

Report identifies ways to rejuvenate Alaska's commercial fishing fleet

December 6 2017, by Paula Dobbyn

A [new report](#) on Alaska's aging fishing fleet and loss of access to commercial fisheries in rural communities recommends five steps to reverse these troubling trends.

The [report](#), called "Turning the Tide," is based on a global review of access to [commercial fisheries](#). It is the work of a research team at the University of Alaska Fairbanks College of Fisheries and Ocean Sciences, Alaska Sea Grant and Alaska Marine Conservation Council.

The report details the ongoing loss of fishing permits and quota from Alaska's coastal communities and the rising age of quota and permit holders. It notes that Alaska's rural fishing communities have shed nearly 2,500 locally held [commercial fishing](#) permits since 1975 when Alaska began limiting entry. That's a loss of over 30 percent of permits originally held by local residents.

Prior to limited entry, anyone could [fish](#) commercially by getting a gear license and paying a nominal fee to the state. With limited entry, people who want to start fishing must purchase rights, or be gifted or inherit them, from private individuals.

Of the permits remaining in rural Alaska today, an increasingly older population holds them, a trend known as the "graying of the fleet." In 1975, fishermen age 40 and under held about half of all rural local permits. By 2016, that figure had nearly been cut in half. The typical fisherman working today is over 50 years old, a decade older than a

generation ago.

Both trends threaten the viability of commercial fishing as an economic and cultural mainstay in Alaska, the study concludes.

The report lists the following recommendations:

- Alaska should supplement its market-based fishing access approach with programs in which individuals do not have to pay. Iceland, for example, has created free community quota programs and quota-free fisheries restricted by landings and seasons. These programs encourage new entry and diversification of Iceland's fleet.
- Youth permits or student licenses should be created, and mentorship or apprenticeship programs established, to provide youth with exposure to fishing and a career pathway.
- Develop mechanisms to protect and diversify access to community-based fishing. One example comes from Norway, which generally prohibits the transfer of quota shares to people living outside local areas.
- Support coastal infrastructure, such as processors, cold storage and industrial parks, to maintain local fisheries.
- Create a statewide task force to review and consider collaborative solutions to reverse the trend of the graying fleet and loss of fishing access in rural Alaska.

The full report is available at fishermen.alaska.edu.

Provided by University of Alaska Fairbanks

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