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Alaska salmon will hit Wal-Mart freezers

BRISTOL BAY: Goal is to put focus on sustainable seafood.

The Associated Press

JUNEAU -- Some of Alaska's finest sockeye salmon is hitting Wal-Mart's frozen food sections.

Wal-Mart says it is stocking Bristol Bay wild salmon in 233 of its stores throughout the western United States.

Trout Unlimited, a Virginia-based fisheries advocacy group, said this development shows that high-end shoppers aren't the only ones conscious of where fish is caught.

"It's not just a high-income-bracket thing to want to know where your food comes from," said Tim Bristol of Trout Unlimited.

The effort is part of a broad pledge to buy and encourage suppliers toward sustainable seafood, according to the Bentonville, Ark.-based company.

In this case it would be wild fresh and frozen fish for North American markets from fisheries certified as sustainable by the London-based Marine Stewardship Council.

The initiative also is part of the company's slogan "Saving people money, so they can live better," an effort to piggyback on high-priced food retailers, such as Whole Foods Market.

Wal-Mart is combining efforts with the MSC, the World Wildlife Foundation and Conservation International. The store currently offers 22 products that carry the MSC label.

MSC's Web site says five of the top 25 North American retailers have deals to get MSC-certified seafood, and most of the rest are discussing it. The council reports that it certifies about 60 percent of the volume of fish harvested in the United States.

Other fisheries groups such as the United Fishermen of Alaska, the Alaska Independent Fisherman's Marketing Association and Nunamta Aulukestai have also praised Wal-Mart for its investment in the region.

Bristol said he would like for deals such as this to help publicize controversy over Bristol Bay development. Anyone in the Lower 48 states enjoying Alaska's fish will begin to take a vested interest.

"You can vote with your fork," he said. "You can ask more about the fisheries, Bristol Bay, the threat it faces. It's a really good way to get the word out about Pebble (Mine) and create jobs for people in Bristol Bay and elsewhere."

Last year's Bristol Bay sockeye harvest was its highest in eight years. The harvest was worth an estimated \$109 million, a quarter of the state's total salmon harvest.

Alaska permit holders received 44 percent of that, and out-of-state residents got the rest, according to the Alaska Department of Labor.