

History of Alaska's Commercial Halibut Fishery

By James Mackovjak

Title: to be decided, perhaps *Alaska's Famous Flatfish: A History of Alaska's Commercial Halibut Fishery*

Time span: 1888–2023

Length: 167,000 words, divided into 13 chapters

Chapters:

1. Pacific Halibut: The Fish and the Fishery's Management
2. Genesis and Early Years of the Alaska Halibut Fishery (1888–1910)
3. The Industry Expands Westward, Employs New Technology, Addresses Labor Issues, and Takes Advantage of the Canadian Railroad Connection (1911–1922)
4. First Regulation of Alaska's Halibut Fishery, and Alaska's Halibut Fishery During the Roaring Twenties (1923–1929)
5. Alaska's Halibut Fishery During the Great Depression (1930–1939)
6. World War II and the Post-War Years (1940–1952)
7. The International Pacific Halibut Commission and the Further Development of the Halibut Fishery (1953–1975)
8. Alaska's Halibut Fishery in Expanded U.S. Waters (1976–1983)
9. The Halibut Derby Years (1984–1994)
10. Exclusive Fishing Rights Make Alaska's Halibut Fishery Safer and More Efficient—At a Cost (1995–1998)
11. An Increasingly Complex Fishery (1999–2008)
12. Declining Halibut Stocks: Fishing for Fewer and Smaller Fish (2009–2023)

13. Sport-Charter Fishing for Halibut

Illustrations: currently 28, mostly charts showing the evolution of regulatory areas

Photographs: will avoid photographs of fishermen with dead halibut, as halibut literature is awash in them

Endnotes: 1,134, many with multiple citations

Intended audience: individuals involved in Alaska's halibut fishery, including managers and scientists, and individuals who want to learn about the history of this iconic fishery. Moreover, the U.S. Supreme Court's recent decision overturning the Chevron doctrine, which authorized federal agencies to interpret statutes to make reasonable regulations, now authorizes the courts to interpret ambiguous regulations, and they must rely on their own technical expertise to do so. For regulations pertaining to the halibut fishery, my book could provide justices with a detailed overview of the fishery and the development and evolution of the regulations under which it is managed.

Organization: This book is primarily a chronology. The organization of Alaska's halibut fishery evolved over the years, and to make the happenings each year easier to comprehend, I varied the structure of the annual discussions to suit the situation. Many chapters, in addition to containing the chronological history of the commercial halibut fishery, also contain information regarding technical, political, and industrial developments and issues that impacted that fishery. Bycatch, which is the unintentional or incidental taking of halibut in other fisheries, is discussed extensively. The catch of halibut by sport fishermen, particularly those who are guided, also impacts the fishery, as does the catch of halibut by subsistence fishermen. A comprehensive history requires that all these impacts be considered, not to mention the impacts of environmental changes.

There are small inconsistencies in the data presented. At times, fisheries data contained in reports by the International Fisheries Commission, the International Pacific Halibut Commission, the territorial governor of Alaska, the Alaska Department of Fish & Game, the U.S. Bureau of Fisheries, the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, the North Pacific Fishery Management Council, the National Marine Fisheries Service (NOAA Fisheries) and the journals *Pacific Fisherman* and *Pacific Fishing* varied slightly. Additionally, confidentiality policies of federal and state agencies and private organizations sometimes restricted access to information.

Complicating matters, the commissions and the government agencies sometimes revised data when better information became available, resulting in inconsistencies in their reports. I used the most recent data that I encountered and that seemed to best suit the discussion. Also, to simplify number-dense discussions, I often rounded numbers, which sometimes resulted in small inconsistencies when these numbers were manipulated.

Further complicating matters, agencies, organizations, and publications over time varied their units of measurement for halibut weights, from pounds to tons to metric tons. And some weights were for dressed (eviscerated, gills-out, head-off) fish, while others were for whole (“round”) fish.