



Bristol Bay, Alaska – A Conservation Partnership

KEY FACTS

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“The Administration’s decision to protect Bristol Bay from oil and gas development is a huge win for both Bristol Bay fishermen and the region’s coastal communities” said Margaret Williams, Managing Director of WWF’s Arctic Program. “Removing Bristol Bay from future offshore drilling plans is the right decision. We congratulate Bristol Bay leaders for their vision in ensuring that America’s “Fish Basket” will continue to be one of the richest marine ecosystems and a source of sustenance for people and species”

Bristol Bay is the eastern-most extension of the Bering Sea, tucked between the body of Alaska’s mainland and the curved arm of the Alaska Peninsula.

Home to a stunning landscape of rugged coastal areas, mountains, rivers, and lakes, Bristol Bay boasts the greatest salmon runs on earth. Each July, millions of salmon return to the streams where they were born—feeding whales, bears, birds, and an entire ecosystem along the way.

This broad and shallow body of water 250 miles long and 180 miles wide sustains more than 450 species of fish, marine mammals, and one of the planet’s greatest concentrations of sea birds.

Surrounding the bay are two national parks, five national wildlife refuges, and eight state protected areas – a testament to the region’s incomparable ecological value. Some of the world’s most important habitat for birds is found along the shores of Bristol Bay and the islands of Alaska’s Aleutian chain. The region’s many coastal lagoons, wetlands, and sheltered bays are important for waterfowl and shorebirds that stop to feed and rest during migration. <http://www.fishbasket.org/wildlife>

Unimak Pass, which divides the Alaska Peninsula from the Aleutian Chain islands, is a concentrated migratory route for marine mammals. It is vital habitat for nearly two dozen types of marine mammals—including the endangered North Pacific right whales, Steller sea lions, Pacific walrus and sea lions.

Bristol Bay is one of the most productive marine ecosystems in the world and is a source of food for communities. It is not only one of America’s great natural treasures; it also is the engine that drives the Bering Sea fishery.

The salmon runs of the bay average 37.5 million fish each year and support not only brown bears and bald eagles, but people and culture as well.

Known as America’s Fish Basket, the bay is an economic engine for Alaska. Alaska Native people have lived and thrived off this bounty for thousands of years. Fishing is a way of life for many families in this area, helping support 31 Alaska native villages.

The bay provides millions of dollars in jobs for commercial fishermen, producing nearly 50% of the world's wild sockeye salmon. There are more than 12,000 jobs for fishermen and processors – those who harvest the fish from Alaska's bay – who live in the state year-round or just during fishing season.

The annual value of Bristol Bay's fisheries is almost \$5.4 billion dollars. The figure would be even higher if we could put a dollar value on the other benefits of the bay, including biodiversity, recreation, scenic amenities and social and cultural significance.

For at least 8,000 years, human populations have hunted, fished, gathered, survived, and thrived in the Bristol Bay region. Today, although modern conveniences have brought many changes, the people of Bristol Bay still depend on and are largely defined by its biological riches.

http://www.fishbasket.org/people_culture

Each generation is raised on the water every summer season, learning the ways of their ancestors, creating a strong work ethic, and appreciating the significance of the world's single largest salmon run and sockeye fishery.

The protection of Bristol Bay from offshore oil and gas development has been one of WWF's highest priorities and a win for the people and wildlife of Bristol Bay.

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For more than 40 years Bristol Bay has been threatened by oil and gas development that could cause irreparable harm to this economically valuable fishery and rich cultural home.

In response a broad group came together to form the "Fish Basket Coalition" and together opposed offshore drilling in Bristol Bay.

The group comprises more than 66 Alaska Native and commercial fishing organizations, hundreds of fishermen, and NGOs – including WWF.

The Fish Basket Coalition, along with thousands of voices from the United States and around the world joined in a call for action for protection of this critical marine ecosystem.

Small family businesses to trade associations representing sectors of the fishing industry to large seafood companies were of one mind – that the valuable fisheries should not be put at risk.

President Obama listened, and on December 16, 2014 he announced the protection of Bristol Bay from offshore oil and gas drilling.

Together we celebrate the action by President Obama, to preserve this beautiful natural wonder for future generations.

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