Captain Doug Chambers gillnets on Young's Bay.

Industry Spotlight:

Coronavirus cripples seafood market

Closure of local seafood processors and restaurants affecting commercial fishermen

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The outbreak of the covid-19 respiratory virus has rippled through seafood markets beginning with the Dungeness crab season in January and continuing with the commercial salmon season.

Closure of local seafood processors and limitations placed on restaurants has meant murky markets for commercial fishermen and seafood retailers for everything from salmon to razor clams.

"I usually could sell between 5,000 and 6,000 pounds a week, but now I'm down to 1,000," said Northwest Wild Products owner Ron Neva regarding razor clams sales.

"They're going to live markets because the restaurants aren't using them. Spring Chinook is 80% of the restaurant market. Normally my buyer could take 800 pounds every three days, but now he can only take 150 pounds."

Virus stunts vital spring salmon market

The first catch of the season often commands the highest price. Alaskan Copper River salmon, highly coveted for being among the first fish and highest fat content, can fetch in excess of $60 per pound on the retail market.

Commercial fisherman Jason Lake contends that local wild spring Chinook are equivalent in quality.

"Technically, these are the first fish on the market and they're just as good as Copper River salmon because of their fat and omega-3 content," Lake said.

"I usually could sell between 5,000 and 6,000 pounds of razor clams a week, but now I'm down to 1,000. Normally my Spring Chinook buyer could take 800 pounds every three days, but now he can only take 150 pounds."