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## Study reveals nearly \$1B annual impact of fishing in Southeast

**Industry provides more than 10 percent of area jobs, Tongass should be a 'salmon forest,' research states**

By Jonathan Grass | JUNEAU EMPIRE

Trout Unlimited has just announced the results of a study it commissioned to generate numbers on the economic impact of Southeast Alaska's salmon and trout fisheries. Those numbers add up, reaching toward the billion mark in local dollars and 10 percent of jobs.

The study was conducted by economist Thomas Wegge of TCW Economics, which is based in Sacramento, Calif. It used data from 2007 to serve as a "snapshot year." Wegge calculated economic values and impacts of Tongass fisheries for salmon and trout. He explained "values" measure the monetary importance of fisheries to those who participate with them. "Economic impacts" refers to the fisheries' contributions to the economic activities in a region, as measured in jobs and personal incomes.

An input-output model was specifically developed to allow Wegge to calculate these factors for Southeast Alaska. Wegge held a teleconference Monday with Trout Unlimited Director Tim Bristol and Southeast Alaska Project Director Mark Kaelke to go over the data. Bruce Wallace, a Southeast commercial fisherman, was also available to give his take on it.

Wegge found the total economic output from commercial, sport and subsistence salmon and trout fisheries was an estimated \$986 million in Southeast Alaska. This includes hatchery productions. Wegge said this level of economic output occurs as purchasing related to the fishing industry ripples through the affected sectors in the region. He said the estimated salmon and trout value for those who fish them was \$466 million that year.

With that large a business, the study found a significant amount of jobs are directly linked to salmon and trout. Wegge said 7,282 estimated jobs were directly or indirectly linked to the fisheries or hatchery operations. The study found the three fishing sectors — commercial, sport and subsistence/personal — accounted for an estimated 10.8 percent of regional employment.

The last number he gave from that year was the estimated personal incomes from salmon and trout, totaled at about \$189 million.

“In short, we concluded that hatchery operations and fishing for salmon and trout are significant contributors to the Southeast Alaska regional economy,” Wegge said.

Bristol said the study shows salmon and trout remain important cornerstones of the Southeast economy.

He added the study was done to provide a tool to demonstrate the importance of salmon to the region’s economy. He said the study shows the fish resource makes for a valuable business resource and should encourage the push for the U.S. Forest Service to manage the Tongass as a “salmon forest” rather than for timber.

The Forest Service announced a shift on focus from timber to second-growth management and restoration projects in the Tongass last May.

Kaelke said the company didn’t realize how large the salmon and trout economic impact was when the study was commissioned, but the results made a strong case for managing the Tongass for the fish. He agreed with Bristol’s recommendation to develop a long-term plan to treat the Tongass as a “salmon forest.”

Kaelke said the study also provides a common ground for different groups who otherwise battle over allocation of the fish. He said it can help give them a unified voice in fish conservation.

Wallace called the study one of the most defining economic evaluations in how fish and money are linked here. He said that for fishermen like him, the figures show how critical the salmon resource is to the economy as a whole. He said protection of that resource is critical and hopes the land mangers will consult these numbers for maintaining Tongass watersheds.

“It is ultimately about economics,” he said.

A press release states this is the first such study done that examines the combined economic values of the three sectors plus hatchery production for the region’s fisheries rather than focusing on each area separately.

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