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Norton Sound herring harvest sets another record for roe recovery

NOME—Norton Sound herring fishermen in June topped their own high mark set a year ago by harvesting herring with an all-time record recovery of roe. The 744 tons of herring harvested this year were comprised of 14.8 percent roe, on average. The previous record, set last year by Norton Sound harvesters, was 13.5 percent roe recovery.

In total, approximately 25 Norton Sound herring fishermen harvested 810 tons of herring, of which 66 tons were directed to a bait fishery. Fishermen were paid out a total of more than \$274,700 for the entire fishery, an average of \$339 per ton.

Prices paid per ton were determined by a sliding scale depending on the roe percentage. Roe recovery ranged from 9 percent to 20 percent, with the majority of the harvest coming in between 13 and 17 percent. Fishermen harvested the herring with gillnets.

Norton Sound Economic Development Corp. (NSEDCC) has worked to bring a herring buyer to the region for the last two years to conduct a fishery after several years of no commercial herring fishing. Through an agreement with NSEDCC, Icicle Seafoods has brought a processing vessel and tenders to Norton Sound in 2010 and 2011. The roe harvested is sold as a luxury food item in Japan and is often given out during the holidays as gifts.

In addition to negotiating an agreement with Icicle, NSEDCC supports the fishery through aerial surveys to determine when the fishing effort should begin and to direct fishermen to high-quality herring once the fishery commences. This year, biologists from NSEDCC's Norton Sound Fisheries Research and Development division flew 29 hours during 15 flights in support of the fishery.

"We would like to thank all our resident fishermen as well as the great crew Icicle brought to Norton Sound. From the crews of the processing vessel and tenders to the aerial survey support, Icicle provided excellent service to all aspects of the fishery," said Southern Norton Sound Seafood Products Manager Reese Huhta.

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About NSEDCC: Norton Sound Economic Development Corp. is a private 501(c)4 non-profit corporation representing 15 member communities and more than 8,490 people in the Bering Strait Region of Northwestern Alaska. NSEDCC is one of six Community Development Quota organizations in Alaska. NSEDCC maintains a balance between distant-water fisheries in the Bering Sea and Aleutian Islands. Key to that balance is the establishment of programs designed to provide immediate benefits to the residents of the region along with the continued pursuit of longer-term investments that provide a stable source of economic strength. For more information, see www.nsedc.com.

"NSEDCC will participate in the Bering Sea fisheries to provide economic development through education, employment, training and financial assistance to our member communities"