

January 2008 This month's highlights

National Fisherman launched its Web site in 1997, not because we knew what we were doing, but because we did not: Everyone was launching Web sites, and we didn't want to get left out.

In fact, my predecessor as editor, Sam Smith, was originally brought on board to design the site, which he did.

He did an admirable job, but within a year or two the dedicated position of Web editor disappeared — not long after the revenue model did — and for the next several years Senior Editor Linc Bedrosian and I more or less performed as Web caretakers.

That changed two years ago with the hiring of Jes Hathaway as associate editor. In addition to a creative eye and the conventional skills of a print journalist, Jes brought with her youthful appreciation of the Internet and lots



Jes Hathaway

of energy, and undertook the task of making the *NF* site interesting, engaging and useful. And so it was that in November we unveiled the most recent incarnation of our Web site at Pacific Marine Expo in Seattle, complete with a clean new look, improved navigation and, we believe, content to keep a commercial fishing audience engaged.

That said, it's all a bit of a guessing game, so please don't hesitate to "blog in" to www.nationalfisherman.com and let us know what you like and what you don't, and what we need to do

to keep you coming back for more.

Fishing is a complicated business, and it's also an expensive one, so when you invest a ton of money in a boat and gear to enter a new fishery, you need to have your ducks in a row.

Just ask New Jersey's Ed Blaine, a longtime commercial fisherman who could see a future in general category (open-access) scalloping even as the sun was beginning to set on his conch fishery.

Assured that he would not be victimized by a control date, in 2004 Blaine bought a 45-foot Nova Scotia boat and rigged it to tow scallop dredges.

You know how this one turns out. In the weeks between the time Blaine bought the boat and the time he was rigged and ready to fish with permit in hand, the New England council had



Kirk Moore

established a control date.

As a result, by spring Blaine found himself on the outside looking in.

Veteran correspondent Kirk Moore of the *Asbury Park* (N.J.) *Press*

took a ride with Blaine and his crew aboard the *Laura Marie* and gives us an at-sea account of the fishery as well as Blaine's plan to hold on (p. 26).

I'm happy to present our second annual "crew shots" edition (p. 22). I just wish someone could tell me why East Coast and southern fishermen are so camera shy. — *Jerry Fraser*

Northern lights

Returning home

"And so, you're doing what? You two are moving off Maui to live in Juneau? Mmm... and why?" Kirk and I have been asked this question many times in this past year. Our response has been our simple motto: "We believe in a better way." The success and popularity of our family salmon fishing business now demands our year-round, full-time attention.



By Heather and Kirk Hardcastle

We both grew up around the Pacific Ocean and its fishing communities in the early '70s. Many of Kirk's earliest memories are of old fishermen and even older boats heading out for their next catch from Bodega Bay, Calif. I remember the sound of the old Evinrude and the smell of gasoline as my brother, "Grandpa" Gordon, Dad and I idled in Southeast Alaska's inlets and watched countless salmon fins cutting the surface all around our skiff. When not commercial fishing, that was what we did; we watched the wild salmon return home. The salmon's perseverance and sense of purpose left a lasting impression on a young girl. Little did I know then that I, too, would become a fisherwoman just like so many of the adults of my childhood. Like the next salmon generation, I would return home.

As each of us grew older, our lives took us away from fishing. We moved away from our respective homes in Juneau, Alaska, and Sonoma County, Calif., attained undergraduate degrees and traveled the globe. We explored various cultures, professions and places. The single common thread through our individual wanderings was the ocean. By the time we finally met on a boat off Maui in 1998, we were both marine biologists. We recognized that living near and working on the ocean sustained us. It would take us a little longer to realize that salmon, specifically, is our lifeblood.



The year after we met, we began to spend our summers based in Juneau and our winters on Maui. At first, we split our Alaskan summers between work as naturalists aboard eco-tour boats and commercial fishing with my parents in Taku Inlet aboard the *Heather Anne*. Gradually, over the course of four years, our summers were wholly devoted to salmon fishing.

I have always been fascinated by the conversations Dad shared with other Taku Inlet salmon drift net fishermen. As typical of fishermen everywhere, they bemoaned the lack of fish, falling fish prices and rising fuel costs. But I also clearly remember their obvious awe for their target catch: "Whew, this week sure brought some gorgeous blue-back Tatsamenies!" (That's a large, fatty sockeye salmon bound to spawn in Tatsamenie Lake, far from the Taku River mouth). I sensed many local fishermen share a reverence for the individuality of each salmon.

Kirk grew up in a region where food is celebrated and quality is appreciated. Surrounded by an open ocean, vineyards and small organic farms, Kirk learned as a young boy the origins of his food and drink. Working as a chef, he developed a high culinary standard. He

learned the best meals are prepared with fresh, premium ingredients from local farmers and fishermen. Produce and seafood are not just commodities to be bought and sold; they are foods to be consumed for nourishment and pleasure.

Our family's epiphany in 2003 was the realization that our respect for, and careful handling of, our salmon simply ended when we sold our catch to large fish processors. We knew we had to shepherd our catch from ocean to market, treating each fish as the outstanding food source that it is. We formed our direct marketing company, *Taku River Reds*, before the onset of the 2003 fishing season. Our business now catches, carefully handles, processes, packages and ships our salmon products year-round to markets countrywide.

The centuries-old French word *terroir* is a favorite of our California winemaker friends. This term can be loosely translated as the sense of place of a food product — the ability to taste the geography and human handling of the food we eat. We feel wild Alaska salmon must certainly have a rich *terroir* that embodies the rugged, wild ecosystems that sustain these salmon. Our passion is to ensure the *terroir* of our salmon products also embodies the unique care we impart as fishermen.

We like the quote from 13th century Persian poet Rumi, "Let the beauty you love be the work you do." We cannot imagine work we'd find more fulfilling. To say we believe in a *better* way is to really say that we honor an *ancient* way. Just like the wild salmon, Kirk and I are returning home. **NF**

Heather Hardcastle and her husband, Kirk, are second-generation commercial salmon fishermen and members of the direct marketing firm, Taku River Reds, based in Juneau, Alaska.