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CANADA ACTS ON PACIFIC SALMON

Canada's Minister of Fisheries and Oceans, Brian Tobin, and British Columbia's Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, David Zirnelt, announced on June 9 that all U.S. commercial fishing vessels passing through several British Columbia waterways would be required to pay a C\$1,500 license fee each way, effective June 15.

The passages, which are all internal Canadian waters, include the Strait of Georgia between Vancouver Island and the mainland and several other sounds and channels that are frequently used by boats from the U.S. Pacific Northwest to reach salmon fishing grounds off Alaska. American boats had previously been exempt from paying a license fee, required of all other foreign vessels.

Tobin said that imposition of the fee was necessitated by the breakdown of negotiations on joint fishing management regimes under the Pacific Salmon Treaty.

Because salmon travel long distances during their life cycles, migrating from freshwater streams to the ocean and back to their native streams to spawn, fishermen from the U.S. commonly intercept Canadian salmon in the open waters of the ocean and Canadian fishermen often catch American fish. Canada and the U.S. signed the Pacific Salmon Treaty in 1985 to conserve and rebuild dwindling salmon stocks and to set limits on major interception fisheries.

The treaty was based on two principles: conservation, to prevent overfishing and maximize production, and equity, to ensure that each country receives benefits equivalent to the production of salmon in its waters.

The equity principle is of concern to Canada because American fishermen intercept a much greater amount of Canadian-origin salmon than Canadians catch of American fish. In 1993, American fishermen caught nine million fish spawned in British Columbia while Canadian fishermen took less than four million fish spawned in Washington State and Oregon, an imbalance worth \$65 million. Since the treaty was signed,



the U.S. has increased its interceptions of Canadian salmon by 50 per cent while Canada has reduced its interceptions of American fish by 40 per cent. Virtually all the increase in U.S. interceptions occurred in Alaska.

By the end of 1992 most of the fishing arrangements specified in the treaty had expired. Recent negotiations to set long-term fishing arrangements and to redress the imbalance of interceptions have produced little progress.

Canada has rejected a U.S. proposal to double the catch of Canadian-origin sockeye in Alaska and in Washington State because it would further worsen the imbalance. Canada has expressed willingness to meet the U.S. demand to reduce the harvest of endangered coho and chinook from Washington and Oregon by Canadian fishermen, but in return is asking for help from Alaskan fishermen to protect its threatened northern coho stocks. The U.S. has yet to respond.

Comprehensive Canadian conservation efforts over the last three decades have resulted in record sockeye runs in

the Fraser River. Canada has restricted harvesting, banned hydroelectric development on the main stem of the river and invested almost \$300 million in hatcheries and habitat improvements. By contrast, the stocks of coho and chinook salmon returning to spawn in Washington and Oregon rivers have declined severely, because of hydroelectric development on the Columbia River system and habitat destruction from mining, logging and agriculture. The U.S. Pacific Fisheries Management Council has imposed an extensive ban on ocean salmon fishing this year for Washington, Oregon and northern California.

Canada's fisheries minister said after announcing the new license fee: "We are not going to give free passage to a nation that has indicated its intention to take two million more fish this year than last year, thus raising the inequity from six to eight million fish."

The license fee was recommended by an advisory panel of representatives of B.C. commercial, sport and Aboriginal fisheries. John Radosevic, president of the United Fishermen and Allied Workers' Union, said after meeting with the fisheries ministers: "We don't really have an option....(The Americans) are now relying on Canadian rivers, but we've kept the dams off our rivers and saved our wild runs."

Tobin emphasized that Canada did not wish to start a fish war that would jeopardize salmon stocks and would continue to fish "in a manner consistent with conservation." He said, however, that the license fee was only the first in a series of steps Canada plans to take to "(slow) down the U.S. assault on a fragile Canadian resource," and to encourage the U.S. to return to the negotiating table.

A spokeswoman for the State Department said that the United States was examining its options to respond, but "believes that Canada should put aside this confrontational approach and return to a reasoned dialogue."