

# Fisheries: A Dwindling Resource

## ► What is the future of the fishing industry in British Columbia?

The fishing industry of British Columbia has been facing hard times. Although herring, cod, and other species are part of the yearly catch, the west coast salmon runs have always been the backbone of the industry. In 1990, salmon represented 55 percent of the total value of the commercial catch. By 2005, salmon made up just 10 percent of the total value of the catch.

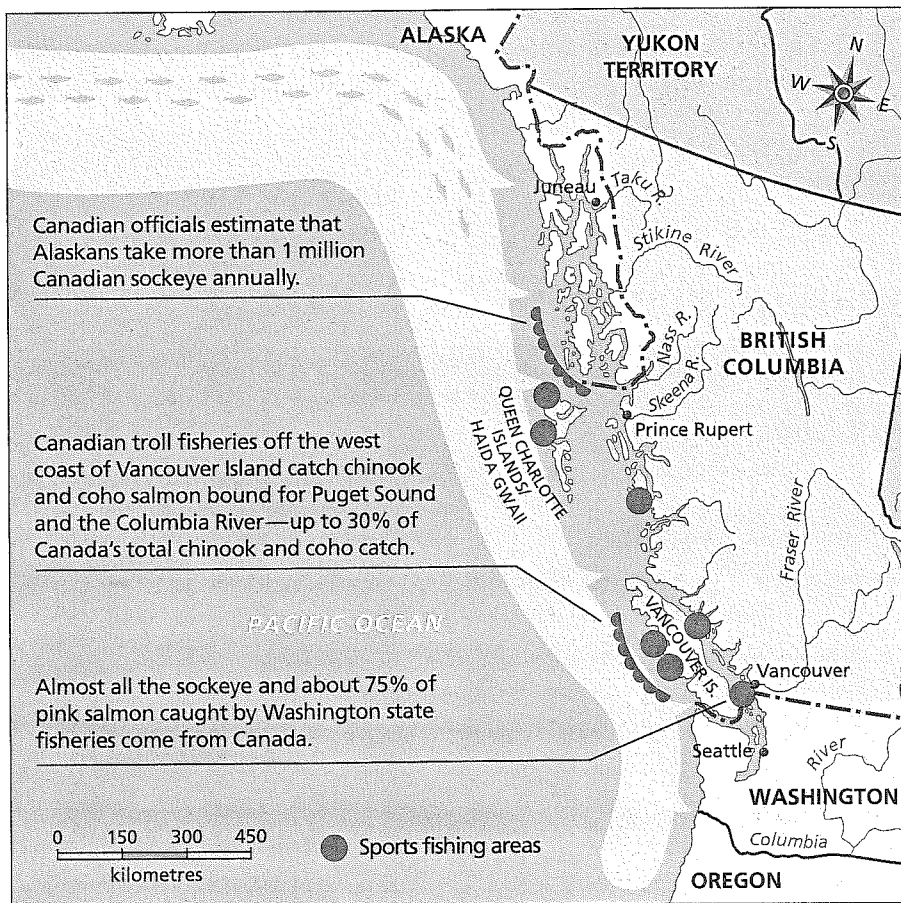
Fishing has been an economic mainstay in British Columbia for thousands of years. The First Nations of the coast depended on fish, particularly salmon, which was caught with spears, hooks, dip nets, and **weirs**. As Europeans began to settle on the coast, a commercial fishing industry grew. The first salmon cannery was opened on the Fraser River in the 1870s. Fishing became an important part of the economy, and growing fleets of trawlers used large nets to catch as many fish as possible.

Today, everyone agrees that salmon stocks are dwindling, yet few can agree on the cause. Overfishing and the destruction of habitats, spawning areas, and migration routes have certainly played a role.

### WEB LINK

For more information about the fishing industry in British Columbia, visit the Pearson Web site.

**weir** an enclosure of stakes and nets in a stream or river



### DID YOU KNOW...

Dams, pollution, soil erosion, and overfishing have reduced the survival rate of spawning salmon to as little as 1 percent in some rivers.

**FIGURE 9-17** Decisions about sharing the salmon stocks between Canada and the United States are regulated by the Pacific Salmon Commission. What clues does this map give you about why this is necessary?

## Aboriginal Fisheries

What rights do Aboriginal fishers have? It took Canada's Supreme Court almost 20 years to answer this question. The most important decisions were *Sparrow* and *Kapp*.

**subsistence** the production of enough food to feed oneself and one's family, without surplus for trade

### WEB LINK

For more information about the *Sparrow* and *Kapp* decisions and Aboriginal fisheries, visit the Pearson Web site.

- In the *Sparrow* decision (1990), the Supreme Court ruled that members of the Musqueam band had the right to fish for “food, social, and ceremonial” purposes. **Subsistence** fishing by Aboriginal peoples became a priority, after conservation requirements. Aboriginal fishers must also be consulted when their fishing might be affected.
- In the *Kapp* decision (2008), non-Aboriginal commercial fishers protested against the federal Aboriginal Fisheries Strategy that allowed First Nations to fish exclusively on certain days during the salmon season, arguing that this violated their equality rights. The Supreme Court ruled that a policy that improves conditions for a group that has been historically disadvantaged is allowable.

These two decisions have done much to spell out Aboriginal fishing rights. As treaties continue to be negotiated, there will be further clarification of the fishing rights of individual First Nations.

## Zoom In ➤ Eulachon: The Little Fish That Matters

In recent years, the supply of eulachon along the coast has collapsed. This small fish, a type of smelt, is about 20 cm long. Nearly 20 percent oil, a eulachon will burn like a candle if dried and strung on a wick.

For First Nations communities, the decline of the eulachon has been devastating. Coastal First Nations people have traditionally harvested the eulachon. The oil, sometimes called t'lina, was part of their diet and served important social and ceremonial purposes. It is commonly given away at potlaches. Historically, the oil was a valuable trading commodity. Mountain passes travelled during this trade were called “grease trails.”

In the last big spawning runs of the early 1990s, millions of eulachon turned the rivers black.

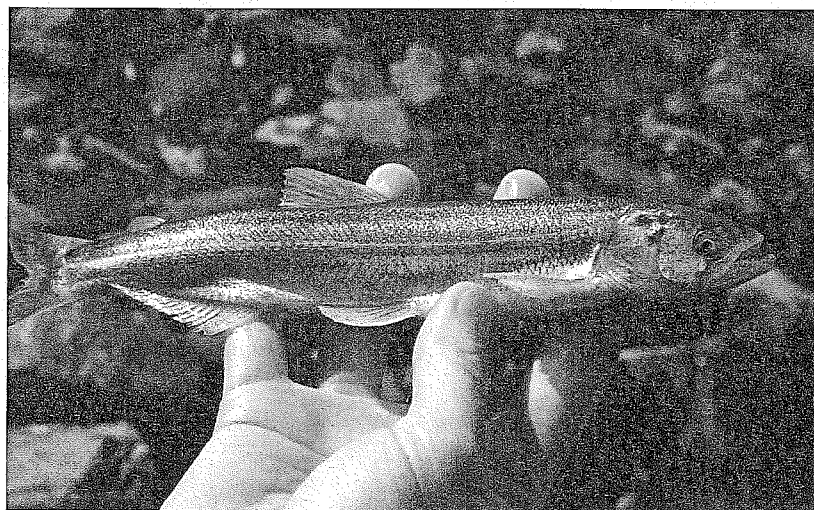
By 2008, fishers, seals, birds, and sturgeon waited in vain for the eulachon to return.

Aboriginal leaders are urging governments to begin restoration projects to bring back the little fish so important to their culture.

- What are the consequences of the decline in the eulachon stocks?

### WEB LINK

To see a virtual exhibit of t'lina making, visit the Pearson Web site.



**FIGURE 9-18** Another name for eulachon is “candlefish.” What other uses for the eulachon can you discover?