

TOP TEN FACTS ABOUT TRAWLING

What Alaska's commercial trawl fisheries mean for fish, habitat, and communities

THE TAKE HOME

Trawling is contributing to declines of salmon, crab, marine mammals, and Alaska Native community well-being, and to the reduction of the resilience and biodiversity of the North Pacific marine ecosystem.

01 SIZING UP TRAWL NETS

1,475 FT

maximum footrope length



“Pelagic” pollock trawl fisheries cover a lot of ground in Alaska. Vessels are equipped with massive trawl nets, with footropes that are 2-inch thick weighted chains on the bottom front of the gear and can be **up to 1,475 feet long** (5 football fields). Pelagic trawl nets can have an opening as large as **180 feet deep** and **590 feet wide**, easily swallowing four Boeing 747 jets, stacked two across and two high. **Bottom trawl gear** in Alaska is also massive. This gear that drags along the ocean floor uses heavy steel trawl doors spanning **over 650' wide**. The rigging between the net and the doors, which disturbs and directs fish into the path of the trawl, can extend **up to 1,312 feet long**. ([NPFMC 2025](#); [NPFMC 2012](#))

02 DAMAGE TO THE SEAFLOOR

40%

of all seafloor contact

Despite being called “pelagic” or “midwater,” the pollock trawl fleet accounts for **roughly 40% of all seafloor contact** in the Eastern Bering Sea.

([Zaleski et al. 2022](#))



03 SCALE MATTERS

97%

of seafloor contact and habitat disturbance



Scale matters when you talk about trawling in Alaska. Bottom and pelagic trawl fisheries are responsible for **97% of all seafloor contact** and habitat disturbance in Alaska, with a combined footprint of 265,666 square miles — roughly the size of Texas. ([Zaleski et al. 2022](#))

04 LEADING CAUSE OF BYCATCH

99.7%

of Chinook & chum salmon bycatch



Trawl fleets are responsible for the vast majority of bycatch of prohibited species in the Bering Sea. In 2024 the trawl fishery was responsible for **all herring bycatch, 99.7% of Chinook salmon bycatch, 99.7% of chum bycatch, 90% of halibut bycatch, 85% of tanner crab bycatch, and 40% of red king crab bycatch** in the Bering Sea.

([2025 NOAA Econ SAFE](#))

05 WASTEFUL KILLING

396 MILLION LBS

of groundfish bycatch discarded, 2020–2024

From 2020–2024, trawlers in Alaska discarded **396 million pounds** (179,600 metric tons) of groundfish bycatch — roughly equivalent to **400 fully loaded Boeing 747-8 aircraft**, or **1.05 billion six-ounce servings** of seafood.

([2025 NOAA Econ SAFE](#))



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06 SALMON LOST TO BYCATCH

132,600

Chinook salmon



615,100

chum salmon

Genetic studies conducted by NOAA Fisheries' Alaska Fisheries Science Center document that since 2011, Bering Sea pollock trawlers have killed over **132,600 Chinook salmon** and **615,100 chum salmon** from the Yukon, Kuskokwim, and other Western Alaska rivers as bycatch — wasting precious fish that will never get the opportunity to feed Alaska Native families and restore abundance to river systems. Had these salmon been caught by subsistence fishers instead of killed at sea, they could have provided **over 18.4 million six-ounce servings** of fish to families.

07 UNSUSTAINABLE BIOMASS REMOVALS

70 BILLION LBS

of pollock removed since 2000



Pollock trawling has been fundamentally reshaping the Bering Sea ecosystem by modifying a specific part of the food web. Since 2000, **over 70 billion pounds** of pollock (equating to about **32 million metric tons**, or **71,000 fully loaded Boeing 747-8 aircraft**) have been removed from the Bering Sea, directly impacting the food resources and reproductive success of top predators like Northern fur seals on the Pribilof Islands.

(NOAA 2026; Short et al. 2021)

08 ECONOMIC VACUUM FOR ALASKA

71%

of labor income

62%

of jobs

~2/3

of total economic output

Trawl money does not fairly support Alaska's rural and coastal fishing communities, despite the Community Development Quota program. **71%** of labor income, **62%** of jobs, and roughly **two-thirds** of total economic output produced by the pollock fishery **leaves Alaska**. (AMCC & OC 2026)



09 INEQUITY AND SELF-MANAGEMENT

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Tribal seats on the North Pacific Fishery Management Council

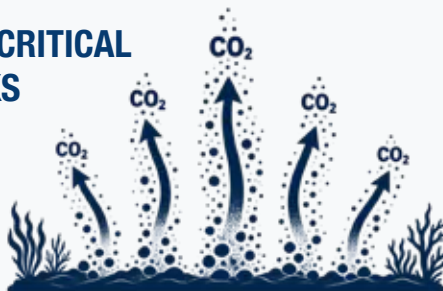


Major decisions, management and oversight of trawling and bycatch is primarily led by the trawl industry itself. Of the 11 voting seats on the North Pacific Fishery Management Council, 4 are held by state and federal agency representatives who prioritize industrial trawling over Alaska fishing and subsistence communities; 3 seats are held by employees of organizations reliant on trawling; and **0 seats are held by representatives of Tribal governments who are most directly impacted**. Since 2010 and the development of the Incentive Plan Agreement (IPA) program, salmon bycatch management has increasingly been codified as the **responsibility of the pollock trawl fleet to self-manage** (50 CFR 679.21(f)(12)).

10 UNLEASHING CRITICAL CARBON SINKS

370 MILLION

metric tons of CO₂ / year globally



Marine seafloor sediments provide long-term carbon storage. **Bottom trawling stirs up sediment and resuspends carbon in the seafloor**, over half of which may eventually get released back into the atmosphere within about a decade, compounding climate change effects. It's estimated that up to **370 million metric tons** of carbon dioxide are released globally every year because of bottom trawling.

(Atwood et al. 2024)