

THE



PROJECT

CONNECTIONS TO THE WILD SALMON RESOURCE IN PRINCE WILLIAM SOUND/SOUTHEAST

Highlights of Opinion Research Sponsored by The Salmon Project

As part of a feasibility study in early 2013, the Salmon Project sponsored extensive opinion research among Alaskans to learn about our connections to wild salmon, our perceptions of the benefits of the resource and the threats it faces, and our interest in supporting efforts to raise awareness and increase connectedness. DHM Research, an independent firm, conducted 11 focus groups, 35 opinion leader interviews, and a scientific telephone and online survey of more than 2,000 Alaskans in five regions of the state (Figure 1).

Public opinion research is just that—inquiry into the public’s attitudes, beliefs, interests, and concerns on a given topic. For an organization or for policy makers, opinion research is useful in understanding what people think and what they most care about in public life. Research helps organizations make connections with the people they are trying to serve. It helps find opportunities to build on existing passions, and can also identify areas where education and information are needed to bring public perceptions up to speed with the facts.

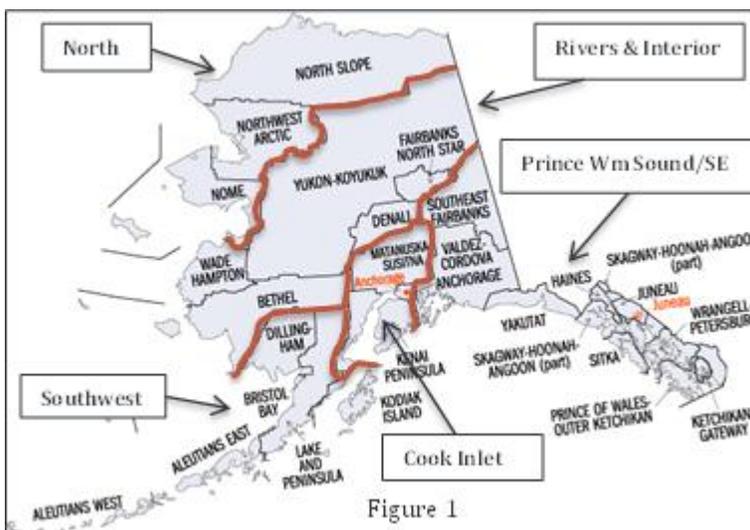


Figure 1

Results from the studies carried out by DHM Research will support the Salmon Project’s efforts to develop meaningful, responsive programs that address Alaskans’ real interests and needs related to wild salmon. This document presents highlights of research performed in the Prince

William Sound/Southeast region of the state (see figure), consisting of a demographically representative survey sample of 445 residents and two focus groups held in Cordova and Ketchikan. More detailed statewide information and results from other regions are available from the Salmon Project at the locations provided on the last page of this report.

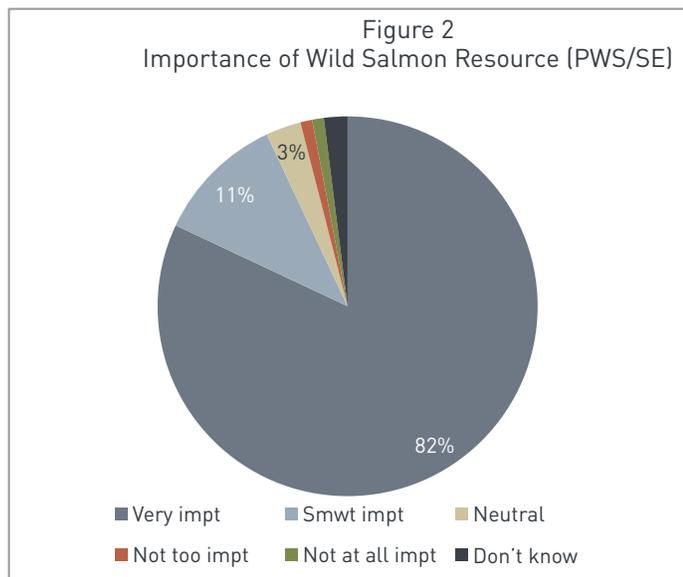
Values and Connections

Along with the Southwest region, Prince William Sound/Southeast (PWS/SE) was prominent for its connected, engaged, and enthusiastic population when it came to wild salmon issues. Inhabitants of the area were among the most likely statewide to work in the fishing-related tourism industry or to sport fish, and the region had the second-highest rate of workers in the commercial fishing industry (12% compared to 20% in the Southwest and 6% statewide).

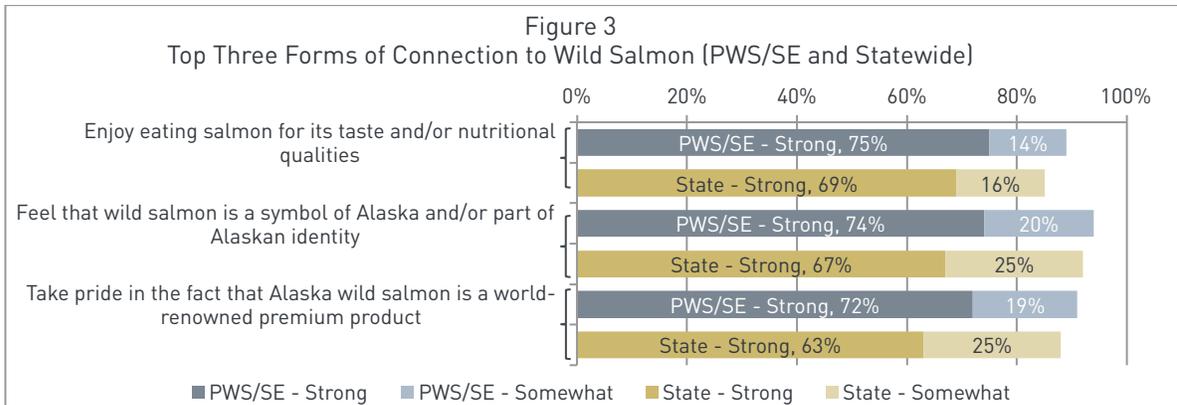
Asked what they value about living in Alaska, residents of PWS/SE were most likely to mention the beauty of the landscape, hunting and fishing, freedom, and nature in general—values that were also widely shared statewide. In thinking about Alaska’s wild salmon resource, inhabitants of the region most frequently mentioned good eating and the economic value of the resource. Compared to their peers across the state, PWS/SE respondents were relatively less likely to talk spontaneously about the need for protection and diminishing numbers.

On a 1 to 5 scale where 1=not at all important and 5=very important, 82% of regional residents responded that wild salmon are “very important” (Figure 2), leading to a mean score of 4.8—along with the Southwest the strongest result statewide. PWS/SE inhabitants were also more likely than their peers (except in the Southwest) to say they were “very connected” to wild salmon (48% vs. 37% statewide).

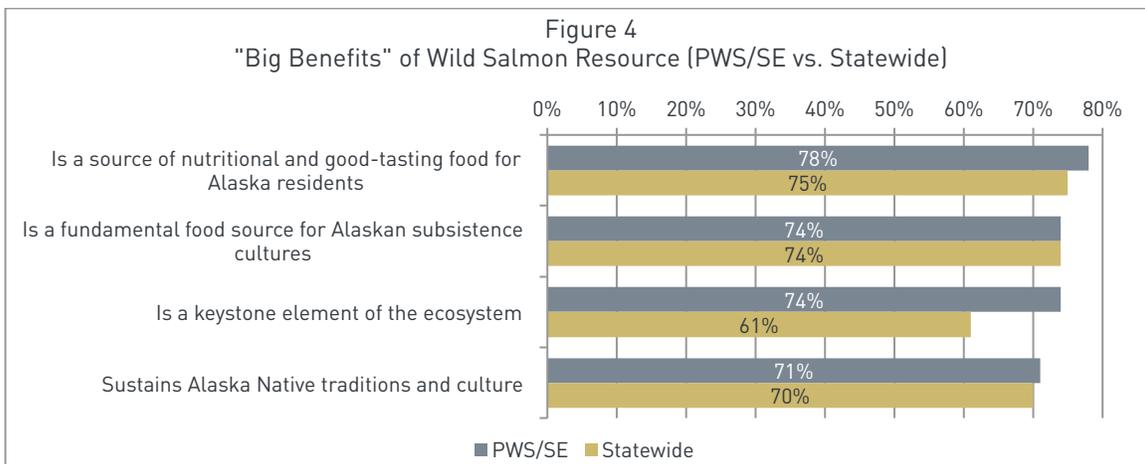
Statewide, Alaskans gave many reasons for their sense of connection to wild salmon. Three emerged at the top of every regional list, with at least 84% saying they felt either strongly or somewhat connected through eating, symbolic value, or pride (Figure 3). Prince William Sound/Southeast residents stood out on these and all other modes of connection we tested. In the middle



tier, combined response in the region ranged from a low of 70% for enjoying salmon as an important part of cultural practices (68% statewide) up to 88% for taking pride in Alaska’s constitution and sustainable management (81% statewide). Statewide response for the same set of connections was a few percentage points lower but the order was identical. Other prominent connections included enjoyment of visiting salmon streams and habitat (86% PWS/SE vs. 80% statewide), benefiting from participation in the Alaskan economy (77% vs. 72%), and enjoyment of sport fishing (76% vs. 71%).



Survey respondents in all regions valued the nutritional and cultural aspects of wild salmon in a series of questions about the resource’s benefits, where food, subsistence culture, and Alaska Native traditions featured as three of the top four big benefits in every region and statewide (see Figure 4). In PWS/SE, the fourth (third overall) related to salmon’s role as a keystone species in the ecosystem. Environmental factors were comparatively more important in the region, as another 66% saw indication of the health of the larger environment as a big benefit of wild salmon (fifth overall). Statewide, providing jobs and income was the fourth top tier benefit (64%). PWS/SE returned an identical response rate but ranked that item sixth on its list of benefits.

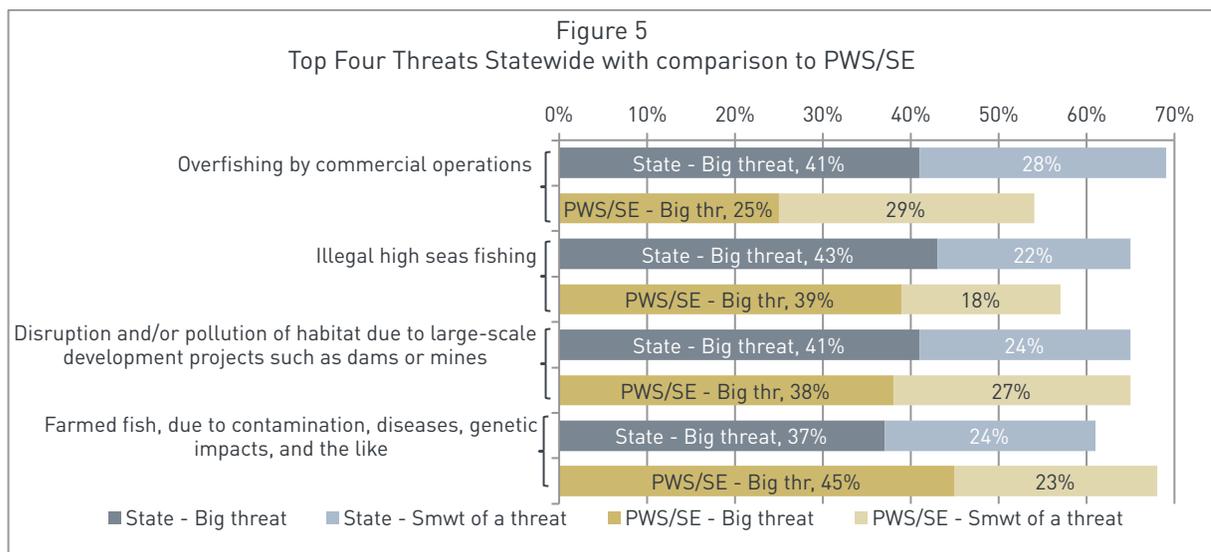


Concerns and Threats

Eight in ten respondents in Prince William Sound/Southeast (81%) felt concerned about the wild salmon resource—41% very and 40% somewhat. This result closely matched response across the state as other regions fell between 78% and 83% overall, with similar splits between strong and soft concern in Cook Inlet and Rivers & Interior. The North and the Southwest showed relatively more strong concern.

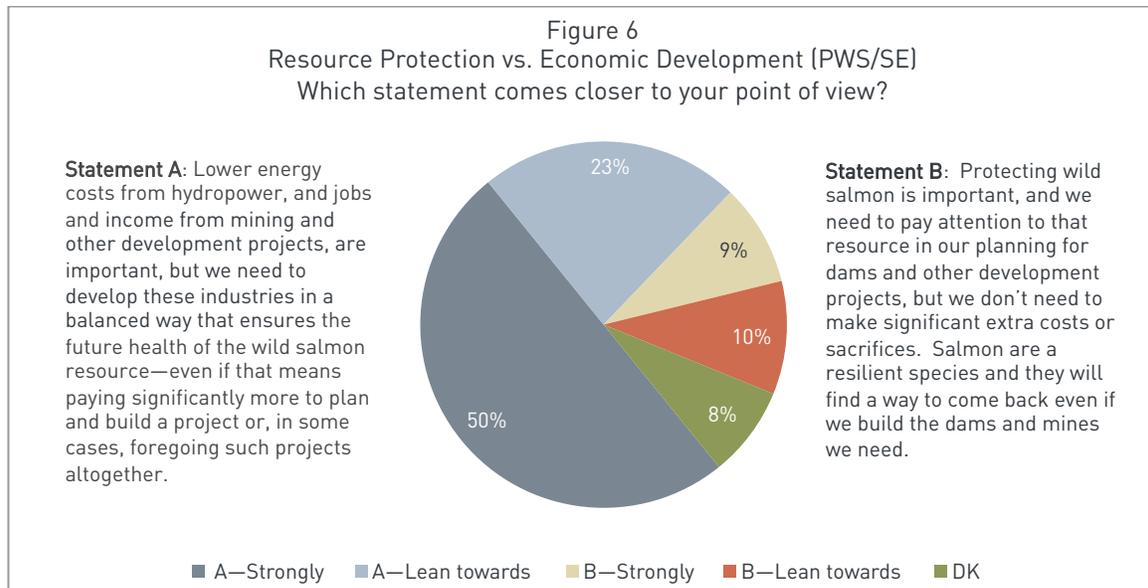
In comments, we heard a great deal about shrinking salmon populations, overfishing, and mining. “There are fewer and fewer places to go fishing,” observed one survey respondent from the region. “The mines scare me and the dams scare me,” remarked another. Many also pointed to the area’s dependency on salmon: “It is the economic engine that virtually runs every coastal community within the great state of Alaska,” said a Cordova resident in one of the focus groups. A Ketchikan participant echoed this sentiment: “The importance of this natural resource is priceless. I, my family, friends, and fellow Alaskans depend on its future.”

Figure 5 presents the top four threats to wild salmon based on statewide results, with PWS/SE percentages underneath. Response rates were relatively similar on illegal high seas fishing, habitat disruption due to large-scale projects such as mines and dams, and farmed fish (the top regional threat). But PWS/SE inhabitants were much less likely than their peers across the state to see commercial overfishing as a threat. In fact, commercial overfishing ranked only fifth on the region’s list, with the environmental and fishing practices of neighbors ranking third overall (58% big/somewhat threat vs. 52% statewide). Concerns about changes in ocean environment due to global warming, invasive species, other forms of habitat disruption, and bycatch were middle tier threats regionally (from 43% to 52% combined big/somewhat) and statewide (44% to 58%).



Resource Protection and Development – Desire for Balance

The survey tested attitudes about the balance between protecting natural resources and generating much-needed economic activity with two competing statements related to the treatment of the wild salmon resource (Figure 6). The research team gave particular attention to crafting test statements that were “values neutral,” in order to avoid response bias from leading statements.



Consistent with the salmon-related concerns evident elsewhere the survey, Prince William Sound/Southeast was more likely than all other regions excepting the Southwest to opt strongly for Statement A (50% vs. 42%-45% in other regions and 52% in SW). In addition, nearly a quarter of PWS/SE respondents (23%) leaned towards A, bringing total support to 73%. Statewide, combined support for A was also quite high at 68%. Regional lows were 57% in the North, where strong support for Statement B was highest (19%), and 64% in the Rivers & Interior region.

The Outlook for Public Engagement

The research explored the potential for raising public awareness in Alaska and strengthening connections to wild salmon. Prince William Sound/Southeast returned strong results, showing enthusiasm for ways to make a positive difference to wild salmon and willingness to contribute time and resources to bring that difference to pass. In terms of ways to make a difference, PWS/SE response ranged from a low of 59% for a “State of the Wild Salmon Resource” speech and action plan by the governor to a high of 93% for educational programs for schoolchildren that focus on salmon and include an outdoor component that brings kids into direct contact with the resource.

Educational programs topped the list in every region with combined support of 85% statewide. Other top proposals statewide were increased public awareness through mass media, improved management with stricter regulations on the heaviest users, and development of scientific and educational materials. Except for improved management, which ranked lower in the PWS/SE, these proposals were also the most popular regionally.

In terms of the public engagement needed to make a difference to wild salmon, PWS/SE residents were consistently more willing than their peers in other regions (excepting again the Southwest) to use websites, participate in community events, pay more in user fees, buy or borrow salmon-related artistic or scientific materials, and volunteer their time. Response rates for these activities ranged from a low of 53% very or somewhat willing to volunteer (47% statewide) to a high of 71% for using websites and social media applications (63% statewide).

Urban-Rural Differences

In the regions of Cook Inlet and Prince William Sound/Southeast the research separately tracked urban and rural populations to explore potential differences in the attitudes of these residents. In PWS/SE, rural residents were more likely to be directly involved in fishing—whether for work, subsistence, personal use, or employment—and they were more likely to be politically conservative. But responses from urban and rural residents in PWS/SE were overwhelmingly similar on most issues. Differences that did emerge include: Urban residents were more likely to identify certain benefits of the resource, such as social and recreational opportunities, attraction of tourists, and providing a source of identity and pride to Alaskans. They were also more likely to be sensitive to certain threats, such as farmed fish, overfishing by sport users, and all forms of habitat disruption (large-scale projects, building and road construction, and timber and agriculture). Rural residents were more likely to think improved management a very effective way to make a positive difference to wild salmon, and also more likely, when presented with alternative statements about promoting public engagement with the wild salmon resource, to prefer the one that declares less interest in joining an effort to raise awareness among Alaskans and strengthen connections to wild salmon.

Conclusion

The Salmon Project appreciates your interest in this research. If you would like to know more about what we're doing in your area, or if you have additional insight into regional salmon issues or topics discussed in this report, please share your thoughts. You can contact the Salmon Project at engage@salmonproject.org. And you can find us on [Twitter](#), [Facebook](#), [Instagram](#) or [YouTube](#) under the username "aksalmonproject."