

# Fishing Jobs Decline 4.9 Percent in 2018

Decreases were mostly in salmon harvesting

By JOSHUA WARREN

Alaska's seafood harvesting employment dropped 4.9 percent in 2018, erasing most of the prior year's gains. While some fisheries added jobs, they weren't enough to offset the losses in salmon fishing, which represents the largest share of the state's harvesting employment. (See exhibits 1 and 2.)

The total decline was about 407 average annual jobs, bringing Alaska's harvesting employment down to 7,924. (See the sidebar on page 6 for more on how we create these estimates.) The loss would have been greater had it not been for increased fishing in September and November.

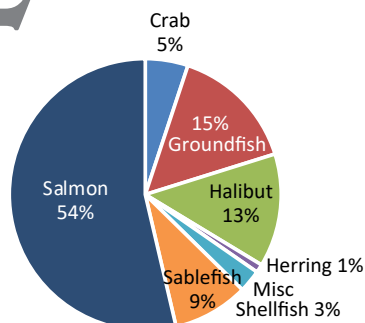
Some months' job levels were the lowest since 2001, when data collection began. While the critical summer months weren't the worst on record, July and August hit decade lows. (See Exhibit 3.)

## Salmon jobs down the most

Salmon harvesting is the most worker-intensive fishery, with more harvesters needed to land the fish per pound, so it represents more than half the state's harvesting jobs.

## 2 Most Jobs Are in Salmon

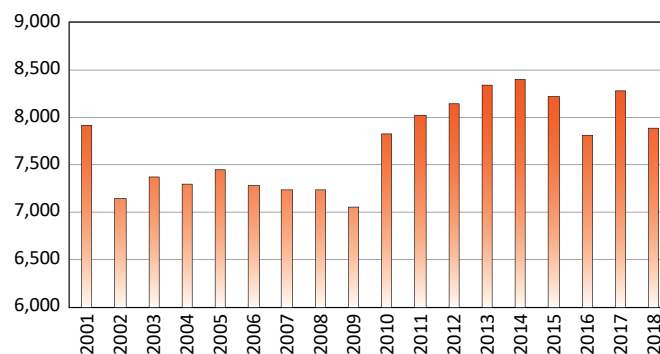
HARVESTING JOBS BY SPECIES, 2018



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

## 1 Annual Seafood Harvesting Jobs

ALASKA, 2001 TO 2018



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

Salmon fisheries lost 7.2 percent of their employment in 2018 (a loss of 328 from the year before), with fewer jobs in every month and the heaviest losses in the summer. Total employment dropped to 4,249 (see Exhibit 4).

Groundfish harvesting employment, which had spiked the year before, dropped back to its previous level of about 1,195. While the 9.1 percent drop (-120 jobs) seems like a large loss, 2018's total employment remained high relative to past years.

Halibut harvesting's pattern was similar, with employment growing in 2017 and decreasing in 2018, although this fishery lost less of its prior-year increase. After gaining 298 jobs in 2017, the halibut fishery lost 38 in 2018, settling at 1,068. Halibut harvesting employment also remains above its recent typical levels, which hadn't topped 1,000 in nearly a decade.

Herring was the other fishery to lose jobs in 2018, and while its employment dropped 7.1 percent, the fishery is so small at 79 annual jobs that it's prone to large percent swings. The loss was just six jobs, making the fishery largely stable. Most of the decrease came in the off

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## Seafood Harvesting Employment By Month

PLUS MONTHLY AND ANNUAL AVERAGES, ALASKA, 2001 TO 2018

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Annual Average
2001	2,972	4,286	4,505	4,681	7,053	18,884	21,571	13,921	8,095	6,194	2,617	726	7,959
2002	3,590	4,047	4,334	4,913	6,715	16,292	18,224	11,975	6,983	5,794	2,632	524	7,168
2003	3,284	3,609	4,378	5,797	6,233	17,610	19,670	11,922	7,191	5,969	2,660	526	7,404
2004	3,594	3,492	4,110	5,050	6,476	17,139	19,634	12,308	7,371	6,023	2,259	509	7,330
2005	3,561	3,150	4,227	5,115	6,283	18,169	20,566	12,889	7,192	4,958	2,768	953	7,486
2006	2,700	3,038	4,573	4,293	5,709	17,748	20,066	13,700	7,719	5,003	2,507	720	7,314
2007	2,584	2,966	3,930	4,348	5,949	17,528	20,137	13,567	7,500	4,738	3,080	791	7,260
2008	2,738	3,138	4,511	4,445	5,572	17,022	20,447	13,634	8,226	4,202	2,708	602	7,270
2009	2,527	2,817	3,126	4,874	5,693	17,609	20,076	13,687	7,148	4,593	2,388	507	7,087
2010	2,668	3,060	4,005	5,255	5,685	18,878	23,128	15,287	7,759	4,992	2,887	850	7,871
2011	2,898	3,214	4,010	4,723	5,610	20,101	23,813	15,574	7,916	5,721	2,303	849	8,061
2012	2,923	3,409	4,609	5,402	6,163	19,237	24,761	16,191	6,988	5,453	2,274	853	8,189
2013	2,818	3,001	4,053	5,285	5,766	21,809	25,859	15,835	7,514	5,118	2,713	895	8,389
2014	2,628	3,247	4,970	5,174	5,866	20,984	24,916	16,614	7,990	5,010	2,808	1,210	8,451
2015	2,599	3,386	4,793	4,261	5,738	20,779	24,805	16,082	7,762	4,940	2,682	1,451	8,273
2016	2,798	3,562	4,991	4,486	5,500	18,458	23,825	15,790	7,533	4,604	1,871	870	7,857
2017	2,595	3,472	4,845	5,362	5,859	20,145	23,917	15,789	8,907	5,658	2,525	894	8,331
2018	2,437	2,929	3,820	4,596	5,369	19,213	23,152	15,138	9,601	5,137	2,899	797	7,924
Average for Month	2,884	3,323	4,322	4,892	5,958	18,756	22,143	14,439	7,744	5,228	2,588	807	7,757

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

months. The peak employment month, April, grew 12.3 percent, from 514 to 577 jobs.

### Small job gains in several species

Three fisheries added jobs in 2018. Annual crab harvesting employment grew 5.0 percent (19 jobs), to 403. Most of the increase came in August, when jobs jumped to 370 from just 68 the year before.

Employment harvesting sablefish, or black cod, also grew — unlike for most groundfish species. April and September were particularly strong. The fishery gained 54 jobs overall, or 8.2 percent, reaching 713 annualized jobs.

Other shellfish fisheries had a banner year. Jobs harvesting miscellaneous shellfish increased 7.0 percent (14 jobs), pushing yearly employment up to 213.

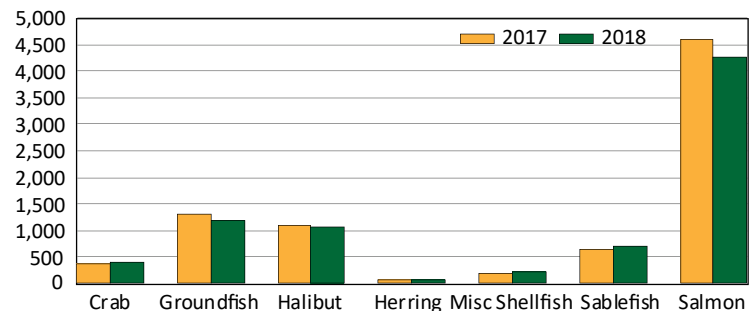
### Aleutians and Pribilofs hit hardest

Among regions, the Aleutians and Pribilof Islands took the biggest hit, with harvesting employment dropping to levels not seen since 2007 and declines in every month.

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## Minor Declines For Most Species

JOBS BY TYPE OF HARVEST, 2017 AND 2018



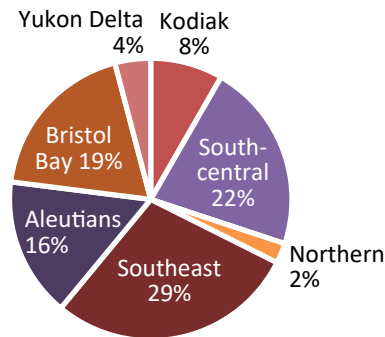
Sources: Commercial Fisheries Entry Commission; National Marine Fisheries Service; and Alaska Department of Labor and Workforce Development, Research and Analysis Section

The region's annualized loss was a staggering 30.9 percent, dropping total yearly employment to 1,199 due to less fishing. The regions' fisheries are dominated by groundfish, which showed dramatic employment declines statewide.

Kodiak's numbers also hit some of their lowest levels since data collection began in 2001, with an employment decline of 14.5 percent to 623 annualized jobs. Just two months showed gains, and others hit their lowest-ever levels. The record low in July was especially consequential, as it's in the middle of peak harvesting. While June and August were typical, they didn't offset the weak July.

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## Jobs By Region\* SEAFOOD HARVESTING, 2018



\*Excludes unknown/offshore

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

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

Southcentral also lost jobs, but this was minor compared to the Aleutians and Kodiak. Southcentral's employment level declined 9.2 percent, hitting its lowest point since 2014 (1,632 jobs). Amid that overall downward pattern, July hit a record high.

The Northern Region's year was similar, with overall losses but a record-high July. Despite the July gains, the region's total employment declined by 13 average jobs (6.8 percent), to 174.

Southeast Region's employment decreased slightly early in the year, then jumped during fall and winter. While the high months in the second half of 2018 muted the loss, the region still lost 78 annual jobs, or 3.5 percent, bringing the total down to 2,145.

The Yukon Delta's employment grew all year in 2018 after three years of losses. While the region didn't reach historical highs, it regained some lost ground. Yukon Delta added 23 jobs over the year, or 8.1 percent, reaching 307.

Bristol Bay was the major exception in 2018, with employment approaching a decade high of 1,148. Bristol Bay fishes mostly in June, July, and August, and total employment fluctuates based on how far into August fishing goes, with even-year runs typically later than odd years. In addition to the strong August, employment grew in June, but declined in July.

Continued on page 15

## Why and how we estimate seafood harvesting jobs

Alaska's world-class fisheries are a critical part of the state's economy. Estimated gross earnings in 2018 totaled more than \$1.8 billion, of which nearly \$600 million went to permit holders who were Alaska residents.

But unlike the wage and salary job numbers we and our federal partner the Bureau of Labor Statistics publish each month, the employment generated by fish harvesting is not readily available. Fishermen are considered self-employed, and permit holders are not required to report the number of people they employ in the same way as employers who are under state unemployment insurance laws.

To estimate fisheries employment that's roughly comparable to wage and salary data, we infer jobs in a given month from landings. A landing, or the initial sale of the catch, signals recent fishing activity.

Because fishing permits are associated with a specific type of gear, including boat size, we know about how many people a landing requires under various types of permits. The number of people associated with a certain permit is called the crew factor.

For example, a permit to fish for king crab in Bristol Bay with pot gear on a vessel more than 60 feet long requires about six people, according to a survey of those permit holders. So when crab is landed under that permit, we assume the permit generated six jobs that month. We count each permit only once per month regardless of the number of landings, which is similar to the way people in wage and salary jobs work different numbers of hours.

Most permits designate where specific species can be harvested, so we assign jobs to the harvest location rather than the residence of the permit holder. This approach best approximates wage and salary employment, which is categorized by place of work rather than worker residence. Jobs 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, as with tourism and construction, averaging employment across all 12 months allows for more meaningful comparisons among job counts in different industries.

It's important to keep in mind that the numbers in this article cover only jobs and are not relevant in assessing other fisheries-related data such as harvest values and the income and tax revenue they make possible.

## FISHING EMPLOYMENT

Continued from page 6

### What to expect for 2019 numbers

Fish harvesting employment will likely benefit from a much larger salmon catch in 2019, and in Bristol Bay in particular. The timing of the catch and whether more permits were fished will influence how much of the increased harvest translates into higher job numbers. (See

the sidebar on page 6 for details on how we estimate fishing jobs.)

Downward pressure on jobs will likely come from the ongoing decline of Pacific cod stocks and corresponding reduced catches. As noted earlier, 2018 job numbers were down dramatically in groundfish fisheries, especially in the Aleutians. If stocks continue to fall, more job losses are likely in 2019.

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## EMPLOYER RESOURCES

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