Could Shrimp Fishery Return?

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Erik Wander/KMXT

Once upon a time, there was a thriving shrimp fishery in Kodiak, but after a long decline, it disappeared altogether in the mid-1980s. And while the potential for the re-emergence of the fishery someday exists, predicting it is challenging. Shrimp were once so important in Kodiak that the city's official seal includes one, along with a king crab and a brown bear.

Alaska Department of Fish and Game's Shellfish Area Management Biologist Nick Sagalkin said that most of what he knows about the shrimp fishery in Kodiak comes from old ADF&G reports. He said the fishery began in the late 1950s and grew to substantial proportions.

-- (Sagalkin 1 24 sec. "It was quite large at one ... it slowly declined after that.")

Al Burch fished shrimp with his brother Oral beginning in 1959 in Seward. The two came to Kodiak to fish crab after the 1964 earthquake severely disrupted the shrimp fishery in Seward. Once in Kodiak, they soon began fishing shrimp again. Burch recalled the early days, when the shrimp fishery was at its peak.

-- (Burch 1 50 sec. "Shrimp was just really ... that amount of shrimp.")

Sagalkin said the gradual decline continued through the early 1980s, and that by the middle of the decade, the fishery was essentially finished. He said there are two thoughts about exactly why shrimp disappeared, and that they bear striking similarity to the situation with red king crab.

-- (Sagalkin 2 48 sec. "Our exploitation rates ... which is actually happening.")

Burch remembers the decline of the shrimp fishery well. But he said that with it came other opportunity.

-- (Burch 2 46 sec. "Seventy-seven, we had ... flatfish first and then pollock.")

Asked about the likelihood of a shrimp fishery re-emerging in Kodiak, Sagalkin said it's difficult to forecast but that anything's possible, given certain environmental conditions.

-- (Sagalkin 3 42 sec. "If and when the Gulf ... expand relatively quickly.")

Were that to happen, Sagalkin believes there would most likely be interest among local fishermen in participating in the fishery once again. He said he's recently noticed renewed interest in shrimp in Alaska, and specifically in Kodiak, where participants in other fisheries have recognized the potential of and expressed interest in pot fishing and trawling for shrimp. Burch said there are indications that shrimp are starting to return, but he said the fishery would be different now than in the old days.

-- (Burch 3 24 sec. "I think that if I had ... quit buying shrimp this year.")

Sagalkin said shrimp fisheries are few and far between in Alaska these days, with one in Southeast, which is mainly a pot fishery, and a small, limited trawl fishery in Prince William Sound.

I'm Erik Wander.

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