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## Russians visit North Coast to learn about U.S. fishing industry techniques

*Russia's Open World Program seeks to find new economic strategies*

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**LORI ASSA — The Daily Astorian**  
Steve Fick, owner of Fishhawk Fisheries, second from left, talks Thursday morning to a group of Russian delegates participating in an international exchange program about sustainable salmon fishing, including, from left, Andrey Tokarev, Petr Petrik and Sergei Popov.



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Through an interpreter, Petr Petrik, left, who is the director of a fishing corporation in Russia, comments on the lack of mechanization at a processing table at Fishhawk Fisheries. Also pictured, left to right, are Sergei Popov, Vladimir Kochelaevsky and Oleg Zaporotsky.

Standing inside Fishhawk Fisheries in Astoria, Sergei Popov tries to explain why gillnetters in Russia make half as much for their Pacific salmon as the fishermen do here.

"We're the same kind of people. We both work hard," he said through a translator. "What's different is the market opportunities and the prices for fish."

He takes out a map of Kamchatka, a peninsula in Russia roughly the size and

shape of California, where he and his fellow travelers - who visited Astoria this week - live with only 400,000 other people. He underlines their five hometowns with a pen: One up north, two on the central west coast, one on the central east coast and one near the southern tip.

Then, he traces the only road on the peninsula, starting on the central east coast and curving downward.

"The problem for us is transportation," said Popov, who leads an indigenous community fishing group.

"There are very few processors for local fish because they're hard to reach."

The markets and processors that do exist on the peninsula or in Moscow take in a lot of frozen fish, he said, which can withstand the long trip by boat or helicopter from distant fishing towns but is not worth as much. Popov is touring the Pacific Northwest this month to find new economic strategies with eight other people from Kamchatka who work with fisheries. The trip is part of the Open World Program, funded by the Russian legislature to introduce professionals in various Russian industries to their U.S. counterparts.

The group arrived in Astoria on Wednesday evening and talked with Pacific Marine Conservation Council director Peter Huhtala about community conservation efforts and marine protected areas. On Thursday, they toured Fishhawk Fisheries to learn about value-added fish processing, heard talks on seafood products and marketing from Michael Morrissey, director of the Oregon State University Seafood Lab and Mark Whitham, Sea Grant product development specialist, and learned about the North Coast's net-pen fishery from Tod Jones and Hans Radtke.

One aspect of the Open World Program, said facilitator Andrei Tokarev, is to introduce Russian delegates to how ordinary people live in America and to "show Americans what Russia looks like."

Some say Americans could learn from Kamchatka, a relatively untouched wilderness with free-flowing rivers that provide spawning grounds for a quarter of the North Pacific's salmon. It is one of the few places on earth where wild salmon are still thriving, and it could soon be a one-of-a-kind refuge for six native salmon species. The peninsula's government has proposed a network of salmon-protected areas that would dedicate nine rivers and more than six million acres to wild salmon production for food, profit, recreation and science.

But until the areas are approved, the salmon in Kamchatka are becoming more and more threatened by poaching and the development of extractive industries, said Sibyl Diver, an associate with the Portland-based Pacific Environment organization. As part of her group's effort to preserve wild salmon species worldwide, Diver is traveling with the Russian delegates and serving as a guide and translator.

"There is a lot of oil and gas development and mining in the region, and poachers who take salmon just for the roe and discard the rest," she said. "There's a tradeoff between healthy fishing and developing extractive industries, so we're here looking at how to make fishing work for local people."

Astoria offers a model for how to create a sustainable salmon economy and offers some insights that could be helpful to fishermen in Kamchatka, she said

"Here you have a lot of independent fishermen with a strong incentive to take care of the resource and who have continued to stay in business despite a decline in the local fish runs," said Diver.

One incentive that is bigger in the U.S. than in Russia is the demand for seafood, said Popov.

"The standard of living is different," he said. "There is more market demand here in the U.S. for fish products. You sell it right away in the cities."

The best markets for Kamchatka fishermen are in Korea and Japan, which, again, require high transportation

costs for independent fishermen.

So some economists, such as Vladimir Murzak, believe fish processing may be the best investment for the region. The challenge for his region's processors, he said, will be to process a lot of fish and make a high quality product that can be widely marketed.

"For us the amount processed is very high, but the quality is very low," he said in English.

Murzak came to the U.S. looking to find the best technologies for packaging and production, so the tours of Fishhawk Fisheries and the OSU Seafood Lab were a nice fit.

Morrissey told the group how the public-private partnership between OSU Seafood Lab and ShoreBank [Enterprise] Pacific was helping small processors in rural areas develop seafood products and packaging, and how marketing salmon in Kamchatka as wild-caught can draw higher prices. The group had questions: What kind of contract would a processor sign to take advantage of OSU resources? Does the seafood lab look at how to market fish by-products? Morrissey had answers.

When Jones stepped up to explain net-pens, everyone took a keen interest. Functioning hatcheries are rare in Kamchatka, and net pens are unknown. But Jones explained the reason for the hatcheries and net pens, and the funding for them, all trace back to the impact of hydroelectric dams and the decline in 13 wild salmon stocks on the Columbia River. Radtke told them a hatchery needs to be subsidized to make it a cost-effective endeavor, because with just 2-percent returns, the actual cost per harvested fish is \$30.

"That was a message that hit home with this group," said Diver. "It told them hatcheries are not the silver bullet. You have to preserve what you have."

It seemed during their visit to Astoria, the Russians and their American counterparts had found some common ground, even if most were not speaking the same language. Salmon fisheries are valuable, and they are also under pressure. An ocean apart, fishermen, processors, investors and scientists from Astoria and Kamchatka understand this.

The commonalties became clear to commercial fisherman Petr Petrik during the tour of Fishhawk Fisheries, as Steve Fick showed the group his docking area, fish washing station and machine shop. Petrik peppered him with questions through a translator. Then, as they parted ways, he found a few words they both understood.

Petrik pulled out a small wooden figure of a Koryak god, known to bring good luck in Kamchatka.

"Good luck in fishing," Petrik said in English, handing Fick the charm.

Fick raised the figure as if making a toast. "Good luck in fishing," he said.

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