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Business/Economy

Bering Sea cod fishery opens 2020 in Alaska

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Alaska's seafood industry is "open for business" starting Jan. 1, when some of the biggest fisheries get underway long before the start of the first salmon runs in mid-May.

Cod begins it all in the Bering Sea, which has a 305.5-million-pound catch quota, down about a million pounds from 2019. Less than 6 million pounds of codfish will come out of the Gulf.

A 400,000 Tanner crab fishery at Kodiak starting on Jan. 15 will be helpful to a town whose economic bottom line will be badly battered by the Gulf cod crash.

But it will be the opening of Alaska pollock on Jan. 20 that will keep Kodiak's processing workforce on the job, along with many other Gulf and Bering Sea communities.

The Gulf of Alaska pollock catch took a slide to about 250 million pounds, a drop of more than 57 million pounds from 2019. Conversely, the Bering Sea will produce over 3 billion pounds of Alaska pollock this year, a 2% increase.

Mid-January is also around the time when Bering Sea crabbers will get serious about pulling up snow crab. That quota is nearly 34 million pounds, a 24% increase from last season.

Southeast Alaska crabbers will drop pots for golden king crab and Tanner crab on Feb. 17. In recent years, those harvests have been in the 76,000- and 1 million-pound range, respectively.

Halibut fisheries will open to more than 2,000 Alaska longliners in March. Catches will be announced by the International Pacific Halibut Commission in early February.

Also coming in the spring: roe herring fisheries with some jaw-dropping harvests. At Sitka Sound, a catch quota of 25,824 tons is double the limit from 2019, when the fishery was called off for the first time in decades due to the small size of the fish. Managers predict heftier herring next spring, saying the forecast 2020 age 4 herring population is "extremely high."

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