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Submitted On
2/24/2019 1:53:47 PM
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Hello,

I recently bought a gasket set from the Caterpillar dealer in Anchorage. Just gaskets, \$600. I'm a decent mechanic but a little intimidated by the upcoming job. If something goes wrong, it'll be expensive and stressful. My boat's 46 years old but still in ok shape. Hank took pretty good care of it but he was kind of a slob. I found old stogies up in the berth. I wonder if he's still alive. Since I've owned it, I tackle one big project each winter to keep it fishing reliably. This winter I have to remove the cylinder heads from the engine to replace leaking coolant sleeves. I hate tearing apart a good running engine to fix a slow drip.

For the last few months, I've been telling myself that if I do things just right, the last of my cash will buy fuel and Phoenix's crew member's license. CFEC's permit and vessel fees have been paid. So have the IFQ fees. Harbor fees and Coast Guard documentaion are due next month. And of course taxes in April but after last year they shouldn't be too bad. I've got enough argon and wire to do the welding. The EPIRB battery's good through the end of July and I'm going to wait until the very end on that. The big flares and smokes are good through October. The handheld flares are expired and need to be replaced. The fire extinguishers are due for recertification. I need to tie more gangions but shouldn't have to buy anything. I hung new nets for last year and for all practical purposes, they're still new. I've got a box of squid in the freezer that Keith gave me and I should be able to catch a few bucketfuls of herring in May. That'll be enough bait to get me started. With a little luck, Phoenix and I will have a productive first trip and get the cash flow going the other way.

I was so happy to hear that Phoenix was going to fish. I'm always afraid that I'm going to scare him off. I don't want to be too hard on him but he's got to pay attention and it bugs me when he's lazy. Since about Christmas, I tried to pin him down but all I could get out of him was "I'll try." I asked my daughter a few weeks ago what his deal was. I told her it's ok if he doesn't want to go, if he wants to hang out with his friends or try to make more money doing something else. I just need him to shit or get off the pot. She said she'd talk to him. She called back last week to say that he wants to go. She said it's just a teenager thing, he answers most of her questions by shrugging his shoulders. I told her to let him know that it should be better than last year. He'll have the additional share from his first long-lining trip and hopefully we'll get more salmon fishing time.

My grandson is growing up in uncertain times. I don't take him fishing with me because I want him to make a career of it. I don't think that's such a hot idea. Fishing might help pay his way through college. Or not. I just want to help him be able to land on his feet no matter what the future brings. He is kind of an oddball kid, like I was. I worked at more mainstream jobs before and after graduating from college. I chose fishing because it's a good intellectual challenge and it helps keep me fit. I believe it's still an honest way to make a living, even in Cook Inlet. I remind Phoenix that the fish we catch are food. Treat them with respect, even the pinks. Because this winter, that's what we're eating.

Brian, a young fisherman friend of mine came to visit a couple days ago. His wife just had their second child, a girl. He and his two year old son needed to get out of the house for a bit. He sold his Cook Inlet permit after just one season of corridor fishing and bought into Bristol Bay. He brought news that Keith, a 30 year Cook Inlet fisherman and whom I've previously mentioned, just bought a Bay permit. That got me thinking about my own course for diversification and efforts to keep my fishing business viable. I've always had a strict policy of no debt. Hence, the 46 year old boat and no hired diesel mechanics, etc. If I had the money, should I flee the Inlet too? What would I do? Buy a few more halibut shares? I've just barely got my toe in the door of that fishery. Should I consider borrowing so I could buy into one of the other salmon fisheries? If that mine is allowed to procede, Bristol Bay permits will instantly lose value. If there are a couple years of poor sockeye returns, they'll lose more.

What do you guys think I should do? Recreational fishing interests have become a juggernaut and I'm in their way. My state claims pride in it's commercial fishing heritage but doesn't seem inclined to preserve it. Every year I get squeezed a little harder. Economic development trumps fish habitat preservation.

What do I want you to do? Don't let the mob have it all. I'm limited entry. Why not them? We don't all get to hunt bears on Kodiak or sheep up at Tok or moose on the Twentymile. Award Kenai River Dipnet permits and king salmon stamps by random drawing. 100% of the fish I catch are responsibly cared for. They all end up on the tables of people who enjoy seafood but are either unable or unwilling to catch it themselves. What's wrong with that?

I look around for bright spots. Phoenix is going. That's good. It's highly unlikely that this year's salmon season can be worse than last year's. That's about it.

Thanks.