

Tlingit Lady:

**PROPERTY
OF
ALASKA**

Earlier this month, Alaska Wildlife Troopers were able to close the book on a case that came to fruition relatively quickly. Back on Sept. 13, 2017, Alaska Wildlife Troopers were patrolling a commercial fishery down in Southeast Alaska near Prince of Wales Island and making contact with vessels. But at about 6:00pm that day, they received a tip that a fishing boat was having a private fishery of its own roughly 65 nautical miles away from the open seine district on the opposite side of the island. A big game guide working out in Coco Harbor, shared news that the F/V Tlingit Lady was actively seining for salmon in Coco Harbor, located on Dall Island, near the mouth of a couple streams. The area surrounding Coco Harbor was closed to commercial seine fishing.

The tipster called troopers back four and a half hours later stating that the 58-foot vessel that he'd been watching blacked out its lights after putting out a final set. The F/V Tlingit Lady then left Coco Harbor in the cover of night.

Not only did the guide provide details of the illegal fishing to Alaska Wildlife Troopers, he took video of what he was watching.

"We had the perfect witness in this case," said Alaska Wildlife Trooper Ryan, the assigned trooper on the case. "He didn't know what the exact rules were for fishing but he knew what he was seeing was wrong so he called us. He really made the case for us."

The next morning, clear skies and gentle seas allowed for another Wildlife Trooper, Trooper Mank, and a Vessel Technician to board their post skiff and head out to Coco Harbor to speak to the tipster and collect the video he had taken. As he watched the video, Trooper Mank could easily see the F/V Tlingit Lady seining with a commercial purse seine net, a power skiff and a crew of five in Coco Harbor.

Trooper Ryan, back at post, worked the phones to track down what the crew of the F/V Tlingit Lady did with the fish it pulled for the mouth of the salmon streams.

The haul of fish was tracked to a seafood tender vessel that purchased it from the F/V Tlingit Lady on at 7:30 am that day. A copy of the fish ticket completed for the offload was provided to Trooper Ryan by the operator of the tender vessel. The fish ticket showed that the F/V Tlingit Lady had offloaded 23,159 pounds of salmon. The permit holder for the F/V Tlingit Lady, Klawock resident Curtis Demmert, claimed the fish were caught on Sept. 13 in Mclean Arm, which was open to fishing. Per the tender operator, the average catch for other seiners fishing in the open area was only 9,000 pounds.

Trooper Ryan, found out that Demmert was on probation and reached out to the probation officer. Ultimately, Demmert was contacted by Trooper Ryan at the Craig Police Department as Demmert was completing a probation check.



The F/V Tlingit Lady illegally seining in Coco Harbor in mid-September 2017. A guide in the area saw the vessel seining at the mouth of salmon creeks and captured the act on film.



The Wildlife Troopers were able to serve a search warrant on the F/V Tlingit Lady that same day as it was tied to a dock in Hollis. The warrant granted seizure of electronic navigational equipment.

After consulting with the Office of Special Prosecutions a decision was made to seize the F/V Tlingit Lady. A warrant was issued for the seizure of F/V Tlingit Lady and was served by Prince of Wales and Ketchikan Troopers on Sept. 15. The vessel was taken to Ketchikan with crew from the Patrol Vessel Enforcer at the helm and secured at Bar Harbor near the Patrol Vessel Enforcer.

The F/V Tlingit Lady, along with its gear, was seized during an investigation into illegal fishing occurring in Coco Harbor.

On December 19, 2017, Demmert pled guilty to Commercial Fishing During a Closed Period (for “creek robbing” near a salmon spawning stream), Commercial Fishing in Closed Waters, False Information on an ADF&G Fish Ticket, and Unlawful Possession of Fish. Instrumental in the quick resolution of this case was the evidence collected through a search warrant for the defendant’s cell phone and data retrieved from the vessel’s GPS/Plotter. The data clearly placed the Demmert and the vessel at the scene of Coco Harbor at the mouth of the salmon streams.

Less than a month later, on Jan. 10, 2018, Demmert was sentenced by the court on Prince of Wales Island. The court imposed a fine of \$32,728.79 fine, ordered 180 days of suspended jail time, and forfeiture of \$17,728.79 worth of illegally taken salmon. The F/V Tlingit Lady, the seine skiff, seine nets, and everything aboard the vessel were forfeited to the State of Alaska. The value of the vessel, skiff and nets are estimated to be between \$350,000 and \$500,000. The case was prosecuted by the Alaska Department of Law, Office of Special Prosecutions.

While the case against Demmert is over, Alaska Wildlife Troopers have not been able to identify the other four fishermen who were assisting in the illegal harvest. If anyone has any information regarding the identity of the crewmembers that were on the F/V Tlingit Lady, they are encouraged to contact the Alaska Wildlife Troopers on Prince of Wales Island at 907-826-2291.

