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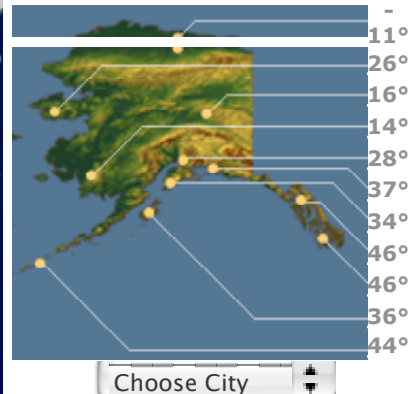
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Alaska fishermen donate next year's catch to hurricane victims

By Margaret Bauman
Alaska Journal of Commerce

Alaska fishermen from the Lower Yukon to Juneau are joining forces to help victims of Hurricane Katrina, collecting upward of \$49,000 to date through fish donations and a benefit concert.

Commercial fishermen from subsistence Yup'ik Eskimo villages along the lower Yukon River are pledging \$30,000 from next year's king salmon harvest to relief efforts for Hurricane Katrina.

Juneau fishermen, meanwhile, collected more than \$19,000 Sept. 30, at a three-hour Fish Aid benefit concert for fishermen victims of Hurricane Katrina, said Scott McAllister, one of the organizers. The money will go initially to Alaska Fishing Industry Relief Mission (AFIRM), a nonprofit organization that will determine where the funds will be used.

Local fishermen are eager to help and it is very clear that fishing groups in Louisiana will need help to get back to fishing again, said Mark Vinsel, executive director of United Fishermen of Alaska, and AFIRM chairman.

McAllister said Juneau fishermen are challenging other fishing ports to have similar events and donate what they can, and interest is already being shown in Kodiak, Cordova and Bellingham, Wash.

Officials at Kwik'pak, which processes the spring king and fall chum salmon runs for the Yukon Delta Fisheries Development Association, will make donations of \$15,000 each to the Salvation Army and the American Red Cross. Fishermen will reimburse Kwik'pak after harvests in the spring of 2006, said Jack Gadwill, a spokesman for Kwik'pak in Emmonak.

The Yukon Delta Fisheries Development Association, a community development quota group that gets harvest allocations from fisheries, also donated about 24,000 pounds of salmon to 17 schools in the district this year, Gadwill said.

"The Yup'ik's desire to help Katrina victims began when a few

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fishermen asked if Kwik'pak Fisheries could help support the cause," said Kwik'pak chairman Billy Charles of Emmonak.

"For some fishermen this means that they're willing to give up nearly 25 percent of their annual income from commercial fishing to help others in need."

The Lower Yukon Delta, known as the Wade-Hampton area, has one of the highest levels of poverty and unemployment in the nation. The Yup'ik Eskimos, who have lived in the region for more than 10,000 years, have sustained themselves through a subsistence lifestyle, sharing what the Yukon River provides.

"This is part of our culture, tradition and who we are," Charles said. "Without sharing with others, we would not have survived as a people. We have no money to send, but we can still contribute in our traditional way, by donating proceeds from Yukon River king salmon to the Katrina victims."

Kwik'pak's fresh Yukon River kings are available only for about two weeks during late June each year. More than 700 fishermen, mostly Yup'ik residents, participate in a two- to three-week limited king season. The total catch is relatively small, but there is great demand for the Yukon kings, which are very high in Omega-3 oils.

Fishermen were hard hit financially when the fishery was opened late this season to assure adequate escapement, leaving Kwik'pak unable to fulfill some orders. Kwik'pak, the only major employer in the area other than the school district, is also the only fishery in the world approved by the Fair Trade Federation, in Brussels, Belgium, based on its work within the community and fair pay to fishermen, Gadwill said.

Margaret Bauman can be reached at margie.bauman@alaskajournal.com.

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