

TOGIAK HERRING LOCAL TRADITIONAL KNOWLEDGE (LTK) SUMMARY

BERING SEA INTEGRATED ECOSYSTEM RESEARCH PROJECT (BSIERP)

Interviews were conducted February 2-12, 2010 in Togiak. Key respondents were identified by the BSIERP Togiak Community Advisory Board (CAB) in cooperation with the Togiak Traditional Council and the Division of Subsistence ADF&G. These notes were provided by ADF&G to the Togiak Traditional Council for review and discussion of the study findings. This data will be included in the final BSIERP report which is currently in press.

Togiak herring were one of the species identified for this research. The following information is from 8 key respondents ranging in age from mid 40's to early 90's. These quotes represent the comments of interviewees, some of whom have lived in the area prior to the advent of the commercial herring fishery.

- His (mid 40's) aunt told him that before commercial fishing for herring there used to be lots of herring during the spring. He believes that herring are being overharvested commercially so the amount of spawn attached to the kelp is not thick enough to harvest in traditional areas. In the past the spawn on the kelp was much heavier. They relied on the spawn on kelp for protein.
- After the commercialization of herring, seems like the numbers of geese, and whales, seals, sea lions went way down. His grandpa used to take him (he is in his late 50's), when he was about 9 or 10 years old, and his grandma to hunt squirrels on the other side of the bay from Togiak near where Twin Hills is today. When his grandpa was taking them across Togiak Bay with a skiff it seemed like they were hitting bottom with the prop but when he looked back there were herring flying up from the prop because there were so many herring.
- He remembers going hunting at the Anchor Point area when the herring were spawning. They would see hundreds of seals all over and herds of sea lion families, like four or five to a group, little groups here and there. Now we just see one big bull and one sea lion when we're going west to hunt.
- Emperor geese like to feed on the herring roe. He remembers his grandpa commenting that the geese are fatter after herring season.
- He also identified a kelping (spawn on kelp) area in the small bay east of Estus Point near the outlet of the Osviak River into Hagemeister strait.
- Another kelp picking area is along the shore about 4 to 5 miles north of the base of Asigyukpak Spit.
- When he (early 60's) was younger and first growing up the best places for herring were by Anchor Point, or to the south by the locally named Hawaiian Islands approximately 7 miles southwest of Togiak. In his time his parents moved down there during herring fishing. They got seal meat there and smoked and dried it for subsistence. Now days they hardly get any seals there even though they try.
- When he was younger good herring spawning areas where his parents went for subsistence were located along the coastline where there are rocks from Anchor Point to Kulukak Bay. He identified three main points within this section of coastline: on the north and south side of the entrance to Metervik Bay and just south of the "bay" created by the Kulukak River in Kulukak Bay. Additionally, Summit Island, the northernmost tip of Hagemeister Island and one spot along the shoreline to north of the outlet of the USGS Osviak River were good herring spawn on kelp locations.
- His parents used to move to a place about one and a half miles northeast of Rocky Point for subsistence spawn on kelp. He always used to take them there to make camp and they would stay there for 2 – 3 weeks. They loved that place. The last time they went there was 15-20 years ago.

- They went to Summit Island to get spawn on kelp more than 40 years ago
- In the past herring stuck between the rocks were gathered up after the tide went out – in this way they could get herring without using nets because there were so many of them.
- An elder told her (she is over 90 years old) that in the past when the herring came in it looked like the ocean was smoking when the first batch (run) was spawning. The 2nd batch was larger, the seiner's fish for them commercially on the 1st spawn and people feel they should wait until the 2nd spawn – that is why there isn't as much spawn on kelp today
- There used to be lots of herring at Nunalukaq (Crooked Island) and there used to be lots of tents there to catch and process herring. She was from up river and her husband was from Togiak by Togiak Bay so he taught her how to take care of the herring just like his mother had taught him.
- Do not sloppily take care of ocean animals, any animal in the ocean comes back to the same area and if they are not taken care of they will not come back to the same areas.
- There is concern that due to commercial herring activity that the birds that migrate into the Togiak area are changing their routes of travel. Additionally he (early 60's) is concerned that the amount of commercial herring fishing activity is detrimental to the herring population in general. The seiners especially scoop up the herring before they come in to spawn and then there is no escapement. The gillnetters don't catch all of the herring so there are some of them that get to spawn
- Before commercial herring fishing the kelp used to be thick with 2 inches of spawn on kelp. Even on top of the rocks where they spawned you could hardly walk over it because you would slip, there used to be a whole bunch but it's not like that anymore.
- A long time ago the first run of herring that came in they called them - herring that swim under the ice – those first herring came in and swam under the ice, they would help to start the ice break up and float away. There used to be thick ice covering the bay all the way from the locally named Hawaiian Islands (approximately 7 miles southwest of Togiak) to Rocky Point and sometimes to Summit Island. Then after that the herring came in and spawned but the first ones didn't spawn.
- When he (early 60's) was young they used to get lots of herring and spawn on kelp at Anchor Point. Seals were plentiful – seals would be eating so many herring eggs they would have the eggs on their whiskers when their heads were out of the water. One indication that there are fewer eggs on the kelp now is that the kelp floats upright with eggs on it, there used to be so many eggs on the kelp that it would fall over and not float upright. There used to be so many herring that when the tide went out there would be herring lying on the beach. People used to let the first batch of herring spawn and the second batch would be 2 or 3 times larger. Elders said to leave the first batch of herring spawn.
- When herring arrived Anchor Point was the first place that they would go to for spawn on kelp, now days they follow along the beach to Kulukak where they don't commercial fish anymore so it's good there for spawn on kelp.
- In 2009 Summit Island was good for spawn on kelp for subsistence for some people.
- They do not want to get spawn of kelp with lots of sand on it. Close to Osviak is a good place to get good, sand free kelp, the kelp is in deep water and a long rake is needed to get it.
- (In his late 60's) The first herring that came in under the ice don't stay to spawn they go back out but they would be responsible for making the ice melt or go away.

RC 104
(Replacing RC 79)

- Herring would spawn on points where kelp is growing extending from Rocky Point all the way to Kulukak and other areas but they don't spawn near fresh water where the rivers are. Herring spawn in the areas where there are rocks that the kelp grow on like on Hagemeister and Summit islands, all the way around to Cape Newenham and even inside Chagvan Bay. The herring spawn in the grass in Nanvak Bay and the Brant Geese are waiting there to fly on to the north. In Nanvak Bay when the tide goes out after the herring have spawned he has observed an estimated 75-80,000 birds in the mudflats where the grass is solid with birds eating the eggs.
- In the olden days for those lucky people, they had a caribou sinew net. The nets were very short but there were so many herring that you didn't need a long net. The whole family would work to take care of the herring. People that didn't have a net could collect the herring from the pockets in the rocks when the tide went out because there were so many of them.
- Concerning herring spawn on kelp I think last year (2009) we were lucky, we were fortunate because we had some strong south wind during the commercial fishery. This made the water murky and the herring couldn't be seen from the air so seiners couldn't seine them and a bunch of them escaped and spawned down at Summit Island and the spawn on the kelp was thick there.
- In the old days when they went to pick spawn on kelp they used to just grab the kelp and put them in the bag because they were all heavy with kelp, now you have to look for the one heaviest with eggs to pick. It's nothing like it was in the old days the spawn used to be very heavy on the kelp.
- An elder in his 70's stated that there used to be a lot of herring out in the Bay, and Anchor Point use to be a favorite place to harvest but now there is little to no seaweed there so the herring no longer spawn there.
- Herring use to be so thick that they were spawning on top of each other, and you could see them over flowing in the water by Anchor Point. You would even see herring spawning while it was still snowing over by Kulukak. They didn't even have to use a net to get herring like they do these days; they could just pick them off the rocks, they are no longer like.
- Before freezers they use to either dry the herring, or put them in a cache lined with grass. Now they almost always freeze them, same with the spawn-on-kelp.