

A Hot Pink Summer Leaves Experts Awestruck

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Jay Barrett/KMXT

The Alaska Department of Fish and Game made it official late last week — this summer's salmon harvest was the best ever, thanks to a record pink salmon run. The season was also the second most valuable harvest ever.

The total number of salmon harvested was 272-million, powered by 219-million pinks. With \$691.1-million in ex vessel value, the cash haul was second only to 1988's \$724-million.

"I don't know if people were surprised as much as they were awestruck," said Geron Bruce, the assistant director of Fish and Game's Commercial Fisheries Division in Juneau.

"This one was very exceptional and people just couldn't believe it kept going and kept going and that it was so wide spread; the whole gulf."

Give the short, two-year lifespan of pink salmon, this year's run pretty much hit the lottery of good conditions.

"Clearly the conditions were very good throughout all stages of their lives to produce something like this, so without a doubt, ocean survivals were excellent and there was food for them out there. Although the fish are small, particularly in Southeast and Prince William Sound. Even though there was food, they didn't grow as big as they can."

Bruce says the record pink run in a year when other stocks had about average or below runs, illustrates the differences in the different salmon species.

"They have little bit different niches in the eco-system, and so they don't really compete head-to-head that much."

He also pointed out that the values figure Fish and Game attached to this season are preliminary, and that they will usually rise as bonuses are determined by the processors.

"Those numbers are determined mostly by the staff, the management staff in different areas. They have different sources; some is what the processors' telling them, some is what information is on the fish tickets, some is what the fishermen are telling them they're getting paid. So it's basically the information that our area managers and their assistants are getting first-hand from the industry."

KMXT had a good long talk with Bruce about this past salmon season, and we'll have more on this week's Alaska Fisheries Report.