

# Responses to the West Coast Groundfish Disaster:

Lessons learned for communities and decision makers

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## Executive summary

Following two decades of rapid growth, the West Coast commercial groundfish industry began a coast-wide constriction in the late 1990s. As stocks declined, the amended Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act (MSA) mandated that the Pacific Fisheries Management Council (PFMC) sharply cut back the catch. For the commercial fishing community, these decreases in catch limit resulted in the unemployment or underemployment of thousands. Some switched to other fisheries;

others left the fishing industry. Employees of governmental and nongovernmental organizations assisted members of the impacted fishing community in accessing occupational training, food stamps, healthcare, or other social services.

Under local pressure, Oregon, Washington, and California requested federal assistance, and on January 26, 2000, the West Coast groundfish fishery was formally declared an economic disaster. Shortly thereafter, Congress allocated \$5 million in disaster relief for the region. The money was split among the states, each of which designed and implemented its own disaster-response program.

Fishery disaster-response programs cost federal and state governments millions to tens of millions of dollars annually. However, little research has been directed toward assessing them, and they are poorly understood and rarely documented. Our study, although small and not perfect by any means, revealed some insights that could



be incorporated into the design of future disaster-response programs. This publication summarizes responses from participants in a study investigating three main questions about the West Coast groundfish disaster: what was the severity of the disaster? What was the government's response to the disaster and how well did it work? And what were some lessons learned that could help communities and decision makers deal with future disasters?

Our research helped us understand that, while accessing social services such as job retraining and food stamps is never an easy or pleasant task, the process is particularly difficult for members of the fishing community. People trying to leave the fishing industry face a medley of unique obstacles different from those faced by the general population. An aggressive, well-planned outreach program is necessary for any effort that aims to directly include people from the fishing industry, and including representatives of the fishing community in the design and implementation of response programs is important in targeting and reaching a broad audience. The good news is that successful transitions out of the fishing industry are possible for those who are willing and motivated to make that personal choice.



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What was the severity of the disaster? What was the government's response to the disaster and how well did it work? And what were some lessons learned that could help communities and decision makers deal with future disasters?

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# Introduction

Commercial fisheries on the West Coast continue to face considerable change. After expanding rapidly in the late 1970s and '80s, in the late '90s many sectors of the industry experienced resource scarcity and decline. While some species and markets, such as Dungeness crab, are

doing well, others, such as several species of groundfish, are struggling.

Over the past few decades, Washington, Oregon, and California have had large fleets targeting groundfish; more than 11,000 vessels participated in the groundfish fishery between 1987 and 2000 (Scholz 2003). During the period of industry prosperity, most of Oregon's fishing ports had several trawlers tied up in their marinas, and revenue from the industry supported hundreds of jobs in coastal communities. Oregon's groundfish industry peaked in the middle 1990s, at which time it accounted for about 40 percent of the state's total fisheries value (Husing et al. 2000).

The fishery began a long and coast-wide downturn in the late 1990s. While the cause of this downturn is not agreed upon, the cumulative effects of poor stock recruitment, decades of heavy fishing, and management mistakes have all played a role. As assessments began to reveal that populations of groundfish were much lower than anticipated, the amended Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act mandated that the PFMC sharply cut back the amount of groundfish the fleet was allowed to catch.





These dramatic decreases in allowable groundfish catch left behind thousands of unemployed and underemployed people. Some members of the fishing community (FC) managed to switch to other fisheries. However, this was not possible for a large number of people, who then faced the task of completely leaving the fishing industry. This transition away from fishing was often difficult, and many people lost boats and homes as they tried to find new sources of income.

The FC was not the only community impacted. In coastal communities throughout the region, a “resource community” (RC) made up of

employees of governmental and nongovernmental organizations was also impacted. The RC assists the FC with occupational training, food stamps, healthcare, or other social services. Community services were straining under the needs of growing numbers of people struggling to adjust to the disappearing groundfish industry. Under local pressure, Oregon, Washington, and California requested federal assistance, and on January 26, 2000, U.S. Department of Commerce Secretary William Daley declared the West Coast groundfish fishery an economic disaster.

This publication summarizes responses from members of both the FC and the RC who participated in a study investigating three main questions about the West Coast groundfish disaster (WCGD): what was the severity of the WCGD? What was the government’s response to the WCGD and how well did it work? And what were some lessons learned that could help decision makers and communities deal with future disasters?

# Background and context

## History of the groundfish fishery

The term “groundfish” has context-dependent definitions; a groundfish in Oregon is not the same as a groundfish in Maine. Our study used the PFMC’s definition of groundfish, which includes 64 species of rockfish, 12 species of flatfish, 6 species of groundfish, and 6 species of sharks and skates. Generally, these species live on or near the seafloor; however, not all fish on the seafloor are managed as groundfish.

Groundfish are harvested using hooks, traps, and trawling. Trawling accounts for approximately 90 percent of the commercial catch (1997 data, PFMC Web site). Gear specialization has effectively divided the West Coast groundfish industry into two groups: those targeting Pacific whiting (high-volume, low-value fish requiring huge vessels to be fished efficiently) and those targeting the other species (lower volume, higher value).

State and federal government share legal responsibility for the management of ocean-dwelling fish stocks. States control oceans from the shore out to three nautical miles, and the federal government has authority from the edge of the states’ bound-

aries to the edge of the national boundary (200 nautical miles from shore). In practice, many stocks are managed jointly by state and federal agencies.

We can broadly divide the history of the commercial groundfish fishery into four periods: the *early years* (prehistory to WWII), when demand and fishing effort were generally low; the *post-war* slump and rising foreign pressure, when the U.S. ignored groundfish stocks (WWII–1976); the *boom*, when demand and effort skyrocketed (1977–1989); and an ongoing period of *industry constriction* (1990s to present) (adapted from Hanna 2004).

The “boom” was an interesting time. To encourage growth in the fishing industry, the federal government provided economic incentives through programs such as the Farm Credit Act, Production Credit Associations, the Capital Construction Fund, and the Fishing Vessel Obligation Guarantee Program (Radtke et al. 1998; Mansfield 2001). Some of these were new programs, created specifically for the fishing fleet, while others were existing programs that were expanded to encompass fishing. Low-interest loans, federal backing of bank loans, and tax deferments



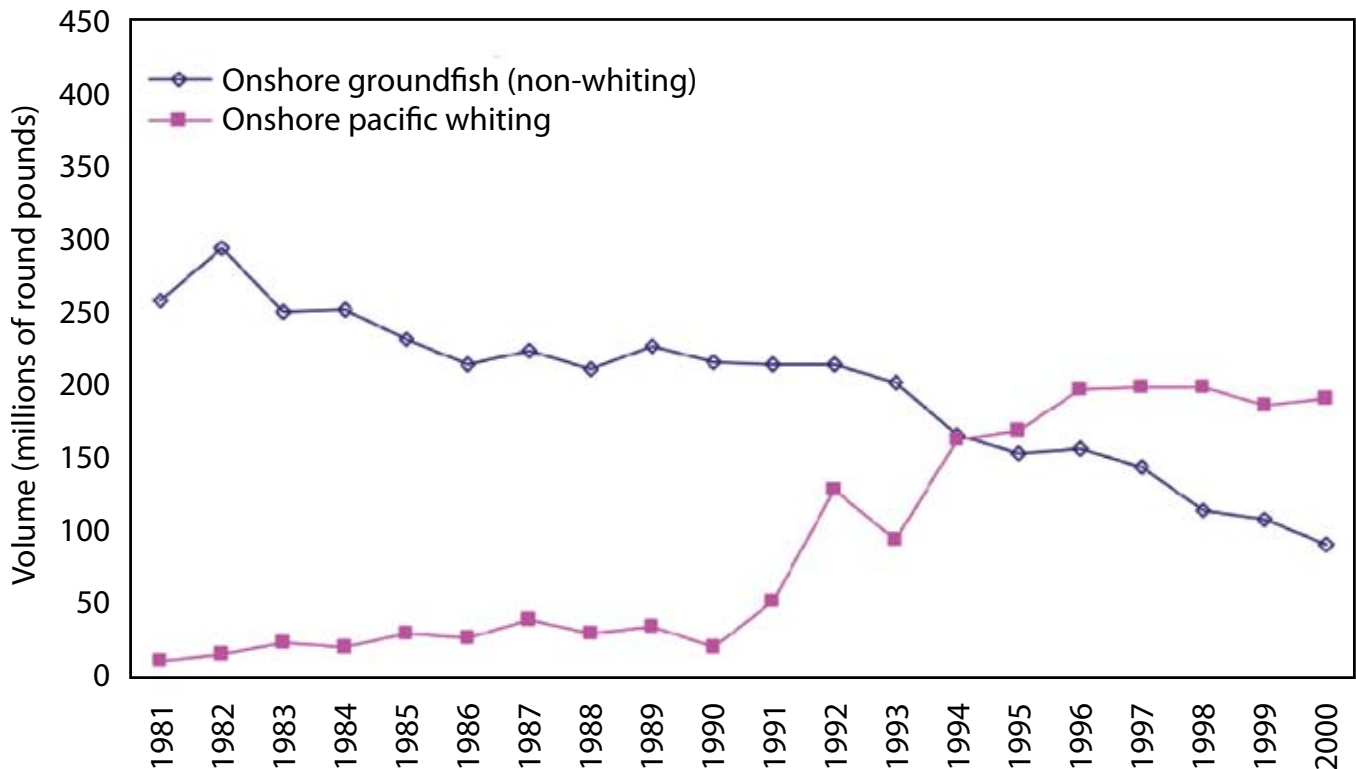


Figure 1. U.S. West Coast groundfish landings, 1981–2000. Modified from Husing et al. 2002.

all encouraged investment in fishing vessels, gear, and technology, and enabled members of the FC to enter what would otherwise be a prohibitively expensive fishery.

These economic incentives were driven by a growing political push for increased fishing off U.S. shores. In 1968, Senator Warren Magnuson (Hanna 2004) demanded swift and decisive moves by federal fishery managers, insisting that:

*“You have no time to form study committees. You have no time for biologically researching the animal. . . . Your time must be devoted to determining how we can get out and catch fish. Every activity . . . whether by the federal or state governments, should be primarily programmed to that goal. Let us not study our resources to death, let us harvest them . . . .”*

Fishers across the U.S. responded enthusiastically to the incentives and to a general feeling of national optimism, and the entire U.S. fishing fleet grew. Few segments, though, grew as quickly as the West Coast groundfish industry, which between 1980 and 1989 nearly doubled from 42 to 70 percent of the total West Coast catch by weight (PFMC Web site). Pacific whiting catch increased more than a thousandfold between 1976 and 1991, while catches of other groundfish doubled between the mid-1970s and the early '80s (Mansfield 2001).

Initially, there were substantial joint ventures between domestic and foreign vessels, particularly with whiting, which was passed from U.S. fishing vessels to foreign processing vessels. This allowed domestic

land-based infrastructure to develop more gradually than the fleet. As processor capacity increased to the levels needed to process the catch of the fleet, foreign processing vessels were slowly pushed out of U.S. waters over the next decade-and-a-half, leaving a new domestic fleet to catch and process all the groundfish they could manage (Radtke 1998).

Unfortunately for the commercial fishing industry, after peaking in the early 1980s the West Coast (non-whiting) groundfish catch began a long-term decline (Figure 1).

The decreased catch was due to numerous factors, both natural and human-caused. Biologically, a string of five El Niños (two of them the strongest on record) temporarily changed fish migration patterns, decreased growth rates, and raised

natural mortality. The 1982 El Niño was a breaking point for many people, causing fishers to lose boats and homes to creditors. The 1997–98 El Niño event was even stronger.

These natural phenomena, coupled with the explosion of fishing effort, depleted fish stocks rapidly. By 1989, fishing effort could no longer be maintained; there were too many boats chasing too few fish, and many could not make a profit from their catch (Hanna 2000). Anticipating this, members of the FC went to the PFMC in 1986 to ask it to limit the number of boats allowed in the fishery. From the late 1980s to the early '90s, the PFMC instituted increasingly restrictive management practices, including reduced trip lim-

its, shorter fishing seasons, bycatch limits, and gear restrictions. In 1994, the PFMC passed Amendment 6, which created a limited-entry portion of the fishery and, for the first time, restricted recreational catch of groundfish.

Meanwhile, changes in federal legislation were altering the way regional councils (such as the PFMC) were required to manage fisheries. In 1996, the U.S. Congress passed major amendments to the MSA. While the legislation was clear on objectives, it was less so on how these goals were to be realized, leading some to criticize the MSA for sending strong signals on conservation but weak signals on management tools to implement these changes (Radtke et al.

1998). For example, the MSA clearly defines acceptable fishery stock levels, and fish stocks below a certain level are declared “overfished.” When a species is declared overfished, fishery management councils are mandated to take measures to protect it and to rebuild overfished stocks as quickly as possible. How best to do this, however, is left largely to the councils’ discretion.

By 2000, Oregon’s catch of groundfish had dropped from a 20-year average of 74,000 tons to just 27,000 tons. In 2002, PFMC declared nine species of groundfish overfished. Faced with an extremely slow growth rate (Love et al. 2002) and a high degree of scientific uncertainty, the PFMC decided to close the entire

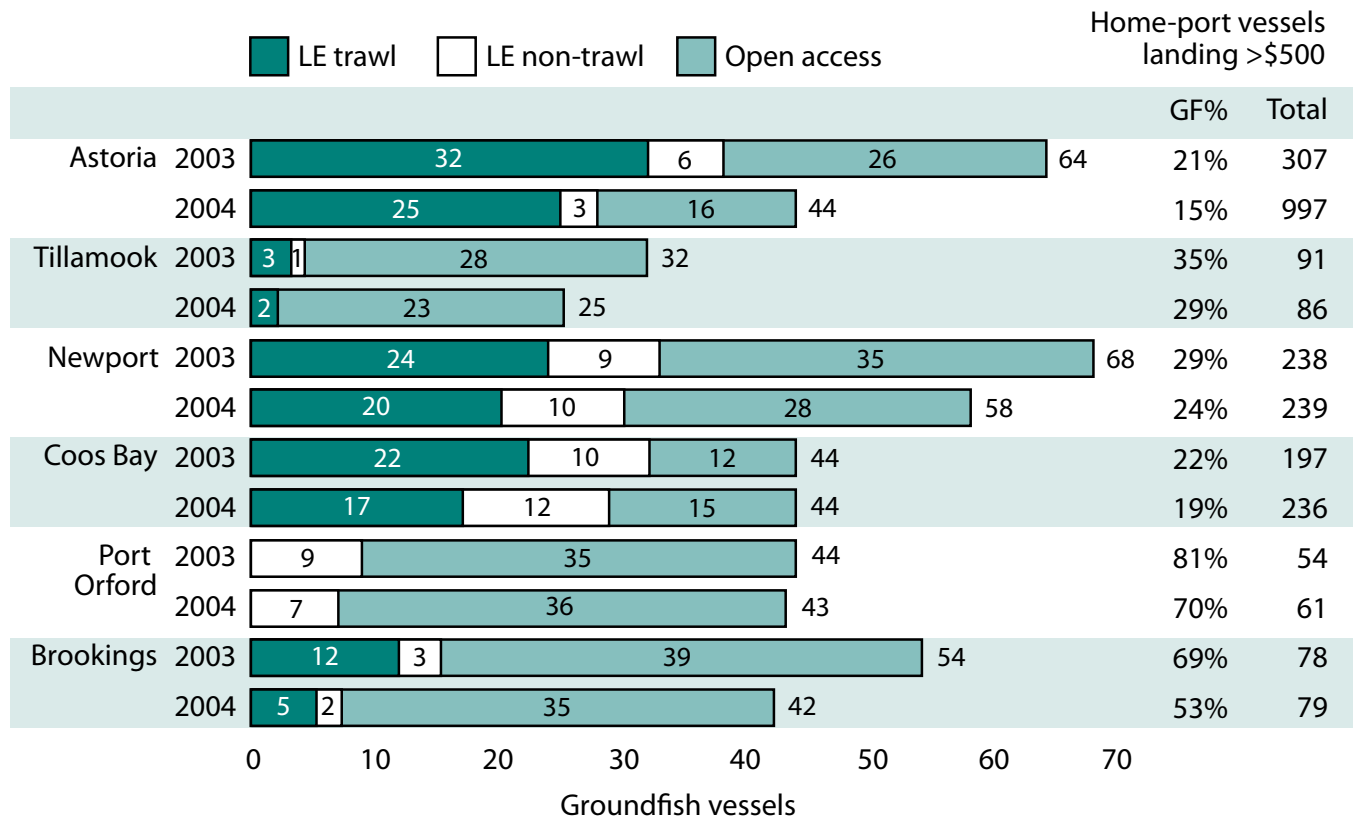


Figure 2. Oregon homeport vessel counts by port group and groundfish Limited Entry (LE) permit status. From Davis and Radtke 2005.



continental shelf to bottom trawling. Current stock-rebuilding plans are extremely long—decades for some species. The boom bubble had burst, it seemed.

In 2004, the Oregon groundfish fishery had an ex-vessel value of \$16.3 million—53 percent below the 10-year average between 1987 and 1996 (Radtke and Davis 2005). The coastwide decline in groundfish has been felt unevenly geographically and by gear types. In Oregon, different coastal communities depend on groundfish to varying degrees (Figure 2). While 70 percent of vessels in Port Orford caught over \$500 worth of groundfish in 2004, only 15 percent of those in Astoria did (Radtke and Davis 2005). Depth-based area closures have more pronounced effects on areas when the continental shelf extends further out to sea. Smaller boats in any port are generally unable to fish these deeper waters.

### Communities and the human impacts of the fishery decline

Section 312 of the MSA defines fishing communities as “geographic areas encompassing a *specific locale* where residents are dependent on fishery resources or are engaged in the harvesting or processing of these resources” (62c FR 41911, italics added). The focus is on the “place,” such as a coastal town. Grouping the fishing industry as members of geographic areas can be very useful; ports are very different from one another and different management decisions affect these ports differently. Management decisions that press people out of the fishing industry may have greater impacts in small towns, where other reemployment options may be limited.

Another way of looking at community is based on finding similarities among members *independent of their*

*location*. Recognizing this, the MSA created a second definition of fishing community: “a community which is substantially dependent on or substantially engaged in the harvest or processing of fishery resources to meet social and economic needs . . .”. Here the focus appears to be dependence on or engagement in fishing.<sup>1</sup> This is an example of what Gilden et al. (1999) call a “community of interest.” In our study, the term “fishing community” (FC) refers to people associated with the groundfish industry by working on boats, in processing plants, in gear shops, in shipyards, as diesel mechanics, as net makers, or as fishers’ shore-side business partners (spouse or partner).

Identifying who is and isn’t part of the FC can be complicated. Diversification in the groundfish fishery is the rule, not the exception. Husing et al. (2002) found that 83 percent of Oregon commercial vessels targeting groundfish also held at least one permit for another fishery. Processing facilities purchase groundfish and other species, allowing them to respond to changes in availability, fishing seasons, and markets.

Establishing meaningful numerical quantifiers of the FC is also complicated, given the scarcity of available statistical data on fishers and their fishery participation. Most funding for fisheries research goes into biological research; NMFS’ 2002 budget requested over \$200 million for biological fisheries research and only \$3.4 million for social research, including economics and statistics (PFMC Web site). What little eco-

<sup>1</sup>This wording, not surprisingly, has come under much scrutiny. Jacob et al. (2001) point out that this definition is workable only with a precise definition of what “substantially dependent” and “substantially engaged” mean.

conomic data does exist on the FC is often combined with data from other groups, particularly timber.

It is often difficult to compare employment statistics between the fishing industry and other industries. Commercial fishing is not an industry where workers keep and record precise hours. Crewmembers on fishing boats are generally self-employed contractors who are paid based on catch, not on the number of hours worked. Commercial fishing also directly supports boat builders, diesel mechanics, gear stores, marinas, ports, and bait shops. Linkages like these create a strong web that intertwines the FC with a geographic community (Jacob et al. 2001). Economic swings have strong impacts on these businesses, too, and when fisheries collapse, businesses like these are sometimes forced to lay off employees or even go out of business.

The FC is a very diverse group of people. In a study of groundfishers' perspectives on conservation, scientists, managers, and industry members, Harms and Sylvia (2001) remark on the diversity of opinion in this, even among fishers targeting the same species with identical gear. As a result of its breadth of experience, wide diversity of opinion, and well-documented feelings of independence, the FC often has difficulty banding together (Conway et al. 2000).

The resource community (RC) is diverse as well. Made up of governmental and nongovernmental employees from a variety of agencies and organizations, the RC is a broad group with members holding differ-

ent goals, philosophies, and opinions on the best way to address disaster relief. In their professional capacity, they may provide direct assistance to members of the FC, or be involved more remotely—planning programs or executing the day-to-day functions necessary for relief programs' functioning.

In the late 1990s and early 2000s, many agencies in the RC faced continually shrinking budgets and growing demands on their resources. In addition to this, during this time, several of the nongovernmental

Resource-dependent communities have been estimated to be 5 to 10 times less economically stable than the average community nationwide.

organizations that were involved in workforce retraining faced changes in federal laws. The Job Training Partnership Act of 1983 (JTPA)—which focused on *retraining* of unemployed persons—was replaced in 1998 by the Workforce Investment Act (WIA). WIA, which emphasizes *reemployment*, mandates that states consolidate different agencies (including employment, vocational rehabilitation, etc.) under one roof. The resulting conglomerations of services are called “One-Stops,” and are designed to streamline services while increasing efficiency and consistency across states and the nation.

## Disasters and disaster response

All communities face problems. At some point, situations move beyond being problems and become disasters. Like community, “disaster” is difficult to define. Social scientists use the term *disaster* to describe events in which communities are incurring damages, losses, and/or disruptions in their routine functions (Kreps 1989).

One example of a type of disaster is an economic disaster. Economic disasters can be caused by large-scale layoffs or closures, or a change in regulations that forces people to stop working. Rural communities are particularly susceptible to economic disasters due to market and regulatory forces outside their control (Overdeest and Green 1995). Resource-dependent communities have been estimated to be 5 to 10 times less economically stable than the average community nationwide (Freudenburg and Frickel 1994).

Disasters of all types can have severe effects on both individuals and the community as a whole (Raphael 1986). Communities impacted by the 1980 eruption of Mt. St. Helens in Washington State saw increased rates of illness, alcohol abuse, family stress, and violent behavior (Adams and Adams 1984). Other severe effects include psychological distress, depression, anxiety, and incapacitating mental problems (Miller 2005).

Governments and nongovernment organizations frequently assist communities hurt by disasters, and relief programs vary greatly in

design and scope. The funding for disaster responses may come from many sources, depending on the type and cause of the disaster and various political and economic pressures.

## COMPARISON WITH OTHER DISASTERS

There is no doubt that the WCGD meets classic definitions of a community disaster, in that it has brought about a disruption of routine function, has stressed the community, and has led to increased strains on families (Kreps 1989; Adams and Adams 1984). There are some interesting similarities and differences between the WCGD and the (roughly concurrent) Canadian cod crisis. Both were based on the crash of a resource once thought to be inexhaustible. Both stocks were reduced to small percentages of their original levels and have been slow to recover. However, the situation on the remote eastern seaboard of Canada was more severe than the WCGD. The closure there was more sudden and complete, and it directly impacted more people. Certainly the response was more substantial, constituting billions rather than millions of dollars (Hamilton and Butler 2001).

In many ways, the WCGD was similar to yet different from the Pacific Northwest timber crisis of the 1980s and '90s. Beginning in the late '70s, the timber industry underwent significant changes in response to market, environmental, and technological shifts, including increased foreign and domestic competition, stricter interpretation

of federal laws,<sup>2</sup> and a changing public view of how national forests ought to be managed (Conway and Wells 1994). Between 1979 and 1988, mill closures caused the loss of more than 25,000 jobs in Oregon and Washington (Pissot 1993). The scales of both disaster and response (federal programs pumped millions of dollars into affected communities) were much larger during the crash of the timber industry than during the WCGD. However, both timber workers and members of the FC face many similar obstacles to transitioning out of their industries. Timber workers (Carroll and Lee 1990) and FC members share a strong sense of

Coast fishery disaster, and more than \$24 million was allocated to salmon disaster-relief programs in Oregon, California, and Washington. The money was used for habitat restoration, data collection, a vessel-license buyback program, and disaster unemployment funding (Gilden and Smith 1996b). The program viewed the disaster as biological, not man-made, and was designed as a tool for helping people through a tough time—not to remove them from the fishery (Gilden and Smith 1996a). The Oregon program was publicized with mailings to all license holders, as well as with newspaper and radio advertisements about available

... there are some interesting similarities and differences between the WCGD and the salmon crisis of the mid-1990s—which, unfortunately, shared some of the same participants.

identity bound to their professions. Both communities have low levels of formal education, yet they are accustomed to substantial incomes that are difficult to replicate in the rural and coastal communities.

Looking specifically at the West Coast and fisheries, there are some interesting similarities and differences between the WCGD and the salmon crisis of the mid-1990s—which, unfortunately, shared some of the same participants. For decades, salmonids were a mainstay of the regional economy. In 1994, the federal government declared a West

benefits. “You’d have had to live in a cave to not know about it after a couple of months,” claimed a person involved in the program’s outreach. Nine ports in Oregon had part-time contracted employees, paid by the program, who were there to help with outreach efforts—to answer questions and find potential aid recipients.

However, only fishers were targeted by these outreach efforts, and only fishers were qualified to receive benefits—not people who worked in processing plants or other businesses supported by the salmon

<sup>2</sup>In particular, the Endangered Species Act, which began a battle between industry and protection of the spotted owl.



fishing industry. This omission was called a failure of the program by a program coordinator. It also failed to provide any occupational retraining. The predominant uses of Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) unemployment money, according to a survey done in 1996 by Gilden and Smith, were family living expenses and the purchasing of fishing gear and Coast Guard-required equipment.

Despite the large amount of money spent, the program was not generally well liked (Gilden and Smith 1996a, 1996b), and only a third of troll-permit owners applied for the relief, despite the fact that most (83 percent) who did apply were awarded some sort of relief (although only 39 percent felt they got what they needed) (Gilden and Smith 1996b). Of those who did not apply, a third felt that they were not eligible, and a quarter did not know about the program. A few chose not to apply

because they did not approve of what they viewed as “government handouts.” Only a quarter of those who chose not to apply for aid cited lack of need as the reason for not applying. Similar results were found in a survey of gillnet fishers. Other dominant complaints were that much of the help went to people who did not deserve or need it; eligibility was difficult or impossible to prove for those who had lost records, had been injured, or had performed major boat repairs during qualifying years; and the rules—which were inconsistent for each type of aid—were too confusing.

However, while there are similarities between the salmon and groundfish disasters, there are also marked differences. Unlike the WCGD and the Atlantic cod disaster, where recovery of stocks is not expected for decades or more, the response to the salmon disaster was designed as a stopgap mechanism to help people endure some bad years in the fishery until it

recovered and they could return to fishing.

All of these examples of disasters point out that the FC is heavily dependent on environmental and regulatory conditions over which they have little control. Firm business plans are difficult, if not impossible, to craft. The FC must deal with constantly changing ocean and weather conditions. Some of these conditions may change hourly; others may be inter-annual or decadal. People have adapted to these natural

cycles, and the result is a well-documented, if unpredictable, boom-and-bust cycle in many fisheries.

But many members of the FC now complain that human actions—especially fishing regulations—are more burdensome than natural cycles. When fishing is good and fishers are perceived to be making lots of money, non-fishers buy boats and start fishing. Soon there is overcapitalization, with too many boats chasing too few fish, so then fishery managers reduce the amount of fish that the FC is allowed to catch. Prices change quickly based on immediate availability of goods, but unlike timber workers, fishers can rarely hold onto product and wait for more favorable market conditions. These factors contribute to making the fishing industry particularly volatile, economically. While the legends of fishers making tens of thousands of dollars in a few days are true, so are the less-glamorous stories of fishers slowly going broke over several years.

## Study methods

The objectives of this study were to (1) document Oregon, California, and Washington’s response to the WCGD, focusing on Oregon; and (2) assess how well these responses worked. For objective 1, data was collected through academic journals, magazines, newspapers, e-mails, office memorandums, telephone calls, and in-person conversations.

For objective 2, we conducted a series of 23 ethnographic interviews along the West Coast. Ethnographic interviews help to discover complex issues, emergent themes, and broad thematic views held by different communities (Silverman 2001; Robson 2002). Ethnographic interviews allow informants to help shape the interview and raise topics that otherwise might not be explored (Schwartzman 1993). Interviewees were selected through “snowball sampling” (Berg 2001; Robson 2002); initial contacts were selected from both communities and then interviewees were asked to provide names of other people they felt should be contacted for the study.

Those interviewed within the FC ranged from people working on boats, in processing plants, in

gear shops, and in other support businesses, to fishers’ shoreside business partners. The RC members interviewed were employees at a variety of governmental and non-governmental organizations. Table 1 lists the geographic distribution and types of members interviewed from each community. Interviewees from both communities represented the diversity found in each community (gender, age), and interviewees from Oregon varied in their location (south, central, and north coast).

Interviews were conducted in person and ranged from 30 minutes to two hours. All responses were tape-recorded. Those from Oregon were transcribed verbatim and analyzed via content analysis (Berg 2001; Robson 2002). Unless otherwise noted, quotations are typical of what many interviewees said. To ensure confidentiality, only community identifiers follow quotations.

When the West Coast groundfish fishery was declared an economic disaster, Congress responded by allocating \$5 million in disaster relief funds, to be used by the three states to help individuals and com-

munities impacted by the downturn. Funds were to be split among the states in proportion to the disaster in each state; the final agreement gave California and Oregon each 35 percent of the money (\$1.75 million), while Washington received 30 percent (\$1.5 million). Each state, within broad federal guidelines, was to design its own program to help its citizens. The National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) reviewed states' proposed plans for compliance with federal mandates before funds were released.

<b>Participants by community</b>		
	Fishing community	13
	Resource community	10
<b>Participants by state</b>		
Oregon	Fishing community	11
	Resource community	4
California	Fishing community	2
	Resource community	3
Washington	Fishing community	0
	Resource community	1
National/other	Fishing community	2

*Table 1. Breakdown of interviewees by geography and community.*



# Results and discussion: lessons learned from different places and different responses

**W**hile the three states were seeking to help similar groups of people and all were operating under identical federal guidelines, Oregon, California, and Washington designed very different programs (Table 2).

## Washington's response

Washington chose to spend its dollars on coastal communities of place. On September 28, 2001, the state announced the final breakdown of its \$1.5 million award. The Washington Department of Community, Trade, and Economic Development (WDCTED) was to get \$1.2M (80 percent) to help communities “better deal with the coast-wide decline of groundfish fisheries” by helping to diversify the economies of coastal communities. Grants were given to projects believed to “promote economic diversity away from dependence on the commercial groundfish fishery,” and were required to address locally defined priorities. Nineteen different communities were eligible to apply for the funds. The remaining \$300,000 (20 percent) was administered by the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife to help set up a voluntary program for gathering data on arrowtooth flounder bycatch rates.

Washington's response was to have the funding go directly into existing programs within agencies. Numerous phone calls to the WDCTED uncovered no one who was knowledgeable about the program or of how the funding was used (Washington fishers reportedly grumbled that it paid for new public restrooms). And while the WDCTED Web site contained a link, buried deep within the site, referring to groundfish funds, the link was a dead end.

Our research indicated that there was little project management and no centralized coordination regarding groundfish disaster funds. Employees approached at coastal Washington One-Stops were aware that the disaster had been declared, but as they received no guidance or funds to administer new programs, it appears that it was generally business as usual, with the occasional retraining of FC members as they came in. Outreach was handled primarily through a mandatory meeting that all people collecting unemployment insurance were required to attend once per year.

However, unlike Oregon, many Washington FC members were able to access standard state and federal unemployment insurance. According

Washington's response		
PROGRAM	BUDGET	PERCENT OF TOTAL BUDGET
Diversify coastal communities	\$1.2M	80 percent
Research	\$300K	20 percent
Oregon's response		
PROGRAM*	BUDGET	PERCENT OF TOTAL BUDGET
Peer outreach	\$66K	4 percent
Groundfish transition income (GTI)	\$1.68M	96 percent
California's response		
PROGRAM	BUDGET	PERCENT OF TOTAL BUDGET
Vessel safety equipment	\$300K (actual was approx. \$100K)	13 percent (actual was approx. 6 percent)
Collaborative research	\$763K (actual was approx. \$1.2M)	33 percent (actual was approx. 69 percent)
Program administration	\$70K	3 percent
Groundfish transition stipend	\$1.2M (actual was approx. \$400K)	51 percent (actual was approx. 22 percent)

Table 2. Breakdown of interviewees by geography and community. (\*Original funding is listed. Note that an additional \$2.2M was received in 2002 [85 percent of which went to GTI, 15 percent to peer outreach].)

to a One-Stop employee: “Fishermen all sign up for unemployment instantly, soon as they come off the boats. It’s a pattern.” While unemployment insurance brought the fishers in, there were concerns expressed by a One-Stop employee that the system was too impersonal, and “wasn’t working for them as well as it could.”

The differences between the Oregon response and the Washington response frustrated fishers who lived near the border. They complained about the discrepancy in available programs for Oregon vs. Washington, as Washington residents might fish off the coast of both states—and even on Oregon

boats with Oregon crews—yet were ineligible for Oregon assistance.

*“I’m getting screwed. I fished in Oregon but I’m not eligible for their program because I live in Washington.”—FC*

### Oregon's response

Oregon’s response to the downturn in the groundfish industry predated that of the federal government’s by several years. Individuals from both the FC and the RC saw the fishing fleet’s shrinking profits and the accompanying social and economic strains—signs similar to those they had seen in the 1990s’ salmon industry downturn. During

the late 1990s, Oregon Sea Grant Extension, fishing industry leaders, members of the Oregon Employment Department (OED), the Department of Community Colleges and Workforce Development (CCWD), local One-Stops, and other social service agencies began meeting to design a response to what they felt was a pending disaster. The group eventually settled on a program designed to help FC members voluntarily and completely leave the commercial fishing industry. The effort would need to work in conjunction with existing services such as One-Stops. By the time the official disaster was declared (January 2000), the coalition was ready. Together they designed the Groundfish Disaster Outreach

Program (GDOP) and served as the Advisory Committee for the program, developing policies and helping to find solutions to challenges.

The GDOP was designed to help people access existing resources available at One-Stops and to ease the passage of those who wanted to leave the fishing industry. The desired outcome was a better bridge between the fishing family business community and the agency/resource-provider community. The target audience was groundfish fishers, fishing business partners, processing workers, gear suppliers, and service/support workers who were seeking to leave the industry and who would commit to actively participating in a reemployment plan.

The GDOP had two main components. First, contracts with part-time “outreach peers”: members of the FC who were paid to help others find services in six target areas (Astoria, Tillamook, Newport, Coos Bay, Port Orford, and Gold Beach/Brookings), and to help the service agencies find affected FC members. After participating in a training session in May 2000, the GDOP went active with five outreach peers and an outreach peer-coordinator (to oversee and coordinate outreach efforts). These people worked independently yet met regularly over four years.

Outreach peers explained what benefits were available to impacted FC members, including, but not limited to, needs-based payments, job retraining, job search help, Oregon Health Plan (a state-supported health insurance plan), and food stamps.

They answered questions and helped people fill out the necessary paperwork, but they were *not* representatives of the service agencies. After talking to the outreach peers, affected individuals went to local One-Stops, which signed them up for services and determined whether they could receive needs-based payments (discussed below). While the outreach peers could remain a resource for affected members of the FC, their primary contact for services was to be the service agencies.

The outreach peers worked in various ways to “grease the skids” for those trying to leave the fishery. Among the GDOP’s innovative creations were the occupational skills checklists for each role (deckhand, skipper, onshore business partner) (Table 3). These were lists of potentially transferable job skills possessed by members of the FC; each list helped the person articulate his or her skills on a résumé or job application. The lists demonstrated to members of both communities that members of the FC already possessed skills that were in demand by employers.

The GDOP’s second component was a source of financial support for people who were actively transitioning out of the fishery. Shortly after the GDOP began, it became clear to the outreach peers and the coalition that a primary obstacle for many people wanting to leave fishing was that they could not afford to stop fishing long enough to retrain or look for new work. As a result of 1999’s Oregon House Bill 3308, which designated fishing vessel crew as self-employed contractors,<sup>3</sup> Oregon fishers were

generally ineligible for federal and state unemployment insurance. As a result, when crew lost their jobs, they no longer had access to unemployment insurance while seeking new jobs or retraining.

This need spawned the GDOP’s groundfish transition income (GTI), which used the bulk of the federal moneys. GTI helped people survive while going through job retraining or searching for a new job. GDOP leaders and state officials decided on an amount of \$1,000 a month for single individuals and \$1,500 a month for married people (if both parties in a marriage were eligible, they could collect \$1,500 each per month). FC members meeting eligibility requirements could collect for up to nine months. GTI was available on a first-come, first-served basis. As soon as funds became available, outreach peers and some agency representatives began informing affected FC members, spreading the word by setting up informational meetings and visiting the docks, processing plants, coffee shops, bars, and homes.

There were five criteria necessary to receive GTI:

1. Be an Oregon resident
2. Be a part of the groundfish industry
3. Be negatively impacted by the groundfish disaster (be unemployed or underemployed)
4. Be actively using or willing to use reemployment assistance
5. Commit to permanently leaving the commercial fishing industry.

<sup>3</sup>The bill applies to Oregon vessels with fewer than 10 crewmembers, each of whom was paid a portion of the total catch.

<b>Vessel operation</b>	
<input type="checkbox"/> Stands watch	<input type="checkbox"/> Takes direction from captain
<input type="checkbox"/> Steers vessel	<input type="checkbox"/> Loads equipment and supplies by hand or hoist
<input type="checkbox"/> Pulls and guides nets and lines	<input type="checkbox"/> Signals other workers to move, hoist, and position loads
<input type="checkbox"/> Removes fish from nets, hooks, pots	<input type="checkbox"/> Stows catch/refrigeration or preservation mixture or ice
<input type="checkbox"/> Sorts catch	<input type="checkbox"/> Has knowledge of radio operation for distress call
<input type="checkbox"/> Operates safety and fire equipment	<input type="checkbox"/> Has knowledge of refrigeration system
<input type="checkbox"/> May cook for crew	
<b>Maintenance</b>	
<input type="checkbox"/> Vessel repairs	<input type="checkbox"/> Switching out pumps–motors hyd/elec
<input type="checkbox"/> Scrape vessel for paint	<input type="checkbox"/> Equipment maintenance and repair
<input type="checkbox"/> Block and tackle	<input type="checkbox"/> Hydraulics/heavy equipment
<input type="checkbox"/> Rope and cable splicing	<input type="checkbox"/> General maintenance of vessel
<input type="checkbox"/> Oil changes	<input type="checkbox"/> Climbing in rigging for light replacement, rigging repair
<input type="checkbox"/> Battery maintenance	<input type="checkbox"/> Wash deck, conveyors, knives, or other equipment
<input type="checkbox"/> Paint vessel	<input type="checkbox"/> Winch operation
<input type="checkbox"/> Electrical work	<input type="checkbox"/> Net mending
<input type="checkbox"/> Winch turning	<input type="checkbox"/> Gear repair
<input type="checkbox"/> Welding	
<b>Business management</b>	
<input type="checkbox"/> Tax forms	<input type="checkbox"/> Record-keeping (self-employed/subcontractor): vessel names, hours worked, wages received, all business-related expenses
<b>Personal skills</b>	
<input type="checkbox"/> Physical strength	<input type="checkbox"/> Can take direction
<input type="checkbox"/> Heavy lifting	<input type="checkbox"/> Knowledge of fish types
<input type="checkbox"/> Good health	<input type="checkbox"/> Perseverance
<input type="checkbox"/> Good physical coordination	<input type="checkbox"/> Patience
<input type="checkbox"/> Mechanical aptitude	<input type="checkbox"/> Commitment
<input type="checkbox"/> Team player	<input type="checkbox"/> Work outdoors
<input type="checkbox"/> Long hours/intermittent sleep	<input type="checkbox"/> Able to recognize and deal with emergency situations
<input type="checkbox"/> Good attitude	<input type="checkbox"/> Flexibility to assume other’s role on vessel

Table 3. Occupational skills checklist for deckhands.

GTI payments were handled through the Oregon Employment Department (OED), as this agency had already demonstrated prior experience with handling unemployment payments and could handle the job most efficiently.

Members of the FC had to sign up for reemployment programs at their local One-Stop, and it was the One-Stops that made the final determination as to whether individual FC members qualified for GTI. If they did, individuals could begin collecting checks as soon as they began a reemployment program and could continue to collect GTI for up to nine months. The OED mailed out the first GTI checks in June 2001, approximately eight-and-a-half months after the GDOP started.

Although the initial response from the FC was sluggish in some areas, as word got out and fishing worsened, the program gained momentum and the \$1.7 million was quickly allocated. Coalition members felt that “this was just the tip of the iceberg,” and that more individuals needed help. Based largely on the GDOP’s initial success, Oregon applied for and received two additional federal allocations, of \$1.0 million and \$1.2 million, in early 2002 (funding came from the fiscal year 2002 Commerce/Justice State Appropriations Bill). Like the initial allocation, the money was used primarily for GTI (\$1.9M [85 percent] for GTI and \$300K [15 percent] for outreach).

Unlike the initial allocation of GTI, where outreach peers had to work to get FC members interested, the second GTI was allocated *hours* after

it was made officially available, with people reportedly waiting in lines outside the One-Stops to sign-up. Although the final deadline for payouts from these funds was July 2006, the GTI funds were exhausted by November 2005..

It would be impossible, for many reasons, to definitively quantify the number of people helped by the GDOP. While agencies’ funding was often contingent on carefully kept records indicating numbers of people helped, outreach peers had only estimates of the amount of time they spent working and how many people they interacted with. Observations of records and transcripts from interviews revealed that outreach peers took phone calls throughout the day and night, and they were often approached with GDOP concerns when they were not officially working.

*“If [an outreach peer] said she got 20 phone calls in a week, I would bet that the number was closer to 100, but she didn’t log every one of them, because some of them would be people saying, ‘I don’t really need training, what I need is help with my taxes, where do I go,’ or ‘I don’t have any food for my family this week,’ and [the outreach peer] would hook them up with a food bank or a grocery store. She went out and found attorneys, clergy, and counselors that would help these people.”—RC*

It is also hard to accurately quantify the number of people the program helped simply by providing examples of successful transitions. FC members talked about how one transitioning deckhand or captain would cause a cascade effect within the

community, bringing several more people in for support and services. With these qualifications, we may make some cautious estimates for people who were assisted by the GDOP.

Before the GDOP began, the coalition estimated that approximately 330 people along the Oregon coast would be at a high or moderate risk of being impacted and would therefore need to access GDOP services (Table 4). Reality proved the number to be much greater.

Region	Anticipated number impacted (%; n = 330)
Astoria	24%
Tillamook	8%
Newport	27%
Coos Bay	20%
Port Orford	12%
Brookings	9%

Table 4. Number of people anticipated to be impacted in Oregon by the WCGD.

By 2004, the GDOP had reached an estimated 1,500 people. Of those, 800 directly accessed resources, with over 400 of those using agency reemployment programs and 350 using other agencies (food or housing assistance, mental health, etc.). As the estimates had indicated, no individual region monopolized the resources available. In late 2005, OED reported that approximately 400 individuals all along the coast had accessed GTI funds during the life of the program. Table

5 shows the breakdown of whom within the FC accessed support from the GDOP. As noted, numbers don't adequately capture the entire picture. Table 6 highlights how the types of careers into which people transitioned varied greatly.

### California's response

While Oregon's GDOP started coming together, California began to form its own plans for its share of the federal disaster funds. In June 2001, a group of representatives from the California Department of Fish and Game (CDFG) and local One-Stops organized and led Groundfish Disaster Response Program meetings in five California coastal communities (Eureka, Santa Rosa, Santa Cruz, Los Alamitos, and San Luis Obispo). The CDFG, which served as the lead agency in the project, used comments from the meetings, written public commentary, and input from an industry advisory group to create the final plan. The program was designed to help both the commercial and charter fleets.

Not everything went exactly according to plan in California. In general, the California FC's response to the program was not as strong as had been expected. The safety equipment buy-back program closed in July 2003, and although the official announcement from the CDFG called the program a success, only a third of the moneys budgeted were paid out (approximately \$100,000 of \$300,000). Groundfish Disaster Stipend funds were also not readily absorbed by the FC. A CDFG representative interviewed for this project reported that approximately one-

Occupational group	Percentage of participants
Boat owners/captains	15%
Deckhands	43%
Shoreside partners	29%
Processing and other shoreside businesses	13%
Gender	
Men	60%
Women	40%

Table 5. Breakdown of members of the FC that accessed the GDOP.

Sampling of occupational fields	
Auto mechanics	Medical office
Barber/hairdresser	Medical secretary
Bilingual education assistant	Medical transcription
Casino work	Medical X-ray technician
Construction/heavy equipment operators	Merchant marines
Contractors (general and specialty)	Oceanography
Counseling	Phlebotomist
Crane operation	Prison guard
Dog grooming and training	Private investigator
Drug and alcohol counseling	Professional chef
Education assistant	Real estate appraisal
Fiber optics	Self-employed manufacturing
Fire suppression	Stenography
Groundskeeper/landscaping/irrigation	Timber framer
Information technology	Truck driving
Legal aide	Veterinarian technician
Medical coding	Water treatment
Medical nursing	Welding

Table 6. Sampling of occupational fields entered after GDOP-supported transitions.

third (\$400,000) of the \$1.2 million remained in the GDS pool when the program closed in June 2004. A total of 58 people received GDS funds during the program. Money remaining from both of these projects was transferred to the collaborative groundfish research program.

for contacting crewmembers. “They didn’t get word unless their boss told them,” she said, and she pointed out that even some supportive license owners do not or cannot read their mail, and do not have access to computers. Additionally, although the target audience for the program

stop fishing and boat owners could not stop, as they were economically bound to their vessels.

Coordination may have been a third reason. A CDFG representative felt that her department should not have been the lead agency. She said that it was nice to have Oregon and Washington setting an example, because her agency was one of biologists with no experience coordinating or leading disaster responses. Perhaps due to a lack of experience and training, they found it “difficult to get much out of” the public planning process.

... retraining efforts needed to come *after* a vessel buy-back program, rather than before.... When retraining efforts went first, crewmembers felt little need to stop fishing and boat owners could not stop, as they were economically bound to their vessels.

There were several reasons given by people in California for what appeared to be a lack of interest in retraining funds (GDS). Outreach had apparently not worked well. A government representative who worked with the fishing industry said that he had heard nothing of any of the money coming to his region, and had seen nothing compared to what he had witnessed during the salmon disaster. He’d heard about the Oregon program, and reported that a GDOP representative had visited his community, but he said that, to his knowledge, “California didn’t make that kind of effort.” Similarly, a CDFG employee called the recruitment for the California disaster program “ad hoc.” She detailed limitations of the effectiveness of mailings, which was the CDFG’s primary method of contacting the FC to let them know about the groundfish program. While the CDFG mailed out announcements to all license holders, they had no mechanism

officially included owners of vessels and fish processing plants and their employees, little effort went toward reaching those past license holders through mailings. She concluded that “the only real way to get word out is in person.” In contrast, one FC member thought that the word got out adequately, with just the existing “network” of FC members’ word of mouth. He had been a boat owner, and he said he’d had a few deckhands go through the program, and they had heard about it from other deckhands.

Another reason for the FC’s seeming lack of interest in the program may have been timing. One member of the FC argued that retraining efforts needed to come *after* a vessel buy-back program, rather than before. After the buyback program removed boats from the fleet, both vessel owners and crewmembers would be out of work and ready for retraining. When retraining efforts went first, crewmembers felt little need to

A representative at a California One-Stop said that she had almost never, during the whole program, talked to anybody in other agencies. Calls with state representatives were mostly to check numbers and funding levels, not to discuss broad problems. She said that there had been one conference at the beginning of the program wherein program leaders discussed how the response was going to work, and then she was set off on her own. A released report issued to the Monterey County Office for Economic Development (Pomeroy and Dalton 2003) posited that the program was less effective than it could have been for three reasons: insufficient promotion of program, unclear rules for participants (it mentions, specifically, uncertainty over whether people could continue to fish while accessing services), and design flaws that failed to address the particular needs and limitations of potential applicants.

# A closer look at Oregon

## Challenges in Oregon

The California response was not the only effort that had challenges; Oregon’s GDOP had challenges as well. Personality and cultural conflicts between and within the two communities were a constant issue, as were more-tangible issues such as taxability and misleading advertisements from politicians (as soon as federal funds were allocated, politicians from each state were quick to send out press releases touting their involvement in securing funding for their communities; unfortunately, their press releases were generally very unclear and resulted in confused FC members approaching the agencies, demanding their share of the money).

A small but important example of cultural differences between the two communities (specifically, agencies and outreach peers) was the issue of client privacy. At the beginning of the program, there was an ongoing debate between the GDOP outreach peers and local One-Stops over access to agencies’ files on program participants. While outreach peers felt that basic information on people accessing the program was necessary to best help FC members, the One-Stops expressed legal concerns over confidentiality. This issue was neatly resolved by a one-line addition to the GTI application, wherein the applicant agreed to have the outreach peer involved in his or her transition.

Stereotypes of the fishing community	Stereotypes of the resource community
Proud/independent/hardworking	Governmental
FC members are looked down upon	Insensitive
Poor with structure	Bureaucratic
Freeloaders	Helpful
Alcohol and drug users	Rude
Unreliable/not serious about retraining	Mean
A different breed	Judgmental

*Table 7. Stereotypes of the fishing community and the resource community expressed by members of both communities.*





*“I went in and met with [a caseworker]. She was really cool. She made it easy.”—FC*

*“They were snide, sarcastic . . . [and] mean to us.”—FC*

*“A majority of people [in the RC] have no customer-service skills. They’re kind of [harsh] to people.”—RC*

Stereotyping emerged as an interview theme related to challenges facing the program. Table 7 summarizes stereotypes of the FC and the RC expressed by members of both communities.

*“ . . . they’re not people that come out with their hand out . . . they’re motivated. They want to do something. They honestly want some help. And it’s not easy for them to ask.”—RC*

*“ . . . fishermen are hard-working people. They go out there and put their lives on the line. They’re very independent people, like to do things their own way.”—FC*

*“I think that probably the number-one [stereotype of the FC] is that they work hard but they party harder.”—RC*

*“In [fishing], numbers are very important. Numbers make me money. But people are just as important, and I don’t see that [at the One-Stops] . . . Government, crappy people, all out to make their own money . . .”—FC*

*“This is government, any way you look at it. I can dress it up pretty and it’s still government.”—RC*

Other challenges included barriers to leaving the industry, such as reduced income or a deep-set resistance to leaving the fishery:

*“ . . . they’re used to making big, huge chunks of money, and they don’t make huge chunks of money when they get out into the real occupational world.”—RC*

*“ . . . guys are used to making a hundred, two hundred thousand dollars a year and all of the sudden you want them to make ten bucks an hour? It doesn’t even cover their lifestyle, their bills.”—FC*

*“Fishing is strange . . . it becomes an addiction, and it’s a way of life. It’s not just a job. If it was just a job, you’d see more people quitting.”—FC*

Interviewees mentioned that age and feelings of pride prevent many fishers from accessing aid, because they view assistance programs as “government” or “welfare” and unworthy of somebody used to supporting his or her family by working.

*“ . . . anytime you try to seek help from anybody, basically what you’re saying is, ‘OK, I’m turning my life over.’ Some of them feel like they’re selling their soul to the devil.”—RC*

*“Probably the number-one difficulty is that it’s humiliating. You’re used to being your own boss, running your own business. You feel like a failure, going into those buildings, and unfortunately you get a lot of people who don’t seem to care, and you feel like you’re being treated like a second-class citizen. So just getting people to go through the door to get help was a challenge, so they wouldn’t feel so humiliated.”—FC*

Being a successful fisher requires extensive skills, many of which can transfer into other lines of work. However, there are many other skills considered necessary for the rest of the workforce that many FC members do not possess. In particular, the job-search procedure is very different outside of the FC, and many members of the FC lack résumés and have never had an official job interview. Many lack high school diplomas.

*“There’s nothing like being turned down . . . I mean, I could not get a job. I’m 50, my back is fused, the car-pel-tunnel. . . . I was applying for so many jobs and it was very frustrating. A male over 50—with some physical problems—that’s coming from the fishing industry is not a well-sought-after individual.”—FC*

*“I think that doing a job search outside of the fishing industry was a challenge for them because they needed to talk and act in a whole new light. It didn’t matter [when applying for a job on a boat] if you wore your waders . . . as long as they were willing to jump on that boat and take a fishing trip. It’s not like having to dress up and present yourself in a different industry.”—RC*

Perhaps due to a well-documented sense of independence, many who transitioned out of fishing gravitated toward self-employment, opening up various businesses from landscaping to dog grooming. Unfortunately, FC members reported that they felt the One-Stops discouraged self-employment and said that tracking self-employed people was too difficult.

*“The problem was that a lot of people did not want to hire somebody who’d worked for themselves, and for the most part I’ve always worked for myself and not worked for somebody.”—FC*

*“One [obstacle] was the self-employment taboo. [A One-Stop] didn’t want to work with people who wanted to be self-employed, period. That was a really big obstacle. To me, it would have seemed more reasonable to expect these guys to want their own businesses.”—FC*

Another challenge to leaving fishing is that there are still boats fishing, which makes fisheries disasters generally unlike mill or mine closures where people are absolutely forced to quit. Although the groundfish fleet continues to shrink, almost every port reported that they had at least a boat or two still going out. Some who went through retraining constantly second-guessed their choice to leave. Both the RC and outreach peers reported that many who started retraining went back to fishing. Some returned to finish their retraining programs; others did not.

*“Do I really want to do this? What am I doing? This is crazy.’ I had to keep telling myself that this was the right thing to do, to get out of the*

*fishing business, and that everything would work out. You just didn’t know it in the start. Was I going to fail? Was I going to work at a gas station for the rest of my life?”—FC*

There was almost universal agreement that the GTI was critical to the success of the program. Some people pointed out that, historically, people have transitioned out of the fishery without GTI, but they thought the program was much more successful for the inclusion of GTI.

*“Without GTI, I don’t think they could have successfully made that transition. With it, people were able to at least try and get through the process.”—RC*

*“The GTI money was a big draw for people to come into the program, and it was a big draw because it was a nice chunk of change. But it also was a component that was needed for the success of the transition.”—FC*

GTI also had its complexities. GDOP leadership lamented the challenges

related to the “taxability” of GTI. Initially, the IRS indicated that it would tax GTI as income, significantly reducing the aid provided by the program. GDOP leadership argued and worked to change this. The issue was resolved in February 2002, with the IRS deciding that GTI was to be tax-free because it was a “needs-based payment,” not “income.”

Another commonly voiced theme in interviews was frustration with temporal and geographical inconsistencies within Oregon. Individual One-Stops generally operate with varying degrees of autonomy, with little or no coordination with other One-Stops. One One-Stop may get a grant that allows it to pay for a client’s books for his or her retraining program, and the next One-Stop up or down the coast may not have funding available for this service.

*“Each of [the agencies] has their own mission with their own board of directors that decide who and how*



... they're going to take their pot of money that they get from the feds and sort of disburse it."—FC

"What [the agency] would do would vary from person to person, would vary from time of year, so we could never really tell what the agency could do for them."—FC

GDOP Advisory Board meetings tried to encourage uniformity, but could not impose it. This caused sometimes-striking regional variances in the services available for FC members.

Additionally, One-Stops were adjusting to changing federal laws (from JTPA to WIA), which altered their funding and missions. Different One-Stops adapted to these new laws at different rates, leaving outreach peers, in particular, in the difficult position of trying to explain constantly changing services. Finally, several outreach peers expressed exasperation over employee turnover within the One-Stops and over the lack of proper briefing new people received on the GDOP. Members of the One-Stops, meanwhile, explained that they were taking on increased workloads with smaller and smaller staffs.

Interviewees from both communities expressed frustration over restrictions and complications to accessing funding. The One-Stops are required to meet various standards in order to receive the funding to operate (numbers served, and numbers served that were later employed—or, increasingly, employed in the field for which they received training from the agency). These goals might have caused the agency to take on one member of the FC, but not another.



"When I started, 'well, there's something out there to help you—let's access it.' Then I realized that they had a whole screening process that really screened out most people who needed help."—FC

"They could be starving to death, literally, and their kids could be starving to death, yet, on paper their assets looked so great that they didn't qualify for a lot of programs."—RC

"I showed them the income that I'd been making, [and] they informed me that they could not pay for the books or the tuition because they needed to be able to get me a job after I graduated paying 75 percent of the wages that I was making before going into the program, or it would count badly against them. There was no way that they could do that, so they were not going to give me any money."—FC

"We live and die by statistics. It's no longer just about getting people trained."—RC

## Successes in Oregon

Each interviewee was asked whether he or she felt the program was a success, an intentionally broad question allowing respondents to answer in a way that revealed their own definitions of success based on their own experience. Three primary themes emerged: people's willingness to help themselves, success did happen, and bridges were built between the FC and the RC.

Numerous people from both communities said this was a program specifically designed to help people who were interested in leaving the fishing industry, not a marketing program to persuade people to stop fishing. It required a lot of effort from its participants—all transitioning members of the FC mentioned difficulties in their process—and ultimately only worked for those who were willing to help themselves.

"Unless the fisherman, or whoever the program is directed at, wants to do it, it isn't going to work."—FC

*“I think that it was a really good opportunity for those that wanted to make the transition. I think that those that wanted to make that happen, they were the ones that made the program a success.”—RC*

Interestingly, nearly everyone interviewed felt that, overall, the program did well. Some people talked about how it was successful in meeting specific goals; others quoted statistics (numbers of people helped, percentage successfully retrained); and others felt that it had simply helped members of the FC to deal with the downturn in the groundfish industry.

*“I think it was a success for me. God, yes.”—FC*

*“It worked real well, and our success rate has been real good . . . I haven’t looked at the stats lately, but last time I looked our placement rate was about 90 percent.”—RC*

*“I just thought that it was incredible.”—RC*

*“[My job-training] was good. I enjoyed it. It was a little hard being away from home, but I knew it was something that I wanted to do.”—FC*

Nearly everyone interviewed also believed that bridges had been built between the FC and the RC. They cited increased communication and a raised awareness of existing services by members of the FC. However, there was an almost universal sentiment that these bridges would not stand the test of time. Many felt that the individuals involved were critical, and that, as they left positions in agencies or their communities, the connection between the communi-

ties would disappear with them.

*“I think [there were bridges], as long as the outreach peer was there.”—FC*

*“I think that a lot of bridges were built . . . [but] nothing lasts forever. There’s an awful lot of turnover and burnout in agency work. I don’t know that it’ll be the same when everybody who experienced this program is gone.”—RC*

Nearly all persons involved in the coordination of the GDOP voiced favorable opinions of the communication between different individuals and parties. While some found the regular GDOP meetings frustrating, most agreed that they were critical to the success of the program as a whole.

because people felt that their calls or e-mails were sometimes unfairly ignored.

## Suggested improvements to the Oregon program

Interviewees were asked what changes they would make if they could go back and reorganize the program from the beginning. Despite the challenges, and maybe because of the successes, three main improvements were mentioned: Longer Program/More Time for Each Individual; Improve Communication, Coordination, and Training; and Make Little or No Changes.

While interviewees who went through the retraining were pleased

**While interviewees who went through the retraining were pleased that they had gotten what they did, most expressed a desire for more training. Many wanted to continue on for more education, whether it was a college degree or increased specialization in their trade.**

*“Our first experience with the GDOP was not successful. It was not a good experience. We ended up having a meeting saying, ‘Why isn’t this working?’ and then it started working. . . . Pretty soon, we had a hundred e-mails going back and forth and were communicating with each other and building relationships. And I firmly believe that the relationships are what made this work.”—RC*

Other forms of communication mentioned (telephone and e-mail) received mixed reviews, generally

that they had gotten what they did, most expressed a desire for more training. Many wanted to continue on for more education, whether it was a college degree or increased specialization in their trade. Some were frustrated that they hadn’t been able to finish programs they had started, though those asked acknowledged that they had been aware of the duration of the program from the beginning.

*“My niece, she went for her [Certified Nurse’s Assistant certification] and*

*now she's working in the doctor's office. She wanted to be [a Registered Nurse], but the funding ran out and she's got another two years to go. . . . How can you keep doing something when your money runs out?"—FC*

The most commonly held belief among interviewees was that more

coordination and standardization was needed between the various entities and organizations involved. Some mentioned that they thought it would help avoid confusion and inconsistencies. Both communities mentioned that the other needed to be more "educated" about the GDOP.

A number of people expressed that, whatever their frustrations with the GDOP, they wouldn't have changed anything in its structure, suggesting perhaps that they viewed the problems as inherent in any system.

*"I don't think I'd change anything. I really don't. It worked well for me."—FC, RC*



## The outreach peer experience

While the official job of the GDOP outreach peers may have been just to get people to the door of the FC, the reality was that they wore many hats. This segment of the analysis focused on the costs and benefits of being an outreach peer. In an attempt to best capture the feelings about being an outreach peer, only the responses from the outreach peers and outreach peer coordinator are included here.

Outreach peers described themselves as teachers, guides, cheerleaders, friends, and advocates to the people they helped. All of the outreach peers shared a common goal of helping the FC however they could. Other personal goals mentioned included self-improvement and drawing attention to their communities. While the interviews did not involve extensive discussions of their backgrounds, all outreach peers had been active members of their communities (both of place and interest).

*"I wanted a 100 percent success rate. I was devastated when people weren't going to do it right. I would go over to their house, 'Man, come on.'"*

—Outreach Peer

*“I think that it was probably my biggest goal was to help as many people as I could. . . . I guess you’d call me an enabler. I’m always for the underdog. I always want to instill in somebody else the confidence I feel I’ve gained by working out in the public.”*  
—Outreach Peer

Every outreach peer, without exception, spoke favorably of every other outreach peer. All said that they had built strong friendships that would not end with the program. Many talked about how these friendships helped pull them through the myriad difficulties of the program.

dinators, but each mentioned them and, again, everyone spoke favorably of the GDOP leadership.

*“I think [the GDOP directors] did a hell of a job, and if they ever want another peer, they should call me.”*  
—Outreach Peer

*“[The GDOP Directors and Outreach Peer coordinator] fought for everybody up and down the coast. [a GDOP Director] is great. I’ve had a few rounds with her, but you want her on your side at any time; she really cared.”*—Outreach Peer

**Outreach peers described themselves as teachers, guides, cheerleaders, friends, and advocates to the people they helped. All of the outreach peers shared a common goal of helping the FC however they could.**

*“My goal was to get out more. Learn something. Helped me a lot with my people skills, and coming out of my shell.”*—Outreach Peer

It was clear that most of the outreach peers were very proud of the work they had done in helping members of the FC, and some outreach peers spoke of the people they had helped as if they were proud parents.

*“It was kind of like one of them would go to school, and they would get a job, it was like ‘YES!’ That’s what we wanted, that’s what he wanted. ‘He did it! I’m so proud!’”*  
—Outreach Peer

*“Oh yeah, every time somebody went through, every time we beat the system up there, it was great. It was stressful. It was great. I was happy for my guys and my girls, happy that they made it through, and that was rewarding. When somebody would call me and say, ‘Look, I just aced this test,’ you got off on that stuff: it’s cool.”*—Outreach Peer

*“For all of us [peers] to have never met before, we all worked great together. We were like one big, happy family. It was like honey to bees. When we got together it was like a major joy.”*—Outreach Peer

*“I don’t know how they did it, but they got the best group of people together to be outreach peers. We’re all so opposite to each other. . . . We had a group that was excellent. . . . It was a great group of people.”*  
—Outreach Peer

*“We e-mailed, phoned, and we had our monthly meetings, which were wonderful. We solved a lot of problems there. We built lasting relationships. . . . I don’t think it matters if it’s 6 years or 60: if we’re all still alive we’ll all still be in touch, and that is the greatest part of the program. And I could cry, thinking about it, right now.”*—Outreach Peer

Outreach peers were never asked to discuss their views on the program directors and outreach peer coord-

There were also down sides to being an outreach peer. The primary personal drawback they discussed was the general stress. Some outreach peers expressed that the job took over their life during the time they did it. In addition to the stresses of working with the RC and advocating for the FC, the outreach peers were subjected to all parts of many people’s personal problems; they saw drug and alcohol abuse, AIDS, cancer, crumbling marriages, and more.

*“It was sometimes real draining. Especially when you got involved with people’s personal matters.”*  
—Outreach Peer

*“But the stress was the worst stress that you could go through. It was just a nightmare. . . . For those years that I was [a peer], I was stressed out from the time I got up to the time I went to bed. And that sucks. To do it again, I don’t think so.”*—Outreach Peer

# Conclusion

Fishery disaster-response programs cost federal and state governments millions to tens of millions of dollars annually. However, little research has been put into assessing them, and they are poorly understood and rarely documented. And even when they are, sometimes it seems like comparing apples to oranges.

The goal of this study was to gain some understanding of fisheries disaster programs through investigating the WCGD. Because of the wide range of approaches across the West Coast, specifically evaluating the relative effectiveness of each state's program was impossible. However, comparisons between states reveal telling similarities and differences between the programs that could be useful in future program design.

Our research helped us to understand that, although accessing social services such as job retraining and food stamps is never an easy or pleasant task, the process is particularly difficult for members of the fishing community. People trying to leave the fishing industry face a medley of unique obstacles different from those of the general population. These include a lack of familiarity with job-search skills and a demanding and unpredictable work schedule

that makes adhering to traditional retraining programs extremely difficult.

Our research indicated that an aggressive, well-planned outreach program is necessary for any effort that aims to directly include people from the fishing industry. The traditional routes of advertising help, but the best success rates were found in areas where individuals actively recruited members of the fishing industry.

When planning for future disaster responses, it's important to look at the lessons learned from the WCGD and others. Oregon's response to the WCGD specifically targeted a broader audience than the salmon disaster programs, by attempting to include not only fishers but their on-shore business partners, processor employees, and other people who were directly reliant on the groundfish industry. This inclusiveness was the result of including FC representatives in the design of the GDOP, and the successes of the GDOP may, in fact, have been related to the continual inclusion of the FC (outreach peers) throughout the life of the program. While the outreach peers did become embedded in the GDOP, they remained advocates and representatives of the FC.



While this study was too different structurally for direct comparison with the Gildeen and Smith (1996a, b) study on the main complaints of salmon fishers with the salmon disaster response, it is interesting that some of the complaints were similar and some were different. Gildeen and Smith found that the salmon FC was frustrated with red tape required for proving eligibility, and that they were generally disappointed with the program. Neither of these themes emerged dominantly in this study of the WCGD. This may be because persons involved in planning the GDOP said that they specifically designed eligibility requirements to avoid some of the problems experienced during the salmon disaster.

Our study, although small and not perfect by any means, allowed us to gather some lessons learned that could be incorporated into the design of future disaster-response programs. While no one set of

lessons learned would apply to every person involved in the disaster, there are some common broad points and keys to success that were consistently relayed to us:

- *It's about people and perceptions.* While there was grumbling about various structural issues of the various states' programs, the majority of the complaints were about individual people or groups and how they treated each other. Building positive relationships should be thought of as paramount.
- *Nobody enjoys accessing social services.* There was no evidence from this study that the system is biased against the FC. People in general access social services as a last resort. Most find the experience humiliating. Many do not want to use services before they ever try them. It is unreasonable to expect any program to overcome this socially ingrained stigma.

- *The FC faces some unique challenges in transitioning.* The fishing industry is different from much of the rest of the workforce. The most pronounced of these obstacles include relatively high incomes that are difficult to replicate in most coastal communities, work schedules that make it difficult to adhere to most retraining plans, and a sense of addiction to the lifestyle.
- *Successful transitions out of the fishing industry are possible.* Despite obstacles, there is plentiful evidence that members of the FC can leave the industry and transition well into other work. Resource providers in all the states considered in this research shared stories of people successfully leaving fishing behind.
- *Successful fishery disaster-relief programs are possible.* While no program was loved by all people interviewed, each had its advocates. In particular, people in Oregon felt that the GDOP—despite some problems—was generally a great success. Keys to this success include:
  - Use of a neutral, respected convening entity to bring partners together
  - Being proactive in planning and implementation, done in partnership with the impacted community
  - Carefully designed and aggressive peer outreach
  - Attention to inter- and intra-agency communication
  - Recognition that some sort of economic support during transition is critical



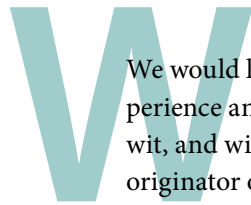
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