Taking Control

Alaskans viewed the transfer of fishery management in 1960 as more than just a step toward the sovereignty guaranteed by Statehood. "It is a requirement toward remolding the shattered remnants of a once unparalleled fishery which, under distant bureaucratic control, has been in sharp decline for more than two decades," said Governor Bill Egan. "Now for the first time, Alaskans are free to exercise their own judgment on a course of action to rebuild this resource in the common good to its earlier position of eminence."

But the salmon canners were reluctant to lose the influence they enjoyed during the territorial days. One of the packers told Chuck Meacham Sr., then supervisor of Fish and Game's Central Region, that the new state should manage its fisheries Greyhound style. "I thought, what the hell are you talking about, 'Greyhound style'?" Meacham recalled. "They said, 'You know, leave the driving to us'."

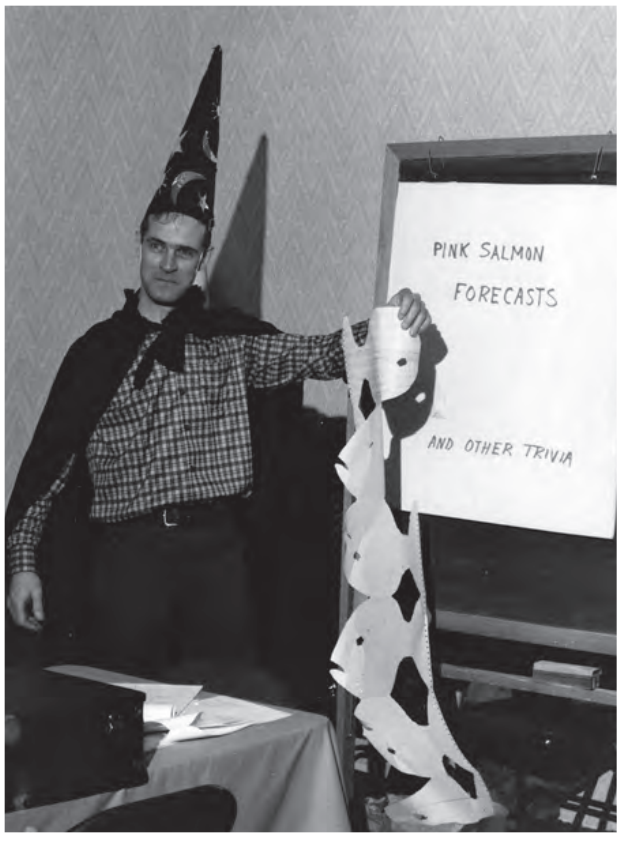
That wasn't an option. Instead, Bill Egan told Andy Anderson, the first commissioner of the Department of Fish and Game to do whatever it took to restore salmon runs to their former abundance. Anderson boosted basic research into inventorying fish stocks, better understanding their life histories, studying habitat, and improving forecasting techniques. New methods for counting fish entering the spawning grounds were put into place so decisions on fish openings were made based on hard data, not educated guesses.

The state scrapped the federal timetable which set fishing periods months in advance based on run expectations. Instead, the state allowed openings based on actual run strength and only when enough salmon reached the spawning grounds to sustain production. Anderson took the statehood idea of local control one step further, giving local fishery managers the authority to set openings through what were called emergency orders.

"Andy passed that authority on to his biologists," Meacham said. "We had the authority to open and close and make emergency regulations and we didn't have to go any further than ourselves. They didn't have to be issued at any set time or sent to the attorney general or anything else. We had local control of our fisheries."

"We had the authority to open and close and make emergency regulations and we didn't have to go any further than ourselves."

—Chuck Meacham Sr.



Salmon jumping up the falls, returning to their birthplace.
Photo courtesy of ASMI.

An early forecasting technique illustrated.
Photo ADF&G.

The new style of management didn't sit well with everyone. Some fishermen missed the regularity of having weekends off during the federal days. Others complained about the "wishy-washy, on-off pattern" of openings. But when the Department reacted quickly to an unexpected strong salmon return to Bristol Bay, the trade press praised Fish and Game's "vigorous on-the-job, on-the-spot, on-the-ball policy of fishery administration."

Salmon runs generally improved in the 1960s, with catches of 40 to 60 million salmon annually but serious problems remained. Bristol Bay production fell into a five-year cycle of booms and busts. When sockeye runs slumped in 1962 and 1963, the state asked President Kennedy for disaster assistance. The harvest soared in 1965 only to collapse again two years later. Pink salmon production was also erratic peaking at over 160 million pounds in 1966 and dropping to less than 30 million pounds the next year. Meanwhile, Japanese fishing fleets continued to catch millions of Alaska salmon on the high seas.

Salmon still dominated Alaska's seafood production with halibut and herring distant seconds in terms of value and poundage respectively, but in the 1960s, a new fishery emerged.

Following World War II, a Seattle entrepreneur named Lowell Wakefield began exploring Alaska's little-used king crab resource. He had a reputation as a "blood and guts guy," someone who could make anything work through his sheer determination and hard work. Marketing was a secret of his success. Rather than put the crabmeat in cans, Wakefield froze the crabmeat in sections. He operated one of the first catcher processor boats that allowed him to explore waters off the Aleutians, Alaska Peninsula, and Kodiak and he built shore plants at Seldovia, Cordova, and Sand Point.

...in the 1960s, a new fishery emerged.

Crab boats on ice.
Photo by Forrest Bowers, ADF&G.

With the passage of statehood, the rules of the crab fishery changed. The new state required fishermen to use crab pots instead of trawls or tanglenets, which the Department considered too destructive. Just over the three-mile limit, the Japanese and Russian fleets were still free to use whatever gear they preferred. Tensions grew when the foreign fleets destroyed Alaskan's pots with their nets.

Not much was known about king crab at the time. "When Clarence Anderson called me and said, 'Hey, how would you like to come up to Alaska,' the first thing I did—I'm in college in Colorado—was go to the library," said Guy Powell, the state's first crab biologist. "I looked up king crab and the only thing I could find was *Limulus*, the horseshoe crab with a big rat-like tail and which is also called the king crab. Basically I learned almost nothing was known about king crab back in '58."

King crab on deck.
Photo Jim Craig, ADF&G.

When he arrived in Kodiak, Powell put on his scuba gear and went to work studying king crab in their natural habitat, documenting their migrations, molting, and mating patterns, sometimes holding the crab in corrals to study their life cycle. Powell came to be known as "the world's only underwater cowboy" for his scuba work and he was pretty much on his own. "We had a saying back then that it really was 'Alaska Department of Salmon,'" Powell said. "In the early days, salmon was king and these other fisheries were nothing. The king crab fishery was managed by salmon biologists in their spare time."

Powell came to be known as "the world's only underwater cowboy" for his scuba work and he was pretty much on his own.

ADF&G biologist Guy Powell used scuba diving gear as a research tool.
Photo ADF&G 1959 Annual Report.

King crab was about to be noticed. Led by Wakefield and soon joined by others in the industry, crab catches doubled every two years after statehood, from less than 20 million pounds in 1959 to over 40 million in 1961 and almost 80 million in 1963. "The communities of Sand Point, Unalaska, and King Cove are bursting at the seams," the Anchorage Daily News reported. "It's go-go all the time."

Kodiak also saw a surge in its king crab catch. In the winter of 1966, less than two years after being devastated by the Good Friday earthquake, Kodiak's king crab catch surged to 96 million pounds. Combined with catches in the Bering Sea, the harvest totaled 159 million pounds. Alaska's first king crab boom soon faded, but a new major fishery had emerged off Alaska, one that would take an increasingly prominent role in the decades to come.

Andy

Alaska's first commissioner of Fish and Game, Clarence Louis "Andy" Anderson divided his early life between Seattle, where he was born in 1894, and Dawson in the Yukon Territory where his father ran a gold rush era trading company. He studied fish biology at the University of Washington where he earned his bachelor's and master's degree. His thesis was on pickled fish and he went to work for the U.S. Bureau of Fisheries demonstrating a new method to preserve herring known as the "Scotch cure."

Anderson jumped into the private sector, running a Seattle smokery for several years, but returned to public service in 1942. He joined the Washington State Department of Fisheries where he promoted the commercial viability of its marine resources. He regularly returned to the University of Washington to lecture on marine fisheries and preservation methods.

In 1949, Anderson was called to Alaska as the territory's first director of fisheries. Over the next decade, he built the Department from a single-room office in Juneau to a department with field offices across the territory and over 170 employees. With the coming of statehood and control over fish management, Governor Bill Egan gave Anderson a simple order: to rebuild Alaska's salmon runs, no matter what it took.

With a management strategy that places control at the local level, Andy Anderson looked to his field biologists to carry out that order. As recalled by Clem Tillion, Anderson told them, "Gentlemen, the governor has instructed me to return the salmon runs to their former abundance regardless of the pain that is inflicted on the people. I'm charging each one of you to make sure every stream in your district is filled to the maximum spawning capability. Now, if you allow an overescapement, depriving the fishermen of their livelihood, you can expect to be criticized. But on a personal level, gentlemen, I want you to understand that if you allow an underescapement, you can expect to be fired."

It's not known if any biologists were ever actually fired. Anderson's managers took his charge to heart which, as Andy predicted, sparked criticism for the young Department. Commercial and sport fishermen howled in protest when Cook Inlet was closed to king salmon fishing. Chuck Meacham Sr. recalls packer Winn Brindle throwing down his hat and stomping on it when the Department once refused to open Bristol Bay.

Andy Anderson never lived to see the success his direction would ultimately produce. He retired from the Department in 1961 and died five years later. For his years of service during the transition to statehood, Andy Anderson is affectionately known as the "Father of the Alaska Department of Fish and Game." For taking a principled stand for conservation, Clem Tillion calls him the "savior of Alaska fisheries."

Clarence Andy Anderson.
Photo ADF&G.

"...on a personal level, gentlemen, I want you to understand that if you allow an underescapement, you can expect to be fired."

—Clarence "Andy" Anderson

The Fish Board

Fish traps may have been the symbol but it was outside control of their fisheries that really drove Alaskans to push for statehood. In territorial days, fishing regulations were largely made in closed meetings between federal regulators and the salmon packers. Alaskans had little, if any, say in what was decided. Andy Anderson had a better idea.

"We take a little different approach to the problem than perhaps a federal agency does because we feel that the people of Alaska should have something to say about this," Anderson said. Along with the Fish Commission, the Territorial Legislature also created the Fish Board with five members: three fishermen, a processor and one member from the general public. In its early days, the board was only advisory and its recommendations were often ignored but with statehood, the board was vested with the power to set regulations. It initially grew to a ten-member board that regulated both fish and game before being divided into two separate boards. Whatever its composition, the idea of giving fishermen the power to regulate their industry was revolutionary.

"Before I got on the Fish Board I was an alternate on the Pacific Salmon Commission and I don't know how many times people came up and said they were fascinated that we were able to have this kind of citizen participation," said former board member Gary Slaven from Petersburg. "Especially the Canadians; almost everyone on the Canadian delegation, sooner or later, that was what they wanted to talk to me about."

Under statehood, the process of citizen involvement devolved even further with the creation of Fish and Game Advisory Committees that encouraged greater participation at the local level, but democracy wasn't always easy. As it worked through its agenda, the Fish Board wrestled with contentious allocation disputes such as conflicts between commercial and sport fishermen in Cook Inlet and between commercial fishermen from different regions such as the mixed stock fishery in the Eastern Aleutians' Area M. The board also struggled with ethical concerns of giving a lay board such regulatory power, at times going too far for some.

"The idea behind it was trying to keep politics out of it as much as possible and utilize the knowledge people have about different fisheries and that's a real good process," said former board member Dick Jacobsen of Sand Point. "The downside is they tried to be overly conservative on conflicts of interest. Information gets lost if a board member isn't allowed to participate in the discussion on areas they know a lot about. That part I think is wrong. I can see somebody not being able to vote on issues that concern their own area, but they should be able to put their knowledge on the table and allow other board members to utilize it."

Most board members took their responsibility seriously and the process brought a broader perspective for the good of the resource and the state. "When they hear such and such a person with a particular gear type is going to get on the Fish Board, some people think, 'Oh, that person will just be there for one agenda.' Well, it really is a thankless task if you have that attitude," said Gary Slaven. "What I saw was that most people weren't there very long before they realized that they were going to learn a lot about a lot of different things, make some really tough decisions and they had to pay attention. Either that or they didn't last long. They weren't happy or it was too much work."

"It's kind of like growing up in Alaska," is the way former board member Robin Samuelsen put it. "If you're an athlete on a high school basketball team like I was in Dillingham, you travel around the state and meet people who become friends for life. On the Board of Fish, I made new friends all around the State of Alaska. I'm sure I made enemies too; in fact I know I did, but if they know you're doing hard work and trying to be fair, they'll respect you. And that's a real rewarding experience."

Members of the first Alaska isheries Board in 19 9. L to R, J. Howard akefield, Port Wakefield; Ira Rothwell, Cordova; J.P. Valentine, Ketchikan; William R. Walton, Sitka; and Karl Brunstad, Kodiak.
Photo Alaska Department of Fisheries 1949 Annual Report.

Flying for Fish

No tool is perhaps more valuable to a salmon biologist than a Cessna 180 or Piper Super Cub. Aerial surveys are sometimes the only way to count fish to ensure there's adequate escapement to sustain the runs and identify the extent of spawning habitat.

Before he even had an office, newly hired biologist Steve Pennoyer was put in an airplane. Dropped off in Aniak in 1959, he was told to find the Kuskokwim sockeye salmon. "I had never flown an aerial survey," Pennoyer recalled. "They told me, 'Well, it's easy. Just go up in the air, count fish and if they're red it's a sockeye.' Okay. Well, the pilot's nickname was 'Crackup Harry.' He had left a plane on nearly every mountaintop along the Kuskokwim. Harry had never flown a survey either so there we were flying up and down the river. We never did find those damn sockeye that year but I found them later."

"I remember doing stream counts in Kodiak in the 60s," said biologist Larry Edfelt. "Dave Henley was the pilot. He was the guy who had the Super Cub with a machine gun mounted on it for bear control. Henley was a great pilot. When he flew, the plane and Henley were one and the same. The thing that bothered me was I'd be counting fish, the plane would roll sideways one way and then roll the other way and I looked at Henley and he was counting too. Nobody's looking straight ahead. 'Dave, let me count, you fly.' It scared the hell out of me."

Aerial survey information is especially important in fast paced fisheries like the Bristol Bay salmon season which lasts just a few weeks but it's not easy in the Bay's turbid water. Mike Nelson started a long career in Bristol Bay management in 1962 and had to innovate techniques to count fish in muddy water. "I used to fly two, sometime three times a day," Nelson said. "I was in the air all the time looking at specific points. Like if you go out to the head of the channel, right at the turn of the tide when it goes slack water, the fish go nuts. They jump every which way because they've lost their directional push."

"They told me, 'Well, it's easy. Just go up in the air and count fish and if they're red it's a sockeye.' Okay. Well, the pilot's nickname was 'Crackup Harry.'"

—Steve Pennoyer

Nelson learned to look where the fish weren't expected. Salmon usually follow the river banks but not always. "One time I flew up Wood River, the lower third of the river, and I thought I saw something out in the middle. I flew out there and, my god, I've never seen so many fish in my life. It turned out to be 500,000 salmon. So I started making aerial survey flights at those conditions and stages of the tide when we needed to know what we've got in the muddy water."

Among the colorful bush pilots who flew Department biologists were some who achieved later

Left: Aerial view of sockeye salmon.
Photo John H. Clark, ADF&G.

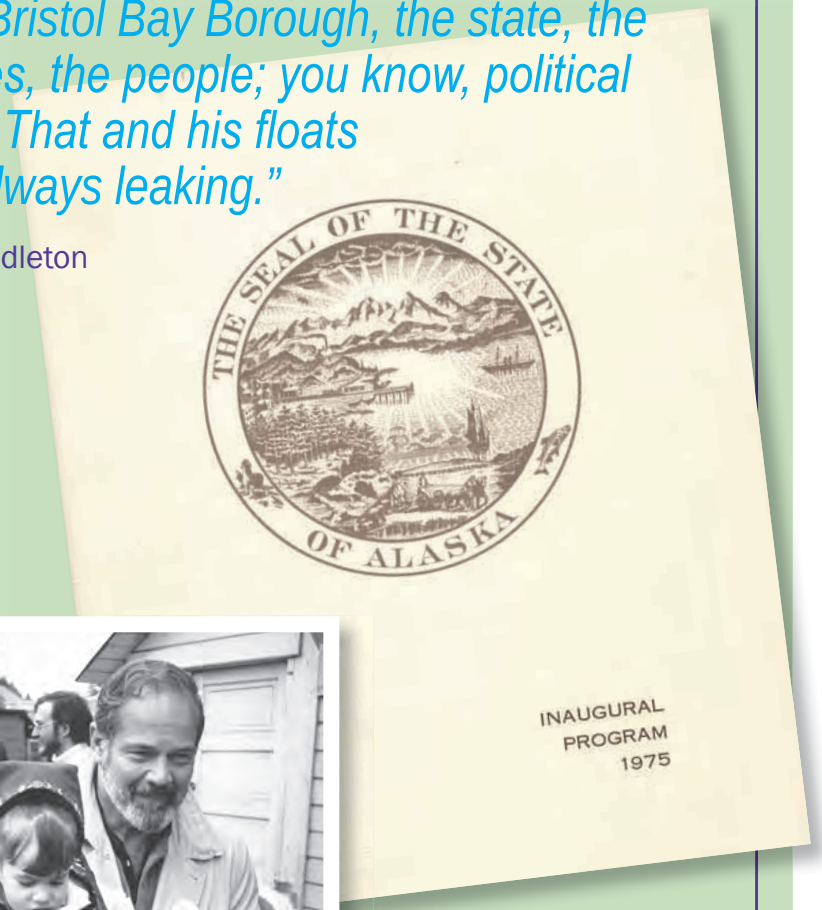
fame, like a pilot from Naknek named Jay. "Frankly, he wasn't much of a stream survey pilot," recalled former Bristol Bay manager Ken Middleton. "The problem with Jay was he was always thinking about other things. His mind was constantly churning about the welfare of the Bristol Bay Borough, the state, the fisheries, the people; you know, political things. That and his floats were always leaking. He never did get the damn things fixed during the season. We had some hairy takeoffs. Sometimes we had to go back, run it onto the beach, pump the floats out and try again. But Jay was an outstanding guy in my opinion. He had a hell of a mind on him." Bush pilot and salmon setnetter Jay Hammond later became the State of Alaska's fourth Governor.

Flying aerial surveys wasn't sightseeing. Alaska's weather and rough terrain made the work dangerous. "I flew in nine airplanes that crashed within 24 hours after I was in them," remembered Larry Edfelt. "I was the last person to fly alive with two pilots, survived a helicopter crash on Chignik Spit, and was in two airplanes that ran out of gas in the air. That kind of stuff was happening all the time. But that was Kodiak and I was young and immortal."

While counting salmon near Quinhagak in 1962, an airplane crash took the life of a young ADF&G biologist, the pilot and a state electronics technician. Lester Varozza was the first Fish and Game biologist to die in the line of duty. In the 50 years since statehood, 25 ADF&G employees have lost their lives in the course of their work, many in airplane accidents while flying for fish.

"The problem with Jay was he was always thinking about other things... the welfare of the Bristol Bay Borough, the state, the fisheries, the people; you know, political things. That and his floats were always leaking."

—Ken Middleton



Above: Alaska Inaugural Program honoring Jay S. Hammond and Lowell Thomas Jr., January 18, 1975.
Photo courtesy of the Alaska Inaugurations collection, Alaska State Library, Historical Collections.

Left: Gov. Hammond at Little Norway Festival, Petersburg.
Photo courtesy of the Office of the Governor Photograph Collection, ca. 1959 to present, Alaska State Library, Historical Collections.

Bush pilot and salmon setnetter Jay Hammond later became the State of Alaska's fourth Governor.

Good Friday

Steve Pennoyer was in the kitchen of his Anchorage home on Good Friday in 1964 when the shaking began. It was shortly after 5:30 p.m.; his wife was preparing dinner and his three children were playing down in the basement.

"I was sitting at the kitchen counter, my wife was cooking dinner, and it started to rumble," Pennoyer recalled. "Well, this was a common occurrence in Anchorage but what made this one different wasn't the violence as much as the duration. Other quakes would last seconds; this one went on for five minutes." An aquarium in his living room toppled over. The refrigerator was shaken open and its contents spilled out across the kitchen floor.

"I ran down the basement steps, grabbed all three kids and carried them up. The wooden steps were shaking back and forth. It was huge. We were sitting in the dining room, the three kids, my wife and me. I tried to save my favorite fish in a jar but don't think they made it. Every time it shook we'd go under the table. After one big aftershock we went out and sat in the car. There was no telephone, no heat, the water was out; the only radio was local and there were reports of fires and looting. That night we were just plain scared."

Steve Pennoyer's family was lucky. They had just survived one of

Above: A 200 ton diesel switch engine of the Alaska Railroad lies on its side more than 200 feet from its original position in Seward, Alaska, following the Alaska Earthquake and tidal wave 3/27/64.
Alaska National Guard Photograph, from the Alaska Earthquake Archives Committee Collection, Alaska and Polar Regions Collections, Elmer E. Rasmuson Library, University of Alaska Fairbanks.

Right: Large scale damage was inflicted on the Alaska port city of Seward by the Good Friday earthquake and the tidal wave that followed shortly thereafter. As the high water receded, only twisted wreckage of the once bustling port remained 3/27/64.
Air Force Photo, Alaska Earthquake Archives Committee Records, Alaska and Polar Regions Collections, Elmer E. Rasmuson Library, University of Alaska Fairbanks.

Kodiak, Alaska, following the Alaska Earthquake and Tidal Wave 3/28/64.
Photo courtesy of the Alaska Earthquake Archives Committee Collection, Alaska and Polar Regions Collections, Elmer E. Rasmuson Library, University of Alaska Fairbanks.

the largest earthquakes in recorded history. Other Alaskans did not. Nine Anchorage residents were killed when blocks of homes and businesses collapsed downtown and the Turnagain Heights subdivision slid into the Inlet. Tsunamis took 106 lives when they swept into Kodiak, Seward, Valdez and other coastal communities. The waves claimed another 16 lives when they hit the Oregon and California coast.

Pennoyer was among a group of young fishery biologists brought to Alaska at the beginning of statehood and would go on to a long and distinguished career with the Department of Fish and Game and the National Marine Fisheries Service. In the weeks immediately after the quake, Pennoyer witnessed the destruction in fishing communities like Kodiak, where salmon seiners were heaved into the center of town and cannery docks were splintered by the waves.

Uplift and subsidence caused by the quake affected fish habitat in Cook Inlet and Prince William Sound, leaving some areas high and dry while others were flooded by salt water. Biologists worried about the impact of such changes to the habitat but Wally Noerenberg, the Department's director of biological research, later concluded that the overall impact would be minimal.

The earthquake of March 27, 1964 shook the young state to its core and caused millions of dollars in damage to the fishing industry. No one who experienced the seismic wrath of that day would ever forget Good Friday.

Offshore Threats

As Alaskans wrested control of their fisheries from the federal government, a new threat emerged offshore. The International North Pacific Fisheries Commission fisheries already allowed the Japanese to fish for salmon in the western Aleutians but in the 1960s, the Japanese cast their nets wider in both the Bering Sea and Gulf of Alaska, targeting halibut, herring, and crab. And they were not alone.

Russian trawlers soon appeared off the Alaska coast also looking for herring, crab, and flatfish. The Soviet ships appeared by the dozens at first; soon their numbers topped 200 vessels and they operated within sight of shore, just over the three-mile limit.

"Oh, are you kiddin'? You could go to downtown Kodiak at night and look out off Cape Chiniak; it'd look like a city out there with all the factory ships," said crab biologist Guy Powell. The three-mile boundary of territorial waters had been defined centuries earlier by the limit that a cannon shot could then defend from shore. By the 1960s, both cannons and fishing fleets had vastly increased their range but the three-mile limit remained unchanged.

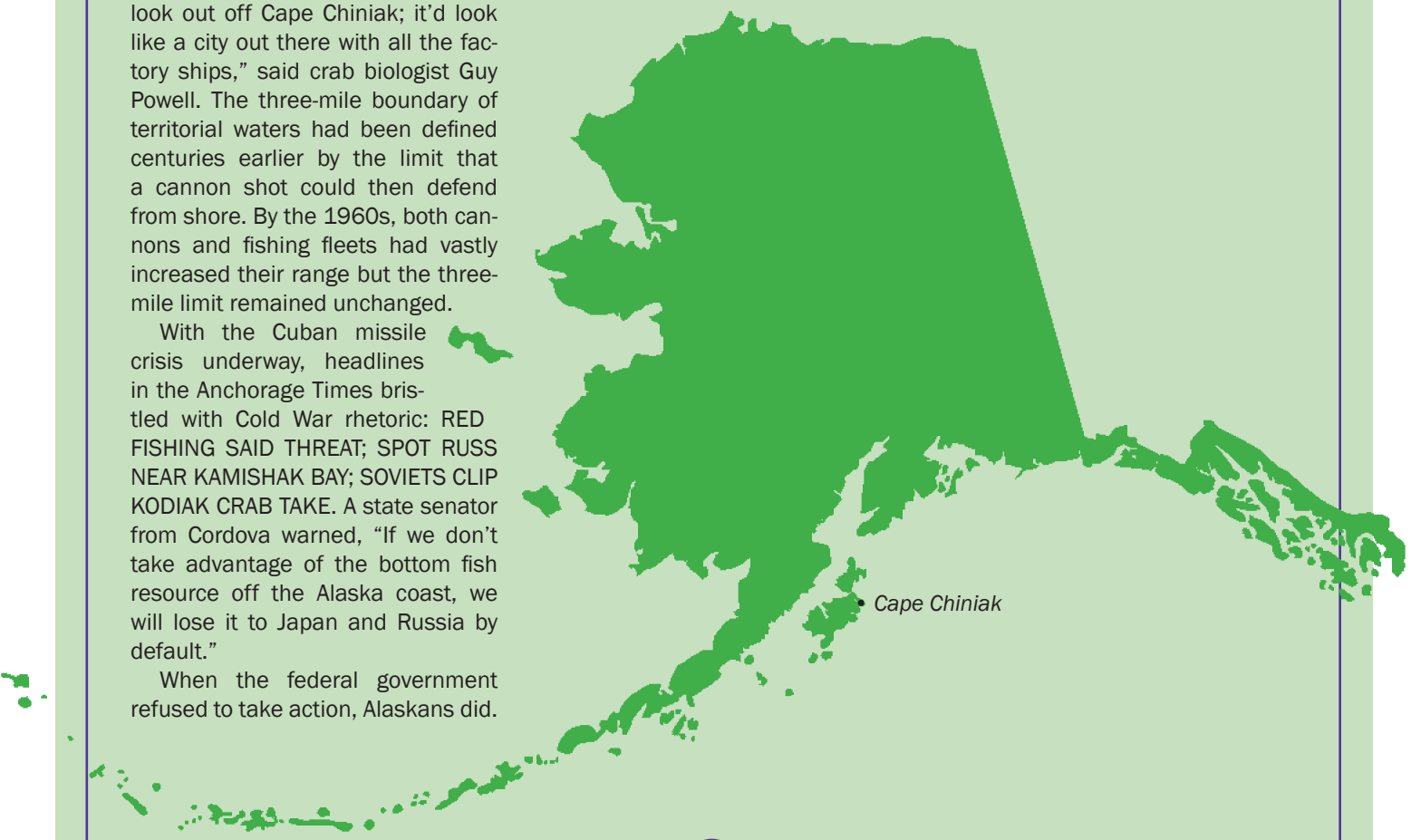
With the Cuban missile crisis underway, headlines in the Anchorage Times bristled with Cold War rhetoric: RED FISHING SAID THREAT; SPOT RUSS NEAR KAMISHAK BAY; SOVIETS CLIP KODIAK CRAB TAKE. A state senator from Cordova warned, "If we don't take advantage of the bottom fish resource off the Alaska coast, we will lose it to Japan and Russia by default."

When the federal government refused to take action, Alaskans did. In 1962, Governor Bill Egan ordered state troopers to seize three Japanese trawlers in Shelikof Strait and charged their skippers with fishing in state waters. "Only through the rigorous enforcement of these regulations can we protect the rights of all fishermen dependent upon these waters for a livelihood and conserve the valuable sea products for future generations," Egan said.

Senator E. L. "Bob" Bartlett, credited as one of the architects of statehood, pushed through legislation in 1964 that banned foreign fishing in territorial waters and claimed authority over bottom dwelling species like crab that lived on the continental shelf. Egan immediately flew to Moscow to negotiate an agreement to keep the Soviet fleet away from Alaska crabbers. Salmon was still king, however, and Egan was particularly angered by the Japanese high seas fishery that targeted Bris-

"You could go to downtown Kodiak at night and look out off Cape Chiniak; it'd look like a city out there with all the factory ships."

—Guy Powell, crab biologist



U.S. Coast Guard Cutter Storis escorting the Russian side trawler STRM 8-457 to Kodiak in 1967. Reflecting the Cold War tensions of the era, the press reported the Russian trawler arrived in port "by the dawn's early light." The Soviets claimed the vessel was fishing in the Indian Ocean.
Photo courtesy of the U.S. Coast Guard.

tol Bay sockeye. With the Cold War underway, the State Department refused to take a hard line in the International North Pacific Fisheries Commission. As Secretary of State Avril Harriman put it, "good relations between Japan and the United States were more important than salmon."

Not to Egan. His frustration over Japanese high seas salmon catches spilled over in 1965 when he threatened to dam Bristol Bay's rivers and turn its valuable runs of sockeye salmon into landlocked Kokanee. Biologists were aghast, calling the idea "madness and foolhardy" but as the Anchorage Times noted, "the governor obviously has succeeded in his first objective—that of focusing attention on a critical problem."

Egan's brinksmanship did get noticed and in 1966 the United States joined other nations in extending its territorial waters from three miles to twelve. But the Japanese refused to recognize the 12-mile limit and the Soviets just ignored it. In the years that followed, foreign encroachments into state waters occurred with increasing frequency. Soviet trawlers were boarded near Sand Point and Chignik; one vessel was caught twice fishing within the 12-mile limit. Warning shots had to be fired to stop Japanese gillnetters fishing for herring in Norton Sound.

Vessel seizures became Cold War media spectacles. When the Soviet trawler STRM 8-457 was boarded in the Shumagin Islands in 1967, the press reported it was escorted into Kodiak "by the dawn's early light." The Soviet skipper, described as "ruggedly handsome," was dragged into court where he pleaded, "I have no money. I will need help from my comrades."

The Russian was later fined $8,000. Alaskans felt that was a mere pittance. Senator Bob Bartlett called the fine "an outrage; a weak policy of appeasement." The 12-mile limit wasn't working. Already, some Alaskans were pushing to extend the state's jurisdiction even further.