



## 2024 Annual Report

# Commercial Fisheries Entry Commission





# Commercial Fisheries Entry Commission 2024 Annual Report

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## CFEC Contact Information

### State of Alaska

#### Governor

Michael Dunleavy

#### Lt. Governor

Nancy Dahlstrom

#### Commissioners

Glenn Haight, Chair

Rick Green, Commissioner

Mike Porcaro, Commissioner\*

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\*No longer at CFEC



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## CFEC Overview

The seafood industry is Alaska's largest private sector employer and adds nearly \$6.0 billion dollars into the Alaskan economy each year<sup>1</sup>, benefiting communities from Ketchikan to Kotzebue. The Commercial Fisheries Entry Commission (CFEC or Commission) plays a vital role in developing and maintaining the sustainable fisheries and small businesses that underpin Alaska's fishing industry.

CFEC issues annual permits and vessel licenses to qualified individuals, oversees permit transfers, conducts research and develops fisheries economic data, assesses demerit points on permits to hold violators responsible, and coordinates with state and federal managers to develop fisheries policy. The Commission is composed of two commissioners who are supported by a staff of approximately 20 people. The agency is organized into four sections overseen by an executive director, responsible for implementing policies and programs established by the Commission to carry out its mission.

In 2024, CFEC generated approximately \$6.8 million in gross revenue for the State of Alaska through the collection of permit and vessel fees. CFEC's FY24 budget was \$3.1 million making it a surplus revenue provider for the State.

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<sup>1</sup> The Economic Value of Alaska's Seafood Industry, McKinley Research Group, April 2024.



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## Commissioner's Office

The Commissioner's Office is staffed by two commissioners (one of whom is the chair), an executive director, a law specialist, and two administrative staff. The commissioners oversee policy direction, issue all final decision in transfer cases, fishery closure, and waiving of fees. The executive director oversees administrative functions. All staff in the Commissioner's Office assist in both policy and administrative functions as appropriate.

The Office works in support of the Commission's four sections: Adjudications, Information Technology, Licensing, and Research. There is significant interaction between these sections depending on the work product. Leadership from the four sections and the Commissioner's Office comprise the Commission's Management Council, which coordinates ongoing internal and external improvements.

The Commissioner's Office, again in coordination with the four sections, leads the Commission's external work with permit holders, fisheries leaders, state and federal agencies, the Alaska Legislature, communities, researchers/academia, and interested public in a continuous effort to improve services, lower costs, and evolve the Commission's work to the benefit of the commercial fishing industry.

Five policy objectives guide the Commission. These include –

- Supporting the economic health of Alaska's commercial fisheries industry and promoting conservation and sustained yield management of fisheries resources.
- Advocating for increased Alaskan resident ownership in fisheries.
- Providing effective service to permit holders.
- Protecting individual fishing privileges.
- Increasing accessibility and functionality of commercial fisheries economic information for the public and private sectors.

## 2024 CFEC Commission Highlights

- Assisted the Legislature on several bills, including SB 82/HB 195, two companion bills working to establish a buyback program for the Cook Inlet's Eastside set gillnetters fleet, and HB 19, which sought to remove a duplicative registration requirement for certain commercial fishing vessels under the Derelict Vessel Prevention Program. The Commission also supported SCR10, the Legislature Seafood Industry Task Force, a workgroup



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established to assist the seafood industry with the recent economic downturn and establish a long-term strategic plan. The Commission presented twice to the task force during its fall meetings.

- The Commission initiated a proposed regulation to limit entry into the Prince William Sound commercial shrimp pot fishery. This effort involved a survey of the most recent permit holders, two public hearings, and a proposed regulation project. In July 2024, the Commission voted to not limit the fishery.
- The Commission conducted three separate regulatory projects to add dip nets as legal gear type for the Cook Inlet set gillnet fishery in conformity with Board of Fisheries (BOF) regulations. An initial project started in April 2024, but required a parallel emergency regulation project given season timings. After not permanently adopting the original proposed regulation in June 2024, a second regulatory project to add dip net gear to the Cook Inlet set gillnet permit started in October 2024 after receiving a petition by permit holders.
- The Commissioner's Office joined the Adjudication Section in reviewing the agency's processes allowing permit transfers to minors. Advised through an open survey of permit holders, the Commission built a more thorough system for reviewing these transfers and developed additional information for the parties involved. The effort further led to improved communications with the Department of Revenue's Child Support Enforcement Division (CSED).
- Set permit fees in all fisheries for the 2024 fishing year.
- Worked in support of the BOF meetings by providing input and assigning Research staff to assist at board meetings.
- The Commission continued its Information Technology (IT) modernization project, securing a 3-year budget increment of \$450.0 from the Legislature.
- In response to BOF action on a Kodiak herring proposal that involved dueling authorities between the BOF and Commission, the two entities created the Joint BOF/CFEC Herring Revitalization Committee charged with reviewing herring fisheries across the state.



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## Licensing

The Licensing Section has six dedicated employees who perform CFEC's essential and unique role in serving Alaska's commercial fishing industry. The Licensing Section is responsible for issuing annual permits and vessel licenses required for participation in Alaska's commercial fisheries. This includes processing requests for vessel information changes and replacing lost or damaged vessel licenses or permit cards. Staff are also responsible for and strive to make timely and accurate determinations with renewals and transfers to avoid any lost fishing time.

The Licensing Section works closely with the Commissioners and the Law Specialist to ensure compliance with the Limited Entry Act. Licensing Section interacts with permit holders daily via telephone, facsimile, email, and written correspondence, and serves as a direct source of information for commercial fishermen and the public. The Licensing Section maintains a close working relationship with Child Support Enforcement Division (CSED), Alaska Department of Fish & Game (ADF&G), Alaska Department of Commerce, Community & Economic Development (DCCED), the Commercial Fishing & Agricultural Bank (CFAB), the United States Coast Guard, the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS), and many other state and federal agencies to track changes in the fishing industry in relevant laws and regulations that impact the issuance of limited entry permits.

### 2024 CFEC Licensing Section Highlights

- Renewed 16,639 limited entry fishing permits, 13 interim-entry permits in limited fisheries, and 3,534 interim-use permits for state open access or federal fisheries.
- Issued 7,367 vessel licenses for fishing operations around the state.
- Facilitated permit transfers which are generally sales or gift transactions. In 2024, there were 722 permanent transfer requests.
- Processed emergency transfers which mainly occur when a permit holder experiences an unforeseen and unavoidable situation, such as an injury. There were 730 emergency transfers in 2024. (Figure 1)

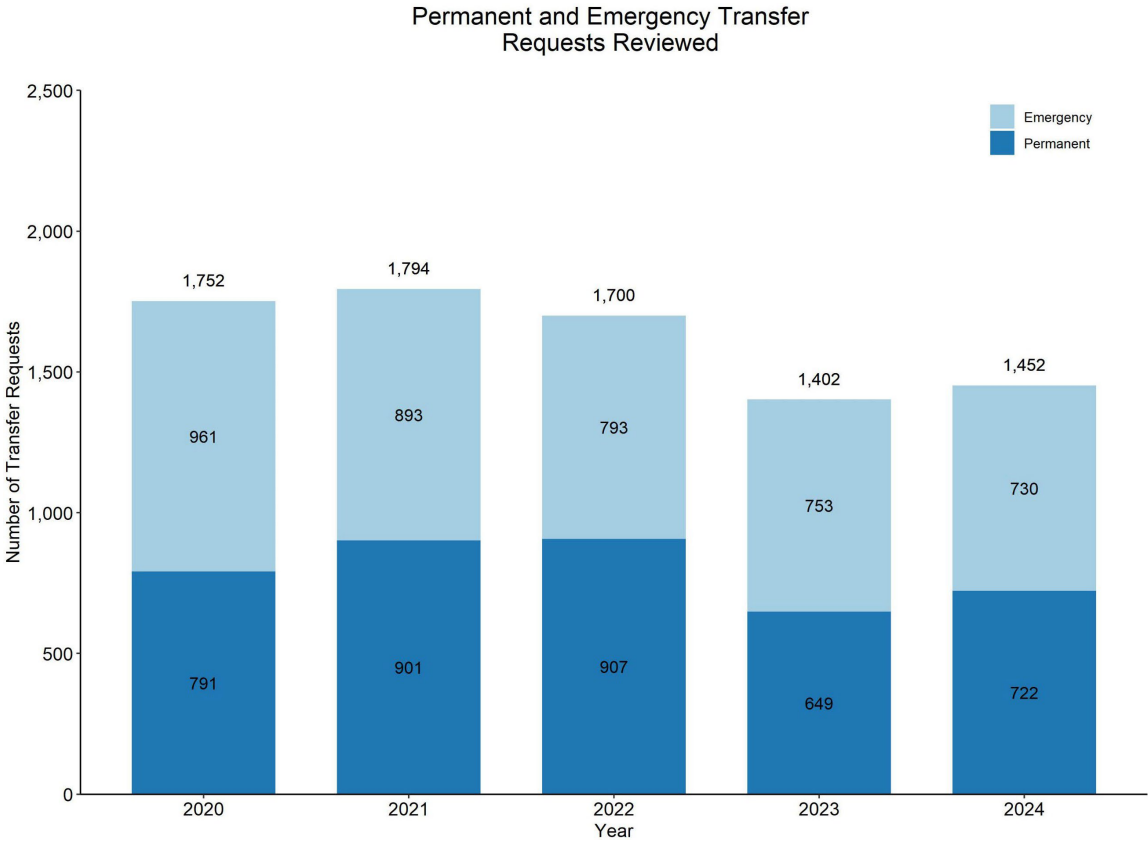




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Figure 1: Permanent and Emergency Transfer Requests, 2020 - 2024







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### Adjudications

The CFEC Adjudications Section is staffed by a hearing officer and paralegal. The Section performs a number of functions for the Commission including conducting administrative hearings, controlling records, and recording and tracking permit demerit points stemming from salmon violations.

The Adjudications Section handles appeals within the Commission. This includes scheduling, researching cases, holding administrative hearings, writing decisions (to be later reviewed by the Commissioners), and tracking cases. Historically, litigation is a major component of CFEC. Since 1975, the commission handled over 3,000 in-house adjudications, most stemming from fishery limitation applications. From these decisions over 500 were appealed to the Superior Court with over 80 finding their way to the Supreme Court. The Adjudications Section continues to serve in this capacity, although most of the cases now involve permanent or emergency transfer denials.

The Adjudications Section leader serves as the Records Officer for CFEC. There are multiple record-sharing arrangements with agencies that are tightly controlled, given the confidential nature of commercial fishing records. In addition, there are massive stores of physical records in the possession of CFEC and off-site. As of the end of 2024, over 3,500 boxes of archived material were held by a private contractor. These boxes continue to accumulate as fish tickets, which record individual fish sales transactions, are sent from ADF&G statewide offices. These records consume a significant amount of space at CFEC's physical location and with the private contractor, leading to over \$30.0 in annual costs.

The other main task for the Adjudications Section is recording and executing the Derimit Point System. In an effort to tamp down on fisheries violations, the Alaska Legislature in 1998 established a demerit point system for suspending commercial salmon fishing privileges based on convictions for fishing violations in the salmon fisheries. Under this law, after successful convictions are conducted by the Alaska Wildlife Troopers (AWT) and the courts, the Commission will receive cases and record demerit points from a holder's permit. Similar to the point system for a driver's license, if multiple convictions occur and demerit points threshold levels are met, it may lead to a suspension of fishing privileges for a period of one to three years.

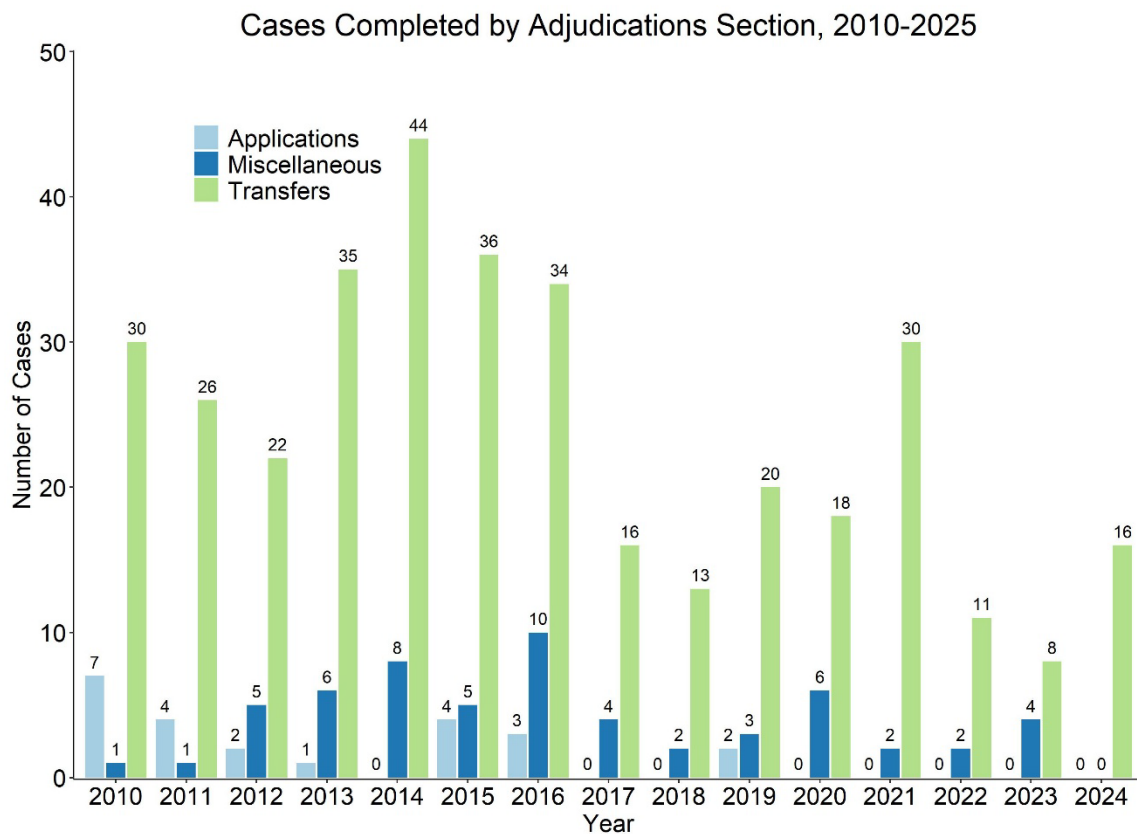


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## 2024 CFEC Adjudications Section Highlights

- Handled 16 cases, held 10 administrative hearings, and rendered nine decisions on matters appealed, all regarding permanent or emergency transfers. No CFEC cases were pending before any court. (Figure 2).

Figure 2: Adjudication Cases by Type from 2010 - 2024



- Conducted an industry wide survey to gauge insights on historic practices and attitudes regarding minors working in the commercial fishing industry. The Section used this information to reform and standardize its work when reviewing permit transfer requests to minors and compiled useful information for families with minors who own permits.
- Revised multiple records sharing arrangements and upgraded the process based on changes to federal and state confidential and personal private information laws.



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- Collaborate with other agencies (CSED, AWT, ADF&G, Department of Revenue) to facilitate lien and collection activity, and coordinate and manage protected data sharing.
- Prepared for a full-scale reduction of vast collections of physical records which it is carrying out starting in 2025.
- In support of the demerit points system, CFEC processed 97 Bristol Bay cases, 15 from Cook Inlet, and one from Prince William Sound.



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## Information Technology

The Information Technology (IT) Section within CFEC is a small, but highly skilled and responsive staff that holds together all of CFEC's functions.

CFEC's internal licensing system was designed in the 1980's and written in COBOL, a language infrequently used in today's programming world. Much of the hardware is over 10 years old and uses operating systems no longer upgraded by the original companies. With a vast store of confidential fish ticket digitally held and used by multiple agencies, academia and the public, security is paramount and a constant focus of this team.

Data processing is a significant role of this Section. The vast store referenced earlier contains every commercial fish sale that has occurred in Alaska since 1975. This rich data set is used by policy makers, businesses, academia, and other agencies. Security and safe storage of this information is a significant role of the IT Section.

External services through the website and several in-house applications are used by multiple agencies, academia and the public. These platforms require constant care and upkeep.

2023 witnessed the loss of 75% of the IT Section staff. For incoming staff, 2024 was a year of standing up the old system while gaining greater insights on its configurations. While maintaining operations, the IT Section also turned its attention to an entire modernization of the IT system. Through a combination of in-house staff and contractors and supported by a \$450.0 budget increment from the Legislature, the IT Section initiated its modernization project.

### 2024 CFEC Information Technology Section Highlights

- Stabilized server room with new air conditioning system.
- Developed a back-up system through existing state IT infrastructure.
- Turned over the legacy internal licensing system for the 2025 fishing season.
- Established a help desk jobs tracking system that indicated assisting in 387 related help tickets.
- Implemented and maintained several IT contracts.
- Conducted a user survey regarding the useability of CFEC's IT system.



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### Research

The Research Section provides the Commission with estimates of the economic value of all fisheries statewide, tracks permit transfers and shifting demographics in state and federal fisheries, responds to public inquiries for data, studies fishery limitation in open access fisheries, prepares optimum numbers reports as needed, and maintains data sets and databases to answer unique questions as they arise. The Research Section issues many standard and specialized reports that are used by a variety of people and organizations to address a range of issues related to commercial fishing. Much of the data is in turn shared with ADF&G, NMFS and the North Pacific Fishery Management Council. This data allows CFEC and others to provide services to local, State and Federal government agencies and policymakers, the Alaska Legislature, academia/researchers, consultants, and other nongovernmental organizations.

The Research Section produces several annual documents that are utilized by the public and agencies. In 2024, the Section provided the BOF economic reports for the Kodiak, Cook Inlet, and Prince William Sound regions. Permit value reports for all limited entry permits in the state were published monthly and annually. These reports are used by lenders (CFAB, the DCCED's Commercial Fishing Loan Program), fishermen and permit brokers, to understand the value of limited entry permits. The annual Limited Entry transfer activity report was published for 2023 as well.

The Research Section also published an optimum numbers study addressing permits in the Kodiak herring food and bait fishery, a Kodiak Seine Vessel Cost Survey Results, and a report on limiting entry into the Prince William Sound shrimp pot fishery. Regularly published reports produced in 2024 include the Emergency Transfer Report and the Mean/Quartile Report.

Research produced preliminary and final ex-vessel price and earnings estimates for all species of fish harvested in Alaska fisheries in 2023. The estimates are performed in the following year (done in 2024 for the 2023 season) due to the time lag to obtain fish ticket data and adjustments made by fish processors after the end of the season. Research's ex-vessel price and earnings estimates are essential to understanding the basic economics of Alaska's fisheries and used widely by various entities. One example is its use in the NMFS Groundfish Observer Fee Program to calculate fees fishermen pay into that system.

### 2024 CFEC Research Highlights

- Responded to numerous public and agency requests for fisheries economic data.
- Assisted new IT staff in understanding existing CFEC systems and functionality.
- Led in the calculation of new permit fees for 2025.



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- In 2024, Research published the following reports to inform the Legislature, BOF, ADF&G, other agencies and regulatory bodies, and the fishing community at large. All reports are available on the CFEC web site, <https://www.cfec.state.ak.us/Publications/year.htm>.
- Mean and Quartile Estimated Gross Earnings for Alaska's Limited Commercial Fisheries, 1975 - 2023. CFEC Report No. 24-07N
  - Kodiak Seine Vessel Cost Survey Results. CFEC Report Number 24-06N
  - Findings and Results from an Optimum Numbers Study on the Kodiak Food and Bait Herring Fishery. CFEC Report No. 24-05N
  - Emergency Transfers of Alaska's Commercial Fisheries Limited Entry Permits, 1975 – 2023. CFEC Report No. 24-04N
  - Limiting Entry into the Prince William Sound Shrimp Pot Fisheries. CFEC Report No. 24-03N
  - Changes in the Distribution of Alaska's Commercial Fisheries Entry Permits, 1975-2023. CFEC Report No. 24-02N
  - CFEC Permit Holdings and Estimates of Gross Earnings in the Cook Inlet Salmon Fisheries, 1975-2022. CFEC Report No. 24-01N



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## Limited Entry Act History

In 1972, Alaskans voted to amend the Alaska Constitution, paving the way for the creation of a permit system that limited participation in Alaska's commercial fishing industry. Through the adoption of the Limited Entry Act and the creation of CFEC an independent quasi-judicial agency, over 60 fisheries were limited from 1975- 2004.

Over the years, Alaskan courts have scrutinized the limited entry program and developed an extensive body of law, including more than eighty Alaska Supreme Court decisions. Among these decisions is the recognition that the limited entry program should impinge on the open fisheries as little as possible. This finding pushes CFEC to conduct optimum numbers studies to determine if there are too many or too few permits in the various limited entry fisheries. With a finding of too many permits, the Commission would be compelled to initiate a buyback program (see Recommended for Legislative Review, pg 12). If the Commission found too few permits existed, it would issue more.

Since the Limited Entry Act was adopted in 1973, CFEC issued decisions on over 20,000 limited entry fishery applications. In 2024, CFEC recorded 16,639 limited entry permits including 3,534 permits for fisheries that are not yet subject to limitation ("open access" fisheries), for a total of 20,187 commercial fishing permits.

CFEC looks forward to continuing to work with legislators and fishermen to modernize and streamline the limited entry program as we move toward the future, ensuring that Alaska's commercial fisheries can be optimally managed for the benefit of commercial fishermen and the families who depend on them for their livelihood.





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## Recommendations for Legislative Review

After 50 years of implementing the Limited Entry Act, the Commission supports a review of the Act to examine potential amendments to address ongoing issues. Principle concerns with Alaska's permitting system include an outmigration of permits from rural fishing communities, and an aging of the fleet.

While change is sought in many corners, concern persists among long-time permit holders that large changes to limited entry could undo the program or otherwise materially impact its effectiveness. Any review of potential change should include strong legal review and public vetting. While it may be possible for revisions to pass public and legal muster, the impact of those changes should be carefully monitored to determine effectiveness.

**Aging of the Fleet.** From 2000 to 2024, the mean age of limited entry permit holders grew from 46.4 to 53.0 years of age. In no year since 1983 has the average age declined. Long time commercial fishermen indicate increasing difficulties finding able crew.

While workforce development is a multi-agency and organization issue, changes to the Act's transfer provisions might improve the ability of retiring fishermen to sell their operations to up-and-coming young fishermen. Certain concepts proposed include allowing for transfers for multiple years based on either a contractual relation to buy and sell or through an apprentice model, and allowing a permit holder to self-finance a permit.

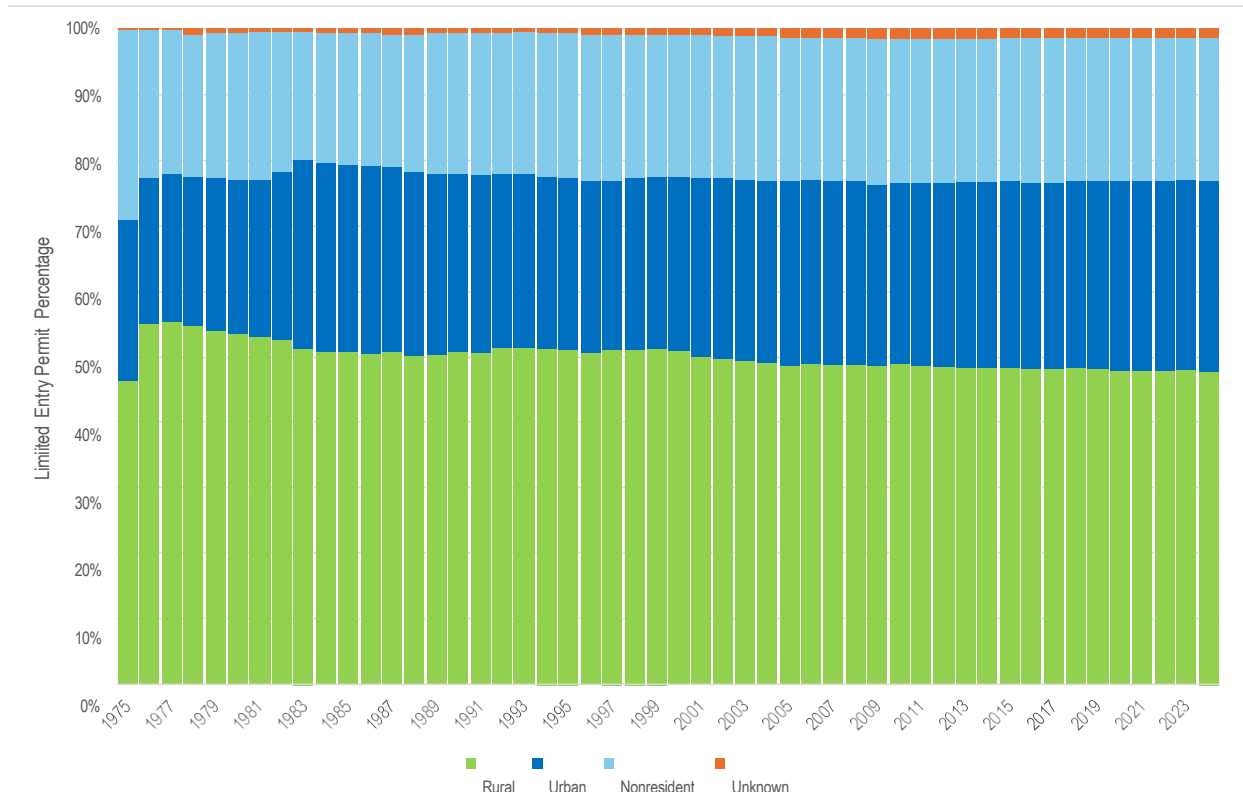
The Act also anticipated youth development through the establishment of Educational Permits under AS 16.43.340. However, this permit – or opportunity – has not been as widely utilized as perhaps envisioned. Efforts to make education permits more vital to fleet development may provide promise in the future.

**Rural Alaska Communities Permit Outmigration.** From 2000 to 2023, the number of limited entry permits held in fisheries dependent coastal communities with populations of 500 or less fell from 2,412 to 1,612 (33%), while coastal communities with populations between 501 and 1000 witnessed their limited entry permits fall from 2,218 to 1,766 (20%). The original limited entry program was designed to ensure Alaska's coastal fishing communities maintained their fishing culture. Given that limited entry permits are freely transferrable they tend to follow money, and given the lack of capital in these small communities permits eventually migrate away. Potential opportunities include creating a location-based permit or establishing regional organizations to facilitate permit transfers.



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Figure 3: Permit Holders by Residency (Urban/Rural) and Non-resident, 1975 - 2024



**Buyback Programs and Fishery Reforms.** The Limited Entry Act has buyback provisions in the event it is found a fishery has too many permits. However, the provisions are focused primarily on a scenario where the fishery is healthy enough to support an assessment for the buyback. This is not always the case and even if it was, the state lacks other tools such as a “buyback loan” or other means to conduct a more immediate buyback.

There are many potential scenarios in which a buyback might occur and if the Commission is to act on fishery reforms, it needs greater flexibility in how efforts are managed. There are a number of other possible buyback scenarios including a buyback through external revenues or fractional licensing. There are some limited entry fisheries that have not fished in decades, generally due to a lack of a market. CFEC has no legal mechanism to undo a limitation, which could be useful if existing permit holders are no longer fishing and potential new entrants are interested in participating.



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**Demerit Point System.** As described in the Adjudications Section, CFEC helps to administer the demerit points system, an attempt to develop greater regulatory compliance within the fishing sector. In discussions with the AWT, CFEC has learned permit holders who are more apt to disregard regulations carefully watch their points and return to unlawful behavior as soon as they can. Potential changes could be made to strengthen the program. Ideas include –

- The system only applies to salmon. Other species could be added.
- If a person has their permit suspended in one administrative area (for example Bristol Bay), it does not prevent them from fishing in another administrative area (for example Prince William Sound). Points and suspensions could apply across all fisheries.
- Individuals who are closing in on the point threshold for permit suspension closely monitoring the date their points fall off their permit and are quick to return to lawless behavior. A probationary period could be added to the provisions.
- Individuals who are cited with fishing violations often purposefully miss court dates leading to continuations. This is often done to push out conviction dates that also push out the date points are added to the demerit point total. Allowing points to count when the infraction occurs, assuming a conviction follows, will eliminate this game playing.



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## Budget Considerations

As mentioned in the introduction, CFEC is a net surplus revenue provider for the state, collecting almost twice what it costs to run the organization. Revenues are collected from permit and vessel fees. Charts 1 and 2 provide a look at the number of permits and vessels fees that are collected for in the last four years.

**Chart 1: Number of Permits Sold by Fee Range**

<i>Fee Range (in dollars)</i>	<i>2021</i>	<i>2022</i>	<i>2023</i>	<i>2024</i>
Waived	2,359	1,721	1,191	2,416
\$75 to \$375	10,327	10,190	9,653	9,367
Over \$375 to \$750	3,393	3,959	1,888	3,029
Over \$750 to \$1,125	665	115	2,016	683
Over \$1,125 to \$1,500	41	6	78	80
Over \$1,500 to \$3,000	208	227	188	238
\$3,000 Fee Cap	362	332	306	297
<b>Total*</b>	<b>17,355</b>	<b>16,550</b>	<b>15,320</b>	<b>16,110</b>

\* The total permits for 2024 represents paid permits. In limited entry fisheries that do not open CFEC does not charge a permit fee.

CFEC's budget increased in FY25 to accommodate continued work on its internal licensing system, database system, hardware and all its unique application systems including the website.

**Chart 2: 2024 Number of Vessel Fees Collected by Vessel Size**

<i>Fee Category (in vessel length)</i>	<i>License Fee</i>	<i>Number of Vessels Licensed</i>
Vessels to 25'	\$24	1,822
Over 25' to 50'	\$60	4,357
Over 50' to 75'	\$120	730
Over 75' to 100'	\$225	192
Over 100' to 125'	\$300	137
Over 125' to 150'	\$375	49
Over 150' to 175'	\$450	31
Over 175' to 200'	\$525	15
Over 200' to 225'	\$600	4
Over 225' to 250'	\$675	3
Over 250' to 275'	\$750	10
Over 275' to 300'	\$825	5
Over 300'	\$900	12
<b>2024 Total</b>		<b>7,367</b>

CFEC's revenues are listed as "program receipts" under AS 37.05.146(c)(28). These revenues create a fund with a carryforward balance that runs from year to year. Along with funding the Alaska Department of Labor & Workforce Development's Fishermen's Fund (AS 23.35.060) at approximately \$300.0 annually, a significant portion of the remaining funds are budgeted to ADF&G's Commercial Fisheries Division.

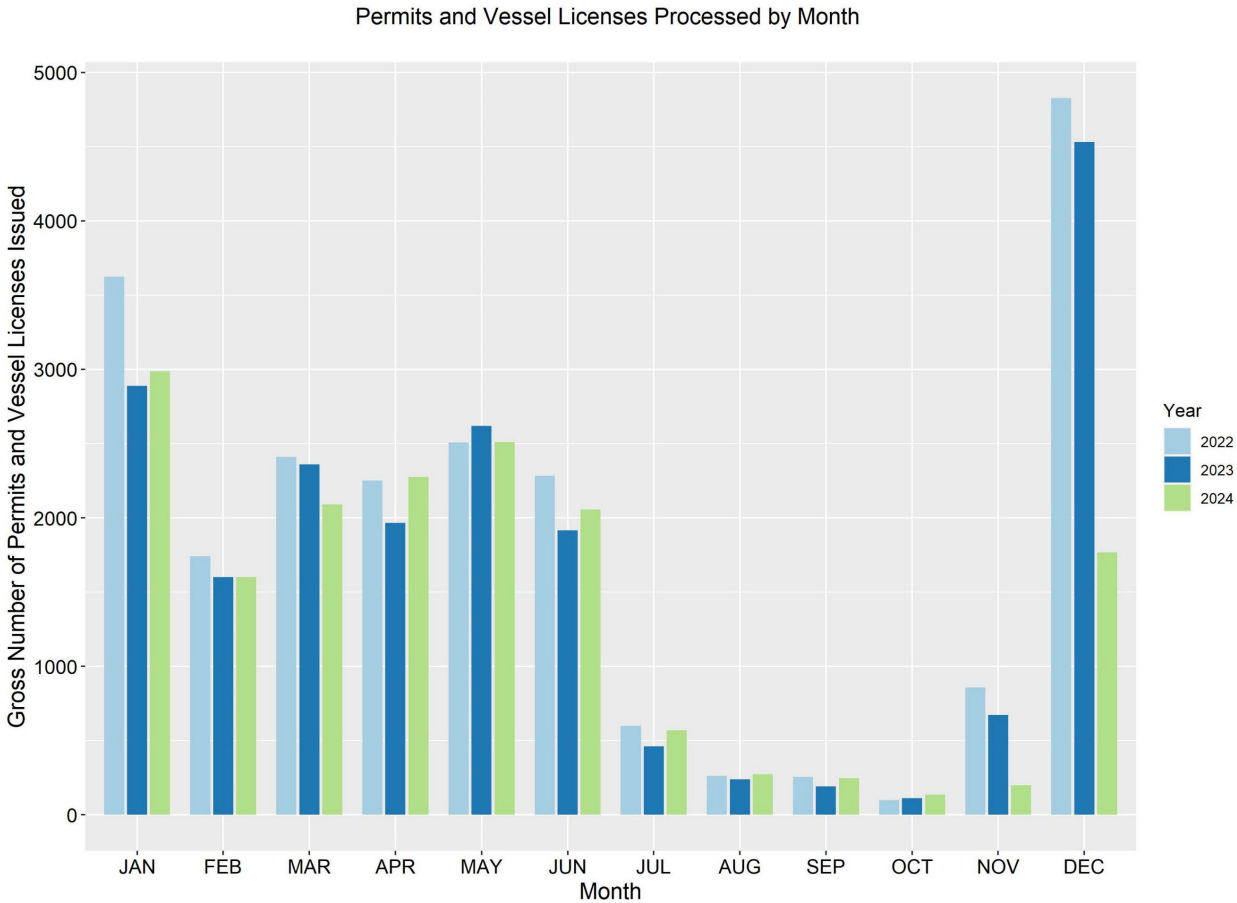
With this variety of uses, CFEC works to assure its carryforward balance does not fall below zero which is most likely to happen between July and November when CFEC collects very little revenue. Figure 4.



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Figure 4: CFEC Revenue Collections by Month, 2022-2024





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## Appendix 1 - 2024 Commission Employees

<b>Commission</b>	Glenn Haight	Commissioner, Chair	<b>Licensing</b>	Suzanne Rumfelt	Leader
	Rick Green	Commissioner		MaryJo Barry	Transfer Officer
	Mike Porcaro	Commissioner*		Marissa Tanuvasa-Tuvaifale	Transfer Officer
	Jennifer Findley	Law Specialist		Renee Dull	Permit Clerk
	Melehoko Maake	Executive Director		Kyle Scholl	Permit Clerk
	Shaundy Perry	Executive Director*		Fred Harmon	Permit Clerk
	Krista Messing	Administrative Officer		Mechelle Moore	Permit Clerk*
<b>Information Technology</b>	Eileen Sundberg	Accounting Technician	<b>Adjudications</b>	Robin Loreth, J.D.	Leader
	Misah Holley-Kline	Law Specialist*		Quinn Gentili	Paralegal
	Roel Yadao	Administrative Assistant*		Randy Lippert	Paralegal*
	Jake Carpenter	Leader	<b>Research</b>	Reid Johnson	Leader
	Josh Sanders	Network Specialist		Daniel Strong	Fishery Analyst
	Heather Crondahl	Leader*		Sally Kohlhasse	Fishery Economist
	Brant Oliphant	Analyst Programmer*		Parrish Ballard	Fishery Economist*
	Jared Spencer	Analyst Programmer*			

\*No longer at CFEC