

Identifying sources of conflict in Cook Inlet and Kenai River salmon fisheries within the context of resource sustainability

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Overview

- Background on Cook Inlet fisheries
- Methods of this study
- Why we fight
- Redpath et. al.'s framework for identifying sources of conflict (2013)
- How do CI fisheries fit into this framework?
- What does that suggest for the future sustainability of these fisheries?

Background on Cook Inlet Salmon Fisheries

- Tremendous economic engine made up of various “sectors” based around gear-type (sport, commercial, personal use, minimal subsistence/education permits)
- Accessible by road system, close proximity to major population centers, easy access to the casual user
- Kenai River runs are part of a maximally allocated system with five species of Pacific salmon returning annually
- Fishers are often organized within advocacy groups that take part in political action focused on allocation issues
- Conflict over allocation and conservation issues are highly contentious and primarily cycle around the AK Board of Fisheries process

Research Design

How do we capture and understand the human dimension?

- Personal Interviews
 - Commercial (drift and set gillnet)
 - Sport (guides and private)
 - Personal use (dip-net)
 - Industry leaders and actors
 - other key informants
- Participant observation
 - Participation with commercial operators, guides, Summer '11 and '12

What does conflict look like in Cook Inlet?

- Perceived threats to livelihoods, economic stability
- Dehumanization of activities by which participants self-identify
- Cultural practices (teaching children, family activities) that are often undermined in management and allocation discussions
- Expressed exhaustion by fishers in engaging in conflict over several decades

What does conflict look like in Cook Inlet?

“KRSA cause conflict in our c
- Peninsula Clarion Op-Ed



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Redpath's framework for understanding conflict

- Steve M. Redpath, et. al. *Understanding and managing conservation conflicts*, Trends in Ecology & Evolution, Volume 28, Issue 2, February 2013.
- Identifies six limiting factors to successfully managing a system in conflict
- We've evaluated Cook Inlet salmon fisheries against those factors to seek insight into the causes of conflict
- Compared our findings within this framework with the thoughts and feelings of fishers from our interview work

Six barriers to conflict management

- Unwillingness of parties to engage
- Striving for unrealistic goals (win-lose scenarios)
- Spatial and temporal scales
- Financial incentives
- Representations of conflict in the media
- Legislation

Unwillingness for parties to engage

- Fishers often represented by advocacy or political action groups that pool resources to enact litigation efforts, etc.
 - Can often encourage “group think” behaviors where individual beliefs are lost in the need to follow a party line
- Groups have organized to work against each other, particularly during BOF meetings
- Language from fishers revolving around fear, anger, and suspicion regarding other groups

Striving for unrealistic goals

- Many fishers perceive that most proposed solutions to problems with this CI fisheries are win-lose, disenfranchising or eliminating particular user groups;
- Management structure does not current allow decision-makers to account for social and cultural aspects of fishing;
- Fishers often unwilling to engage with other groups, but desire others to understand the intricacies of their participation
- Sweeping generalizations during dialogue do not lend themselves toward achieving nuanced change to overarching problems

Considering spatial and temporal scales

- Arguments stemmed from many years ago remain in the memory of industry leaders, adding to mistrust of others and unwillingness to engage; fresh efforts are often discouraged as “hopeless” or “naïve”
- CI’s fisheries management system takes place on several different and disconnected levels; ADF&G sport and comm. Fish divisions have diametrically opposed missions in management

Financial Incentives

- Because each user group has such a large economic investment in their fishery, changes in allocation or status quo within management represent a potential threat to individual economic stability
- Fishermen lament that perceive unpredictable management make the economic risk of buying into the fishery nearly intolerable for the next generation
- Deep pocketed interest groups are perceived to be a serious threat to ecological and social well-being of the entire system
- Redpath et. Al. point out that the incorrect design of monetary conservation incentives can lead to poverty traps, bankruptcy, and dependency, all of which are least desirable results to fishers (i.e. buying out permits, federal disaster relief)

Representations of Conflict in the Media

- The brevity and “snapshot” approach of print media often neglects the nuances of fishing perspectives, creating generalizations or other sensationalized imagery of the fishery
- Efforts on behalf of advocacy groups (blogs, etc.) can act as anonymous soapboxes for one-sided rhetoric, often picked up by the press and shared as “news” or “fact”
- Can result in dehumanization and the basis of conflict being broken down into sound-bites rather than meaningful dialogue

Legislation

- The political process is highly distrusted by fishers, most feeling that they have little to no influence except through collective action and financial contributions.

“I consider \$1000 toward [advocacy group] part of the cost of doing business now. It’s the only way a single guy can have a voice.”

- “I don’t trust ADF&G. The local guys are fine, but they are controlled by some politician in Juneau and as soon as they make a decision they get overridden. The management plan is a joke.”
- Most recent effort: ballot initiative to eliminate setnet fleets around “urban” areas in Alaska (including CI)

Conclusions

- Cook Inlet fisheries meet all six of Redpath et. al.'s categories for barriers to sustainability surrounding conflict
- These sources of conflict are prevalent and long-standing in Cook Inlet, further cementing them as a potential rigidity trap
- Under these circumstances, there are significant barriers to resolving conflict. There is significant concern in the fishing community that the fishery system as a whole faces significant detriment if users cannot organize to face more significant problems (i.e. climate change) together

What else does this data set tell us?

- Beginning identification of sources of conflict
 - Points of conflict (aside from Redpath's framework)
 - potential points of consensus
 - inclusive dialogue and problem solving
- Identification of gaps in the information streams
- Identification of potential research topics
 - Does the culture of Cook Inlet fishermen now include inheriting conflict?
 - Are there avenues by which this conflict could be mediated?
 - What are the major impediments for conflict resolution?

Questions?

