

cross sound and the fairweather fishing grounds

Our Home, "Office", Playground... Lifeblood

Cross Sound lies at the northernmost entrance of Alaska's Inside Passage, a thousand-mile maze of rocky mountainous islands, interspersed with hundreds of miles of deep glacier-carved saltwater fiords, bays, and channels. The islands of southeast Alaska are drained by thousands of small streams, while larger rivers drain the snow-covered mountains of the mainland.

The cold clear waters of these streams support runs of Pacific salmon. In the late summer and fall, these streams swarm with spawning adult salmon. In the spring, the offspring of these salmon migrate downstream to feed, first in the shallow protected estuaries, and then in the open ocean.

These salmon runs supported Alaska natives for thousands of years. On a commercial scale, salmon fishing took hold in southeast Alaska in the late 1880s, with the development of canning. By the early 20th century, a commercial fishing fleet was harvesting salmon runs migrating through Cross Sound.

A small fish-buying station was established in the 1930s in Elfin Cove, on the north shore of Chichagof Island, and it was not long before a fishing community grew up around the buying station. Soon Elfin Cove had a thriving fishing fleet, supported by a general store, a fuel dock, and other businesses. A large salmon cannery operated in nearby Port Althorp. Elfin Cove was served by a post office and by seaplane services. As families settled there, a school was built. In the 1980s the community built an electric power system, a water system, and a library.

As they do for other commodities, markets for salmon ebb and flow like the tides. There are good years and not-so-good years for the Cross Sound fishing fleet. Yet 70 years after its founding, Elfin Cove remains a home base for a commercial fishing fleet. Attracted by the fishing, as well as by the natural beauty of Cross Sound, fishermen and their families converge on Elfin Cove every spring, to make their livelihoods at sea.