

National Geographic sides with monster

National Geographic Channel's show "Monster Hauls" featured Atlantic "salmon." That is right! The Atlantic salmon is a monster! The fish belongs in the Atlantic not the Pacific Coast, where pen raising is spreading disease.

Escapement of the Atlantics from the pens probably means they will invade local streams and displace natural runs of Pacific salmon. Also the residual feed mounding under the pens smothers the sea life. Wild fish is used to produce feed for the Atlantic salmon, causing even more pressure on wild runs.

Why does National Geographic Channel want to play politics by extolling these invasive species? Why not support stewardship of the local, wild runs of disease-free Pacific salmon that has supported all of the coastal communities for hundreds or thousands of years?

There is nothing wrong with British Columbia wild salmon. Please, give wild

salmon the same exposure.

Southeast Alaska is expecting a 41 million pink salmon return for 2009 and double that for 2010. If Southeast is expecting a huge return, so then is British Columbia. Unless, of course, the sea lice from the Atlantic pens has decimated the natural runs of pinks.

Please support the men and women of the Pacific Northwest who raise their families by fishing for abundant wild Pacific salmon, not corporate fish farmers.

Can National Geographic try educating their audience instead of playing one side against another? We are one world, not us and them.

RANDY KATZENMEYER
Haines, Alaska

Virgin Islands association continues battle with NMFS

We are really engaged in quite a battle with NMFS down here in the U.S. Virgin Islands. They are simply determined to shut down fishing here and, in our opinion, are going outside of the processes included in the Magnuson Act Reauthorization.

We have suggested approaches to setting annual catch limits, which they have insulted and refused to consider. Their current track is that the Virgin Islands data, which they have funded on an annual basis (and therefore approved

annually) cannot be used in setting ACLs.

In addition, NMFS personnel on the Scientific and Statistical Committee have refused to set overfishing limits and allowable biological catch. The Southeast Regional Office has used this as justification to dictate values. Since they have "determined" they can't use Virgin Islands data, they feel they can push the ACLs back as much as they want.

We have had feedback that, during a four-hour conference call this week, a high-ranking NMFS official from D.C. said that this is not about resource management; it's about politics!

Administrator Lubchenco said, "There

is the appearance among fishermen that the federal government is being heavy handed... The current level of mistrust between the industry and NMFS is now at an all-time high. We believe that it is important that your office investigate and give this matter the immediate attention it deserves."

This is certainly the case down here.

We have spent the last five years trying to work within the system, carrying out studies, providing information. They have forced us into the position that they can make any rules that they want because, unless they change their approach, we're not going to follow them. They can't hire enough enforcement to cover our fishery.

DAVID A. OLSEN
Chief Scientist

St. Thomas Fishermen's Association
St. Thomas, U.S. Virgin Islands

Is ICCAT down for count on bluefin tuna stocks?

I have read, with interest and agreement, your editorial entitled "Toward truth in tuna" that appeared in the May issue of *National Fisherman* (Editor's Log, p. 3). For too long our stocks of bluefin tuna have been ravished as the result of foreign nations which have refused to accept and abide by accurate scientific information.

During my two terms as a member of the Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council, I was designated an adviser to International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas, and during each of the meetings of that organization we were confronted with statistics presented, particularly by Japan, which were not only obviously wrong

but bordering on the outrageous. In face of significant declines in bluefin tuna stock, the Japanese so-called statistics attempted to convince ICCAT members that the stocks in fact were increasing and that quotas should likewise be increased.

I hope the newly formed International Seafood Sustainability Foundation will be able to convince other ICCAT members to view accurate scientific information honestly and realistically. Certainly, ISSF deserves the support of every American interested in the fishery, whether a member of the consuming public or a recreational or commercial fisherman.

WILLIAM M. FEINBERG
Bayonne, N.J.

'Empty Pots': an ode to fisherman and father

The clock blares its loud and piercing tune. It's just shy of three o'clock in the morning. My father is beginning to arise from his all too short slumber, so he may commit to another day of backbreaking labor. After he prepares himself, he exits the house and becomes engulfed by the frigid air surrounding him. He climbs into his truck, still in a dreamlike

What's on your mind? Send letters to Mail Buoy, National Fisherman, P.O. Box 7438, Portland, ME 04112-7438; fax letters to (207) 842-5603; e-mail to nationalfisherman@divcom.com. Letters may be edited for length, clarity and style.

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The Cove went big time last week with the arrival of the Marblehead Yacht Club's Annual Raft-Up and Clambake. Beulah Banning was chairman of the biggest one in years n' it was kinda tough t'pull off, but Beulah Banning did it finestkind.

It started 'bout a month ago when we got a postcard from the Commodore 'bout the expanded Raft-Up on account of the Obama Stimulus. Most of the Headers work on, for, or around Wall Street so's they caught Stimulus Fever. Just about every Header traded up in super yachts, seaplanes n' accessories.

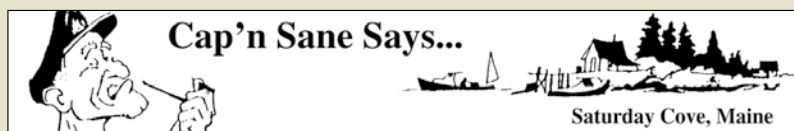
The Commodore's new 192-foot flagship, Carbon Points, was a beauty t'behold. She has a 100-foot bank of solar panels n'port n'starboard windmills f'cloudy days. Her auxiliary power is a 15-hp Mercury outboard run on E-10 gas. She's not fast but her cocktail salon is fabulous so's speed isn't a factor.

The following fleet, also carbon points Stimulus rigged, all hailed from the same port, Chicago, Illinois. The Commodore said it was the least they could do t'honor the Stimulus President.

In keepin' with the event, Shorty Gage supplied 10 crates of Stimulus lobsters varying in size as all Shorty's

lobsters are. The Headers were so pleased with the somewhat small soft-shells they tipped Shorty five handsome Stimulus greenbacks.

Beulah worked all week preparin' her 2-pound crabmeat rolls. By the way, the Commodore's wife, Peaches, who is rather large, was wearing her stunning Cove jewelry. Most prominently her Beulah Crab Earrings, which were two of Beul's crab rolls that Peaches had gold plated last year by the famous New



York jeweler, "Earshot" Rubinstein.

Puddy Hall had a devil of a time finding enough pisser clams f'the Header Clambake. Puddy has a sometimes friend, "Pig Trough" Pendergast, whom everybody calls Snout. Puddy hires Snout when he gets clam short. Snout lives entirely on clams n'digs by night on feel alone. Our clam cop, Bubba Beal, has been trying t'catch Snout closed flats night clammin' f'25 years n' ain't come close.

Thanks t'Snout, Puddy prevailed with pissers plus filled Commodore's order of five gallons of boiled clam

juice f'Stimulus Martinis. These were originally Raft-Up Martinis invented by the Dodge Girls f'the annual occasion. So the Girls came up this year with a Stimulus wine for the fleet ladies called Air Force Two. After wine hour, three of the ladies tried to fly from the top tier of solar panels on Commodore's Carbon Points yacht n'burned their feet quite painfully. Puddy Hall came to their rescue massaging their little feet with a can of Bag Balm.

As usual, Knees Drinkwater blessed the fleet with an alder wand dipped in Holy Water from the Cove Swamp. It ain't really holy water, just in name. Seems years ago Shorty Gage's cousin from Friendship, Slats Farnum, got turned 'round heading south f'home and a bit drunk n'ended up north in the Cove Swamp. When Shorty found Slats face down in swamp water, the first thing Slats said was, "Holy Christ, I died n'gone t'heaven." It's been Holy Water swamp ever since.

The Marbleheaders sailed Sunday night under Stimulus Stars shining bright n'the Cove is back t'fishin' f'practically nothing with no more Stimulus in sight.

Best regards,
Cap'n Perc Sane

state that only sleep deprivation can create. He starts the truck and leaves for work, not knowing whether he'll return.

He arrives at the frostbitten dock at four in the morning. Grasping on a hot cup of coffee, he waits for his older brother. For another hour they load pound after pound of frozen semi-fermented bait onto the boat. The temperature hasn't risen yet at all. To breathe stings the lungs in a way akin to inhaling furious hornets. My dad's brother enters the damp, gloomy cabin and proceeds to start the boat. They leave port and travel for several hours so that they may set their traps.

Dawn is just beginning to break, shattering the frozen grip the night had on the world. One by one, my dad baits each trap with one piece of grimy, icy fish. For the rest of the day my dad throws pots overboard. With each trap he throws, his shoulders ache a little more, his back becomes slightly sore and stiff, while mental and physical exhaustion begin to creep in. Finally the last pot has been thrown. It is now late in the afternoon, now they both enjoy the first thing that has some resemblance of rest.

Best practices aim to make perfect fisheries management

The concept of "best practices" can be defined as the most efficient and effective way of accomplishing a goal, based on standard procedures that work in different settings. Recently NMFS held its annual meeting with the Fishery Management Council Coordination Committee, and participants discussed four opportunities to develop best practices in fishery management.



A letter from James W. Balsiger

The first is a NOAA Task Force on Catch Shares that will ensure councils have the technical and administrative resources to consider this management option, while empowering fishermen to be part of the design process.

The second is tracking our progress: NMFS has just released its annual Report on the Status of U.S. Fisheries. While 77 percent of U.S. stocks are not

overfished, and 84 percent are not subject to overfishing, we face a significant challenge in ending all overfishing by 2010, rebuilding stocks, and preventing future overfishing. Tracking our progress is essential, so that we can make the necessary adjustments based on the latest data.

The third opportunity for best practices is to more fully develop ecosystem approaches to fisheries management. In many cases, additional scientific information is needed to support ecosystem-based decision making, especially in light of variables such as climate change and ocean acidification. Improving this base of knowledge is a priority for NMFS.

The fourth opportunity is two-way communication: NMFS is committed to ensuring the transparency of scientific information, and making the agency more accessible to constituents who may be affected by management decisions. In all these cases, an open exchange of ideas is key to the success of any best practices.

James W. Balsiger is the acting director of NMFS.

My father and uncle return to the dock at six o'clock at night, chilled, weary, and famished. Dad throws together a hodgepodge meal from the scraps of food that remain in their refrigerator. They then consume their meal in a ravenous fashion and then retire to bed. He does this for another two weeks, without returning home. He may not receive his

paycheck for up to a month later.

What could possess someone to go to such dire lengths just to receive a check? The reason my father does what he does is so he can provide our family with all the amenities we enjoy. It's humbling to see how much he goes through, just to place a warm meal on the table. Watching what he does has instilled me with great

respect for jobs requiring manual labor. His efforts have helped make me a more well-rounded individual, as well as providing a roof over my head. I have grown to be thankful for what he does, and shall never take for granted the great sacrifices he makes.

DREW FRENCH
Morro Bay, Calif.

In search of the simple life

Where were the walleye?

Where were the walleye — that was the question. The answer is exactly where we were going. I don't want to sound overconfident, but it's in the bag. We'll be (if you'll excuse the expression) wallowing in walleye.

Such was my conviction. Know a fish, catch a fish. I had done my homework. Fish the dropoffs... rocky bottom, weed beds but no sand... early morning bite, late evening bite — even into the night when walleye use their night-goggle vision to nail their prey. Which is what gives them that strange look, a walleyed fish: like Jean-Paul Sartre with fins.



By Roger Fitzgerald

Here's the scenario. Memorial Day weekend on a houseboat on Roosevelt Lake, 150 miles of trapped river that used to be part of the Columbia River, between Coulee Dam and Canada. In the fall we hunt turkey here — on the Colville Indian Reservation — but in the spring it's walleye time. Captain Hollywood, on leave between cod seasons, is the designated skipper; I'm the fishing master and chief bursar.

True, it's only a houseboat, but that doesn't mean it's all fluff. I have my fishing skiff in tow, iced up and baited, all the trashy gear you can imagine, plus a cooler

full of night crawlers.

True that some of our crew would rather soak in the hot tub on the upper deck than hardcore it across the river for the evening bite. The idea of eating walleye appeals to them, the idea of catching them at night, when they could be hot-tubbing it under the stars (not a human sound or sight within miles) didn't.

Not everyone has the calling.

They would go. My two grandsons were already in the skiff. We crossed the river, arriving at French Rock just as it was getting dark. No other boats in sight, not so much as the flicker of a light bulb on the horizon... only the anchor light of the houseboat in the dim distance.

The fathometer jumped from 100 feet to 18 feet. I cut the engine, already two lines in the water, Conor has one on right away... then Devon... then me. That's the thing about walleye. You're either in 'em, or you're not. Come to think of it that's true of any fish.

You can tell a lot about a walleye by looking at it. The sharp teeth that extend back into its mouth like a baby lingcod, sharp as razors, the teeth of a fish-eating carnivore — the only freshwater fish I can think of, at least in temperate waters, that require wire leaders.

Holding one in my hands, it looks more like a reptile than a fish, the green camo skin, long tapering tail, pointy fins bristling like a rattler, the fins of a perch, by the way, not a pike as is frequently mistaken, so beautiful to look at that I have to force myself to throw it in the bucket (with the others). Only what we can eat.

But I have to say this (and my crew will agree) that for all their ferocious appearance, the walleye is a wimp as a game fish. "They give up right away," says Conor,

who gives them a 4 on a scale of 1 to 10 (with trout getting a 7). As Born Again Bluegill Fishermen, we weren't impressed.

But edibility is a different matter, and here the walleye excels. The way I know them best is from bird hunting in Montana where battered and fried walleye is your best alternative to turning into a cow — at the bar at the Great Northern Hotel in Malta, for example, where I've eaten it for years.

Or have I?

Here's the problem. A lot of what is sold as walleye is zander, *Sander lucioperca*, imported from eastern Europe. They taste the same (both members of the perch family, so similar that in lawsuits the difference has to be determined by DNA), but, as they are different species, substitution is illegal.

Illegal, but not unprofitable. According to what I read, the difference is about two bucks a pound — which can add up fast. The amount of substitution, even by traditional vendors of walleye, has been an embarrassment over the years in Minnesota where walleye is the state fish, held in reverence and widely consumed, but how widely no one really knows, except that it all tastes good.

Our last day we had a walleye fish fry. Scaled and filleted, six fish, fried in a little butter and oil (no coating), everyone licking their fingers and picking out the bones. The boys gave it a 9 "if you don't count the bones" (4 if you did). I'd give it a 10 on taste. As for zander, I think I'll pass. An imported freshwater fish from Russia doesn't do much for my appetite, even if it tastes like king salmon. How do you tell the difference? Buy a dozen night crawlers and head for the river. **NF**

Roger Fitzgerald has been covering the Alaska fishing industry since 1976.