is called the crew factor.

For example, a permit to fish for salmon in Bristol Bay with a drift gillnet requires about two people, according to a survey of permit holders. So when salmon is landed under that permit, we assume the permit generated two jobs that month. We count each permit only once per month regardless of the number of times it returns to port.

Most permits designate where specific species can be harvested, and we assign jobs to the harvest location rather than the residence of the permit holder. This approach best approximates payroll employment, which is categorized by place of work rather than worker residence. Employment generated under permits that allow fishing anywhere in the state receive a special harvest area code and are estimated differently.

We produce the job counts by month because, as with location, that comes closest to wage and salary employment data. And because seafood harvesting employment is much higher in summer than winter, like tourism and construction jobs, averaging employment across all 12 months allows for more meaningful comparisons of job counts in different industries.

**For detailed seafood harvesting data, visit:  
<http://live.laborstats.alaska.gov/seafood/>**