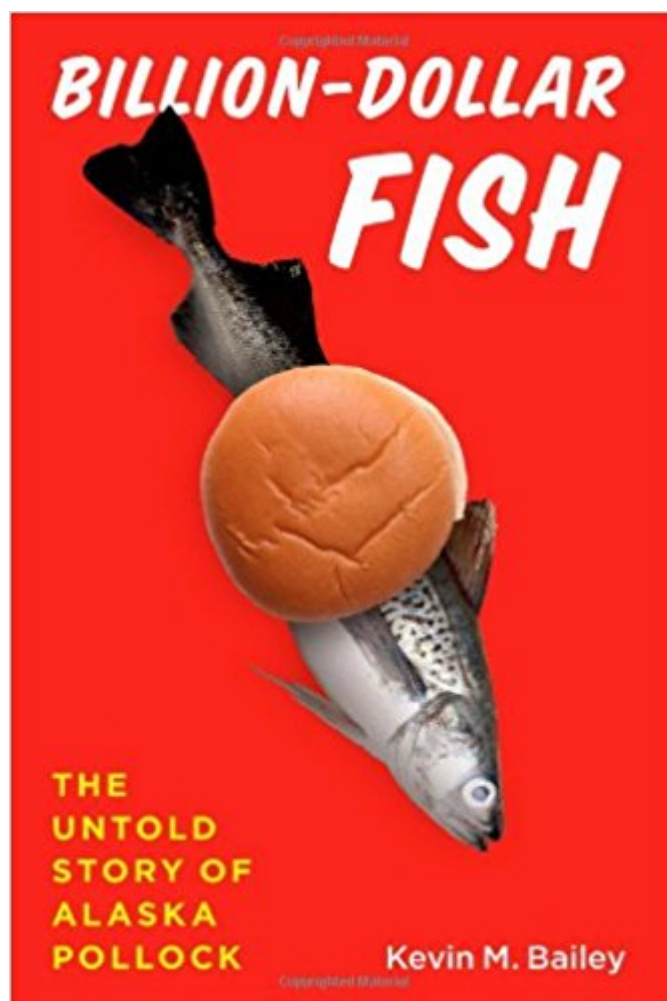


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Billion-Dollar Fish: The Untold Story Of Alaska Pollock



Synopsis

Alaska pollock is everywhere. If you're eating fish but you don't know what kind it is, it's almost certainly pollock. Prized for its generic fish taste, pollock masquerades as crab meat in California rolls and seafood salads, and it feeds millions as fish sticks in school cafeterias and Filet-O-Fish sandwiches at McDonald's. That ubiquity has made pollock the most lucrative fish harvest in America—the fishery in the United States alone has an annual value of over one billion dollars. But even as the money rolls in, pollock is in trouble: in the last few years, the pollock population has declined by more than half, and some scientists are predicting the fishery's eventual collapse. In *Billion-Dollar Fish*, Kevin M. Bailey combines his years of firsthand pollock research with a remarkable talent for storytelling to offer the first natural history of Alaska pollock. Crucial to understanding the pollock fishery, he shows, is recognizing what aspects of its natural history make pollock so very desirable to fish, while at the same time making it resilient, yet highly vulnerable to overfishing. Bailey delves into the science, politics, and economics surrounding Alaska pollock in the Bering Sea, detailing the development of the fishery, the various political machinations that have led to its current management, and, perhaps most important, its impending demise. He approaches his subject from multiple angles, bringing in the perspectives of fishermen, politicians, environmentalists, and biologists, and drawing on revealing interviews with players who range from Greenpeace activists to fishing industry lawyers. Seamlessly weaving the biology and ecology of pollock with the history and politics of the fishery, as well as Bailey's own often raucous tales about life at sea, *Billion-Dollar Fish* is a book for every person interested in the troubled relationship between fish and humans, from the depths of the sea to the dinner plate.

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Customer Reviews

It's the most common fish on America's tables and in its fast-food restaurants, but few know much about the origins and marketing of Alaska pollock. Netted by fishermen in the Bering Sea, Alaska pollock has done for Pacific fisheries what cod once did for the Atlantic. Ground and processed, Alaska pollock becomes surimi, which goes to table as imitation crabmeat. Cut into shapes, it appears in supermarket freezers as fish sticks and at fast-food restaurants as fish sandwich filling, prized for its "neutral, nonfishy taste. Biologist Bailey served as an inspector on a Japanese fishing trawler, and this experience led him on a quest to learn as much as possible about this sea creature currently so vital to the world's tables. He finds pollock populations to be extraordinarily resilient but nevertheless vulnerable to overfishing. Bailey traces the history of fishery regulation back to the seventeenth century, and he tries to identify parallel problems and solutions encountered by the Atlantic cod industries' boom and bust. --Mark Knoblauch

"Few would be accused of romanticising the pollock—a fish about which only the most devoted marine biologists would use the word 'charismatic.' But the fishermen's tales of its hunting to near extinction are no less fantastical. . . .

[Bailey's] book isn't really about the fish at all. It is about a modern-day gold rush, a Wild West of the high seas, and an environmental catastrophe." (Tom Whipple *Times* (UK)) "Bailey blends science with competitive fighting over a substantial pile of money. . . .

Never boring or entangled in scientific jargon, *Billion-Dollar Fish* practically makes pollock fishing out to be *The Old Man and the Sea*. (Shelf Awareness) "[T]he first natural history of this ubiquitous fish and an analysis of its population. Although the market for pollock—worth more than a billion dollars a year in the United States alone—seems buoyant compared with some others, Bailey unveils a familiar tale of steep decline." (Barbara Kiser *Nature*) "Not that it's a bad thing, but sometimes *Billion-Dollar Fish* reads like two different books: one a compelling history of the Alaska pollock fishery, the other an excellent primer on the development of fisheries science and resource strategy." (Tyrone Burke Canadian

Geographic) "*Billion-Dollar Fish* is an eye-opener for those who have caught themselves

pondering the origins of their fried fish sandwiches. (Erin Wayman ScienceNews) [Bailey] writes in a workmanlike style but lightens his account with sporadic portraits of colorful and powerful personalities from the commercial fishing business and its environmentalist antagonists. . . . Billion-Dollar Fish conveys the story of pollock with his skeptical, but affectionate, eye for industrial and environmental claims alike. (Elizabeth Lester Science) [Bailey] paints a revealing picture of the colourful personalities at sea and ashore whose economic imperatives raised rates of fishing mortality to levels which, experience was to show, made little long-term biological or even economic sense. (Richard Shelton Times Literary Supplement) "Bailey is more than a fishery biologist specializing in Alaskan pollock. He is also a talented writer with a graceful style who can casually deliver a wealth of unusual insights and enliven his topic. . . . Bailey is one of those aristocrats among science writers whose work illuminates his field, rewarding general readers as well as professionals. Billion-Dollar Fish is the most authoritative source of information on the US's most important fish. Essential. (F. T. Manheim, George Mason University Choice) 2013 Outstanding Academic Title (Choice) "An engaging, knowledgeable, and entertaining book. . . . Bailey's book is an eloquent illustration of the ways in which human institutions, useful at first, can run out of control and do more harm than good. (Paul J. B. Hart, University of Leicester Fish and Fisheries) "Bailey has written a very personal account of the Alaska pollock as an industry, a food source, and a species. His ability to see multiple viewpoints comes from a career on commercial boats, aboard research vessels, with Alaskan communities, and in laboratories. . . . [Bailey] sheds light on the complex ways that industry figures, politicians, and scientists use their different stores of money, power, and knowledge to influence the decisions that affect pollock populations, the fisheries, and their management. The wide scope of Billion-Dollar Fish means that every reader, regardless of his or her background, will learn new things from this book. (Jake Rice, Fisheries and Oceans Canada BioScience) "This is an excellent book, . . . full of exciting tales of Norse cowboys, native peoples, fish biologists, and a multitude of fishers battling the mighty North Pacific with plenty of heroics, risk, stupidity, and adventures. Of the various books I've reviewed so far, I'd have to give it my highest rating of 10 fish. (Orlay Johnson American Fisheries Society, Washington-British Columbia Chapter) "A modern-day tale of an aquatic gold rush. . . . Bailey is an accomplished fisheries scientist, yet he does a remarkable job of providing insightful social and economic viewpoints. His breadth of discussion and the historical context throughout the book is rich and multifaceted with diverse perspectives from environmentalists, businessmen, scientists, and even popular culture. . . .

Billion-Dollar Fish should be required reading for students of conservation and the environment, anyone involved in the fishing industry, or general readers with a healthy curiosity of humanity's relationship with the natural world. (David D. Huff, University of California, Santa Cruz Quarterly Review of Biology)

"Bailey does an excellent job describing the biology and ecology of the species he has spent much time researching, but he does well beyond these topics. Bailey describes the fishery from the perspectives of the fishermen, politicians, environmentalists, and scientists. These perspectives are pieced together from books, scientific papers, popular press articles, and Bailey's recollections. Additionally, these perspectives are masterfully brought to life through in-depth interviews, and Bailey's descriptions give the reader a sense of being present at the interview while experiencing the emotions of interviewer and interviewee. . . . Given its interdisciplinary range, this book would be appropriate for readers interested in the environment, conservation, history, politics, policy, biology, oceans, and fishing. Readers will appreciate the pictures, figures, and sidebars throughout the book. . . . Billion-Dollar Fish could be used as a case study in undergraduate or graduate courses in fisheries and conservation biology or in other disciplines such as economics, management, and social sciences. (Fisheries)

"It is remarkable that a book describing one of our nation's largest fisheries has never been written until now. Lucky for us, Kevin M. Bailey, a well-respected fisheries scientist who knows the fish and fishery better than anyone, tells the story of the billion-dollar fish that few know by name—Alaska pollock. Bailey creates an anticipation of what happens next to the fish, fishermen, environmentalists, politicians, and scientists that makes it hard to put this book down. (Jeffrey Buckel, North Carolina State University)

"With the clear eye of a scientist and firsthand experience out on the high seas, Kevin M. Bailey presents the explosive rise and potential collapse of America's most valuable fishery. Surprising and disconcerting, beautifully written and thoroughly researched, Kevin M. Bailey's Billion-Dollar Fish gets to the bottom of how and why we decimate what could continuously provide substantial sustenance and wealth. With compassion and clarity, he points a way out of this difficult and inexcusable mess. All of us who eat fish will want to know this story. (Deborah Cramer, author of Great Waters and Smithsonian Ocean)

"Kevin M. Bailey turns his well-honed research and writing skills to explain how science, international economics, and national politics turned the lowly walleye pollock into the billion-dollar fish. This story will inform, entertain, and astonish its readers with the complexities of managing the removal of protein from the sea for human consumption. (Jeffrey Napp, Fisheries Oceanographer)

"Kevin M. Bailey's Billion-Dollar Fish captures the

high-stakes international battles over the business and biology of Alaska pollock fishing, the most valuable food fishery in the world. Bailey's perspective is as a noncombatant giving scientific advice in a battle for money conducted on the battleground of the sea. Such battles have been and continue to be fought over many other species in all parts of the sea—for example, codfish, whales, tuna, and squid. This book provides an accessible and entertaining description of decades of hidden financial and scientific battles over a fish that most of us have eaten, unaware of this war. (Tim D. Smith, author of *Scaling Fisheries: The Science of Measuring the Effects of Fishing*, 1855–1955)

The book is a complete look at the history of the fishing industry as it relates to the Alaskan pollack, a fish which has become one of the most eaten fish in the world. Originally considered a trash fish, the pollack has gone on to be eaten in numerous ways and in dozens of countries and it supports a massive fishery in the waters of Alaska. The book begins with the history of fishing for cod in Alaska waters and covers the period when anyone with a net could fish just about anywhere. It details the feud between foreign fisherman and US based fisherman and how this led to creating exclusive economic zones for fishing in the waters surrounding all nations. Now the fighting that goes on is between smaller US vessels known as day boats and the larger and much more productive factory druggers. That fight still continues, and most likely will for the foreseeable future. The book offers the history of the pollack, but this same story could apply to dozens of other fisheries in the United States, particularly the cod fishery in New England, which has all but shut down. The Alaskan pollack is a success story as it is considered to be a self sustaining fishery, which will hopefully produce fish to the US Markets for some time to come. Certainly more work and study is needed, but at the current time, this is state of the art fishery management. This book is a fascinating look at the history of a fishery and how it can be managed so that it continues to produce fish and keep fishermen working. I would highly recommend it to those interested in fisheries management or to those simply curious about the fish that they eat.

The Bering Sea Pollock fishery is currently the largest single fishery, by volume, for the U.S. and Russia, which share the Bering Sea. Kevin Bailey's "Billion-Dollar Fish" tells the history of that fishery and in the process explores the challenges of modern fisheries management. Bailey takes a meandering path through his topic, mixing personal anecdotes about time at sea in the Bering with almost breathless accounts of the intense commercial competition to exploit the Pollock fishery, and with some careful commentary on the shifting and evolving state of the marine science which has

influenced the management of the fishery over the years. There are well-developed vignettes about some of the colorful and strong characters one can encounter in Alaskan fisheries. Bailey devotes time and effort to describing the controversial politics of managing the Bering Sea fishery, especially as it has played out in the State of Alaska and in the U.S. Congress. The processes Bailey describes have led on the one hand to the undoubted disaster of the doughnut hole, still barren of Pollock twenty years after a moratorium ending fishing there, and on the other hand, to the current thriving Bering Sea Pollock fishery, albeit with a challenging future. This book would likely have benefited from additional editing; those readers not already familiar with the fisheries business may find it hard to follow. Readers wedded to a particular point of view on the subject of fisheries may be frustrated by Bailey's evenhanded approach. However, this fisheries analyst and former Alaska resident found much of interest in the book, and appreciated Bailey's willingness to admit the limits of the current science and to explore all sides of a complicated topic. Recommended.

Formerly working in the Industry, and proud to have done so, I found this book extremely even-handed, and appreciated the author's knowledge of international treaties, such as Quota Allocations, that affect every fin-and-feather lover on the Big Blue Marble. Believe it or not, commercial fishing concerns would like to be in business generations down the road...

This book was fascinating and well written. I worked in the industry for most of a decade and thought the book well balanced and researched.

More than history, more than science, more than politics, and more than a story of American entrepreneurial spirit; the author reveals the astonishing complexities surrounding this hidden fishery. This book has it all; successes and failures at individual as well as on grand human scales, conflict, unlikely cooperative efforts, controversy, humor, cutting edge science and ultimately uncertainty about the future of our environment and its biological resources. This is an important story.

I bought to get the science of the fishery. There was so many errors in the people of industry that I knew that I wonder if the science is very accurate ? I can only hope so. I feel if a book should be written it should have the information correct. It contradicts itself in the lives lost of people I knew and obviously was not researched or checked. Kevin

I have been in the industry for a long time, been there....I feel that I should get my money back

Thorough and detailed - this book tells all the tales of the North Pacific pollock fishery - from its beginnings to its rationalization to today's uncertainty. Includes interesting stories and personalities in the science, economics, and politics.

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