

SALMON REEF NETTERS

Salmon reef netters catch sockeye and pink salmon during summer months and coho and chum salmon during fall months in designated areas of northern Puget Sound.

This form of fishing was invented by Coast Salish Indians hundreds of years ago. European settlers first witnessed reef nets in use on Point Roberts Reef and at Village Point on Lummi Island, Washington. Today, the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife manages this fishery and has issued permits for reef net fishing near Lopez Island and off Legoe Bay on Lummi Island. Additional reef netting areas have been designated off Cherry Point and Point Roberts in Whatcom County and Stuart Island in the San Juan Islands. Ironically, there are no tribal fishermen currently engaged in reef netting.

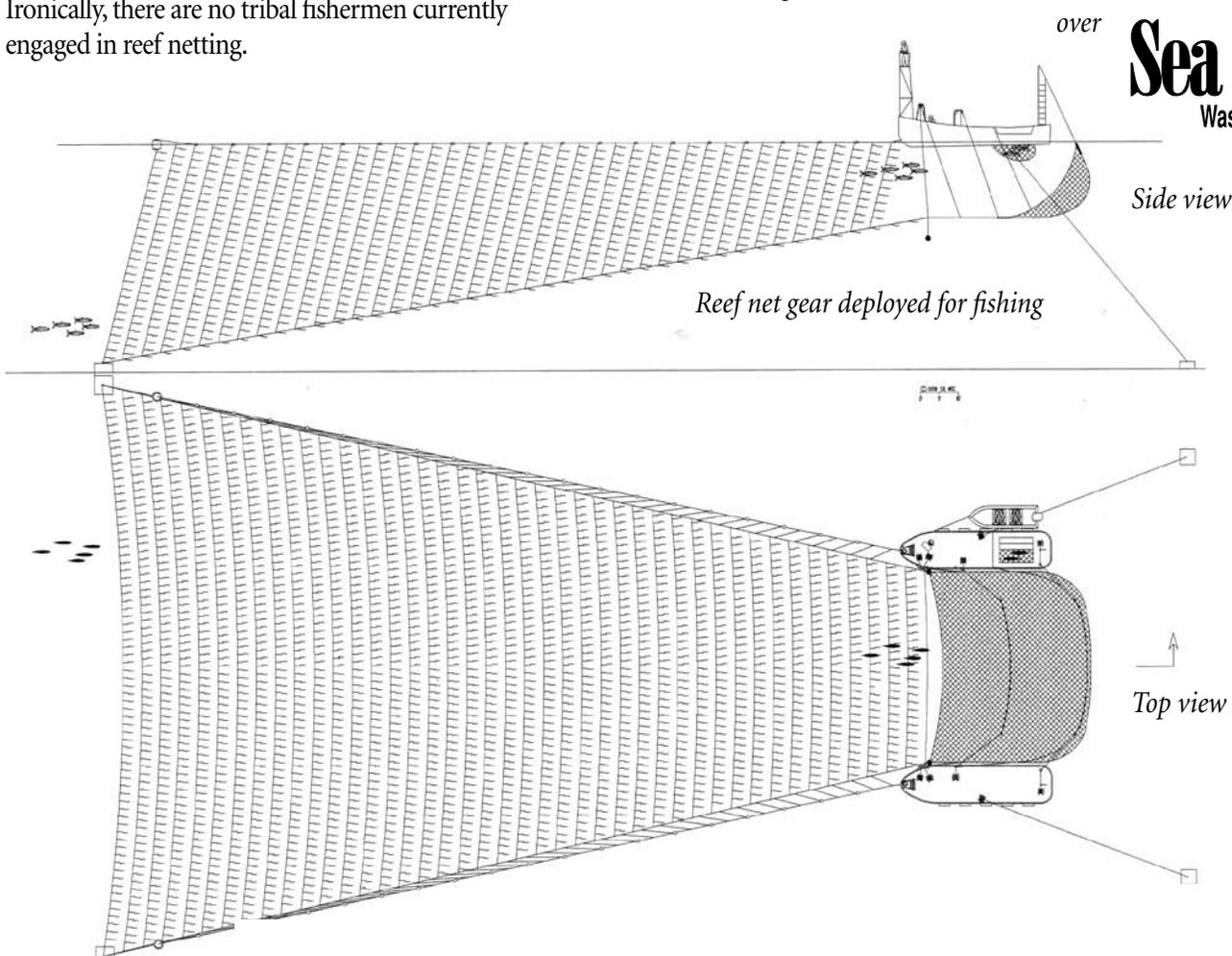
Reef netting involves two fishing boats. Nets are set between the boats, in the marine passages that the salmon travel through, enroute to freshwater spawning sites in British Columbia's Fraser River system. The vessels and gear are anchored in one place for the duration of summer or fall fishing seasons. By gentleman's agreement, reef nets are set in the same locations, year after year.

Reef nets are oriented so the dominant daytime tide — typically an incoming or "flood" tide — "pushes" salmon to follow the lead lines, over the webbing and into the bunt of the net. When the time is right, a lookout in a tower or

Washington Sea Grant offers classes and workshops, supports research on salmon biology and ocean conditions and produces technical reports and instructional videos to help salmon fishermen improve their operations while using environmentally sound methods to acquire, process and market their catches. For more information on Washington Sea Grant Program, visit the WSGP Web site, wsg.washington.edu or call 206.543.6600.

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Illustration by Bob Hitz
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a crewmember using an electronic fish-finder signals other crewmembers to pull up the net.

The net is pulled to the surface by a system of battery-powered winches. Any salmon trapped in the bunt are maneuvered into a live well of the outside fishing boat. After the net is emptied, it can be lowered below water's surface to receive more fish.

At the end of the tide or the end of fishing period, the fish are taken from the live well, bled, placed in totes, iced and transported to processing tenders or directly to processing plants.

Reef nets, boats and gear are stored on shore at the close of the fishing season.

Getting ready to haul in fish

