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INTRODUCTION

Herring Bay? There are four Herring Bays in Alaska. Two are in Southeast Alaska, one is in Prince William Sound, and one is on the Kenai Peninsula, near Seldovia. And the name Seldovia is itself derived from the Russian words *Zaliv Seldevoy*, which translate to "bay of herring."

Additionally, Metervik Bay, near Togiak, in Bristol Bay, is also known as Herring Bay. There are also two Herring Coves, the Herring Islands, and Herring Point.[1] Fish Egg Island, near Craig, in Southeast Alaska, is named for the herring eggs that are deposited there.

> There is reliable information to the effect that schools of herring many miles in extent appear frequently about the fishing shores.—Tarleton Bean, fish expert, 1889[2]

> The most abundant food fish in the waters of the world is the herring, and weight for weight this fish has a greater nutritive value than most meats and other fish, while its low price brings it within the reach of all and makes it pre-eminently the poor man's food.—John N. Cobb, US Bureau of Fisheries, 1920[3]

> Klawock, Alaska, January 1913: Last January at Klawak, on the west coast of Prince of Wales Island, there occurred an unusually enormous run of herring. So numerous were the fish as they crowded into the bay that hundreds of thousands or even millions were stranded and suffocated. When the tide receded they were left in a solid mass over the beach to a depth in places of several feet.—Barton Warren Everman, US Bureau of Fisheries[4]

Alaska's marine waters support at least 384 species of fish. Arguably, the most important of them is the small silver Pacific herring (*Clupea pallasii*).[5] In the North Pacific marine ecosystem, Pacific herring are, in the words of Alaska cultural anthropologist Thomas Thornton and his colleagues, a "foundation and bellwether species."[6] Herring are also characterized as a keystone species because of their vital role in the marine food web.

The family *Clupeidae*, to which the Pacific herring belongs, is the world's most valuable family of food fishes. It includes—in addition

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to saltwater herring—menhaden, shad, alewives, freshwater herring, and many other species.[7]

> In addition to their direct commercial importance, herring also are of great indirect importance as a food supply for many other commercially important predacious species of fish such as king and coho salmon, cod fish and halibut. They are also extensively preyed upon by whales, seals, sea lions, birds, and by other fishes.—Alaska Department of Fish and Game, 1963–1964[8]

> When the herring vanish, so does everything else dependent on them.—June Allen, *Ketchikan Daily News*, 1993[9]

Pacific herring, because of their typically high oil content, are energy rich.[10] They are classified as forage fish—also called prey fish or bait fish—and are a favored food of top-tier predators, among them whales, sea lions, king salmon, halibut, and marine birds. As such, they occupy a key position in the marine food web, linking the energy and nutrients produced by plankton to mammals, birds, and large-bodied fish.

> Forage fish provide the main pathway for energy to flow from very low trophic levels—plankton—to higher trophic levels—predatory fish, birds, and mammals. They transfer a large proportion of energy in the ecosystem and support or regulate a variety of ecosystem services.—Lentfest Ocean Program, 2012[11]

Herring mass into immense schools that move along coastlines and migrate across open water. In fact, the fish's name is derived from the German term *heer*, meaning "army."[12]

Herring abundance can fluctuate widely, but the reasons behind the fluctuations are poorly understood. Thus, prudent management of the herring resource requires the employment of conservative, ecosystem-based management principles.

Alaska's herring industry is a big, big subject. There have been numerous herring fisheries in the state, ranging along the coast from Kah Shakes, on Southeast Alaska's southern tip, to Dutch Harbor, in the Aleutian Islands, to Kotzebue Sound, above the Arctic Circle. Each fishery is or was at least locally important and often unique. Some, such as the roe-herring fishery at Togiak, were large factors in the global industry. A comprehensive history of Alaska herring fisheries

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big and small would take volumes, and, in the interest of concision, I have chosen to focus on those I consider most important.

Over the years, Alaska herring have been harvested for a wide variety of purposes, including "reducing" them into fertilizer, fish meal, and fish oil; curing (salting) them; using them for bait; stripping the females of their roe (eggs); and harvesting herring-spawn-laden kelp. Based on those uses, this book is divided into three parts. Part I is a history of the reduction (fertilizer/fish meal/fish oil) and the cured (salted) herring industries, which were largely integrated operations. Also included in part I is a discussion of Alaska's bait-herring fisheries. Part II, in mostly chronological form, is a history of the roe-herring fisheries in Southeast Alaska, Prince William Sound, Kodiak Island, lower Cook Inlet, Togiak, and Norton Sound. Part III is a history of Alaska's herring spawn-on-kelp industry.

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