

ABORIGINAL

NON-ABORIGINAL

Introduction

Since the 1970s important changes have occurred along the west coast of North America with respect to the Native people's use and control of natural resources. The Coast Salish of the Northwest Coast controlled a traditional fishery that not only met their needs for subsistence but had the potential to develop into an integral part of the resource-based economy of the Pacific Coast. Native people played important roles in the development of the commercial salmon fishing industry of British Columbia and Washington State (Knight 1978; Boxberger 1989) but this changed dramatically in subsequent years as technological changes and competing labour groups worked to marginalize Native participation. In addition to the economic forces at work Native people were also subject to the assimilationist policies of Canada and the United States, which served to further limit Native access to the salmon fishery.

This paper examines the post-contact salmon fishery of the Coast Salish of British Columbia and Washington State especially focusing on recent court cases which have upheld the aboriginal right of access to the resource. Particular attention will be given to the comparative analysis of adjudicated resource rights in Puget Sound and the Fraser River. While there have been several recent studies of the role of Native people in the commercial fisheries of the Northwest (for British Columbia see Pinkerton (1987) and Newell (1993), for Washington State see Cohen (1986) and Boxberger (1989), for southeast Alaska see Price (1990), there have not been any attempts to compare the differing experiences in Canada and the United States for the purpose of providing insight into resource rights and policy.