

fact sheet

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Since 1971, Greenpeace has been a leading voice of the environmental movement. We work throughout the world to protect oceans and ancient forests, and to fight toxic pollution, genetic engineering, global warming and nuclear threats. Without compromise, Greenpeace takes on powerful political and corporate opposition to protect the future of our planet.

DEEP TROUBLE IN THE BERING SEA

The Bering Sea is one of the most remote and wildest regions of the world and the source of half the seafood caught in the United States. The fish trawlers that operate in the Alaskan waters of the Bering Sea are widely considered to be the standard by which "sustainable" and environmentally-friendly fisheries management are measured. However, this is not the reality.

Alaska's billion dollar fishing industry is one of the most closely monitored in the world, but concerns still abound. The North Pacific Fishery Management Council (NPMFC), which governs the fisheries operations taking place in the Bering Sea, has inexplicably been unable to prevent the decline in populations of key fish species- pollock, Pacific cod, halibut, and Atka mackerel. Two fishing operations in the Bering Sea, the Aleutian Island and Bogoslov fisheries, and one in the Gulf of Alaska, the Shelikof Strait roe fishery, have been closed or severely limited due to overfishing. Today, the vast majority of fishing pressure is in the eastern Bering Sea, location of a pollock population that is capable of supporting large-scale commercial fishery, the last of its kind.

The Bering's ecosystem is also in grave danger. Fish-eating predators- Steller sea lions, sea birds, and northern fur seals- are on the decline as well, thanks to the rapidly disappearing Alaska pollock. The National Marine Fisheries Service has concluded that the pollock fisheries are likely to put the survival and recovery of the Steller sea lion in jeopardy and negatively impact their habitat. Concern is growing that the fisheries will also be responsible for the continued decrease in fur seals populations in the Pribilof Islands.

The continued robbery of the Bering's fish populations has also impacted communities throughout the southern half of the Bering Sea and Aleutian Islands, as well as the Gulf of Alaska. Fishing boats are travelling farther and farther offshore in search of fish and crab that were once plentiful near beaches. Many communities in the area live and die by the survival of their surrounding waters, exemplified by the 25% drop in human population on St. Paul Island following the collapse of the snow crab fishery. For the Alaska natives who have derived subsistence and livelihood from the waters of the Bering for thousands of years, addressing the issues of fish depletion is an urgent matter of cultural survival.

The Bering Sea, once the poster child of U.S. fisheries management is dire need of an extreme makeover. Unlike other waters, Alaska's have not faced heavy fishing pressure for an extended period of time, and the situation is not as dire as it is elsewhere. The research that Greenpeace will be conducting in the Bering Sea this summer aims to motivate our leaders and governments to give the Bering a chance, before it's too late.

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