

Privatizing the Right to Fish: Challenges to Livelihood and Community in Kodiak, Alaska

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Increasingly economists and resource managers across the globe promote the privatization of fishing rights to achieve efficiency goals. These processes of enclosure often generate profound impacts for marine-dependent communities. This talk will examine the transformations brought about by privatization policies in remote Alutiiq fishing communities of the Kodiak Archipelago, Alaska. Conclusions are based on twelve months of ethnographic research, a large-scale mail survey of Alaska halibut quota holders, and in-depth analysis of fisheries privatization discourses and policies. I describe how privatization policies remake the relationship between fishing communities and the resources on which they depend constraining flexible, kin-based village fisheries and causing dramatic reductions in fisheries participation. Mail survey results show clear relationships between market participation, attitudinal responses, and demographic variables. A logit analysis suggests that fishermen with lower incomes and those that identify as Alaska Native are more likely to sell, and less likely to purchase fishing rights. While reasons for declining participation are complex, fishermen identify the permit as an important social marker of change in their communities. Social changes related to permitting and privatization, including the emergence of a lost generation with few ties to fishing, pose challenges for marine-dependent community sustainability.