Resident Recalls Early Days Of Scallop Fishing

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Mary Donaldson/KMXT

Salmon, crab and halibut aren’t the only seafood delicacies pulled from Kodiak waters. There is also the elusive and tasty weathervane scallop. Mary Donaldson spoke with a Kodiak resident who participated in the fishery when it first began in Alaska and has this report.

Scallop fishing in Alaska began in 1967 in Kodiak Island waters and resident Al Burch was a part of it from the very beginning. He says he and a friend, Bob Moody, helped develop the fishery when Moody lost crab pots off of his fishing vessel, the Venus. Since the waters were shallow, he dove into the water to retrieve the pots, and that’s when he discovered the abundance of scallops on the ocean floor, says Burch.

(Burch 1 :30s “…great big scallops.”)

After Moody’s discovery, Burch later made a dredge that would fit his vessel, the Endeavor, an 84 foot, wooden boat he brought up from California.
He says interest grew around town and that talks of starting up scallop fisheries began. In the late 60’s, the state brought in a team to evaluate the numbers of scallop present in Alaska’s waters.

(Burch 3 :27s “…beds of scallops.”)

He says processors like Washington Fish and Oyster, which is now Ocean Beauty, ran King Crab, Incorporated, and they began marketing and selling the 20 to 30 thousand scallops from Kodiak waters. Today, that is one third of the total guideline harvest levels for the Kodiak area, which is only one of several scallop fisheries statewide.

Burch says that it’s been a profitable business over the years, though the fleet size has changed.

(Burch 2 :25s “for those that are in it.”)

The fisheries have gone through some highs and lows since its heyday. Today, the state manages the fishery with regulations requiring 100% observer coverage, bans on automatic shucking

machines on vessels, limits the number of dredges and by catch allowed on a vessel as well as a limit to crewmembers allowed on boat. The Alaska Department of Fish and Game says annual catches in state average 800,000 pounds of shucked weight, with an average annual value of approximately $1 million dollars. This year’s fishery began July 1st, and will run through February 15th in the Kodiak area. Today’s scallop fishery is limited entry, with about 10 boats registered in state with a scallop limited license permit.

I’m Mary Donaldson.

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