



Valdez Fish Derbies' and the Silver Salmon Sisterhood



The Valdez Fish Derbies not only has the oldest silver salmon derby in the state of Alaska, they also have something that no other Alaskan city has...a fishing derby just for women, one day every August, known as the Silver Salmon Sisterhood.

This event came to life in 2005 when Angela Corcoran, the Derby Clerk at the time, came up with the idea. The Valdez Fish Derbies, a non-profit corporation run by seven volunteer committee members, got behind it and rallied support from the community and big name sponsors like Fish Alaska Magazine, having no idea what to expect.

They were pleasantly surprised when 372 women showed up for the registration event at Prospector Outfitters. The opening event quickly outgrew the original venue and filled the Valdez Civic Center ballrooms to capacity with 707 registrants in 2010. In 2013, they saw their highest participation with 742 registered women.

The event has become much more than just a day of fishing, with an opening celebration on Friday and an awards party after the day of fishing on Saturday.



The opening celebration always promises to be fun, light-hearted, and even a little silly with games like the Fish Olympics and the Wheel of Chocolate. There are light snacks and a no-host bar and everyone is encouraged to dress the part and participate in the annual themed costume contest, which happens to be Superheroes this year.

Attendees to the awards party on Saturday will enjoy music, giveaways, the infamous sock toss, prizes awarded for the Top 50 fish caught, and crowning of the Queen of the Silver Salmon Sisterhood.

According to committee member and volunteer Laurie Prax, "I think the top draw to the awards party is the fact that everyone has a chance to get into the top 50 and win prizes." In addition to the cash prizes for the biggest fish, the top 50 receive a fleece vest, and of course, bragging rights. Finally, 100 lucky women anglers are randomly chosen to win a goodie bag filled with items donated by Prospector's outdoor clothing and equipment vendors.

In addition to fishing and fun, the Women's Derby's fundraising efforts have raised a substantial amount of money to benefit cancer awareness and survivors, the Cast a Dream Foundation, and other important causes.

The Women's Derby is now in its 11th year and shows no sign of losing popularity. They see new participants annually, and many that return year after year. It has become a family affair for some; in 2014 one group had four generations fishing together.

When asked what makes it so special, Prax said, "I think it's just the idea that it is their day. Whether women enjoy the fishing or the events, they have an excuse to take the day for themselves, spend it with friends, dress up in silly costumes, win cool prizes, and just have fun. I think that's the glue that binds them

and makes the event a success.”

Each year the female angler reeling in the largest silver salmon is given the ‘Queen of the Silver Salmon Sisterhood’ title. They receive \$1,000 in cash and an additional \$1,000 in prizes; they’re also adorned with a tiara and a fluffy pink robe, which they get to keep, as they take their seat on stage.

The most memorable Queen, according to Prax, was Lenore Groundwater. She was 93 years old when she won the derby in 2011 with a 16.58 pound silver. Laurie said Groundwater epitomized what the Silver Salmon Sisterhood is all about, “she was there to fish, have a good time, and support the people around her.” Lenore passed since her reign as Queen and according to Prax, “we were notified that when Lenore passed, she was buried in her tiara; that clearly demonstrates how special this event is.”

Registration for the Women’s Derby is \$50/person plus the purchase of a derby ticket. A derby ticket qualifies anglers to win the \$15,000 first place prize for the largest silver salmon caught in the regular derby as well as other prizes.

Money raised from all Valdez derbies promotes and supports sport fishing in the community. It’s used to fund the derbies and events all summer, distribute cash and other prizes, host a Kids Pink Salmon Derby and Barbeque, and to promote fishing through advertising, rack card distribution, and online media.

Valdez Fish Derbies has also helped purchase fish carts, signage, and scales at the harbor as well as picnic tables that are used for all community events. Valdez Fish Derbies employs just three part-time employees and has a few part-time contract jobs; the majority of the work done for the derbies is done by volunteers.

2015 Valdez Fish Derbies Events

The Women’s Derby is just a one day event, but the Valdez Silver Salmon and Halibut Derbies run throughout the summer. Don’t miss your chance to reel in the big one and take home cash and prizes.

- **The Halibut Derby** runs May 23-September 6, 2015, and features a \$15,000 cash grand prize for the largest halibut, \$5,000 cash for second place, and \$2,000 for third place. There are also weekly prizes, and a chance to win the Halibut Hulabaloo \$1,000 grand prize for the largest fish caught June 12-21.
- **The Silver Salmon Derby** runs July 18-September 6, 2015 and also features a \$15,000 cash grand prize for the largest silver salmon, \$5,000 cash for second place, and \$2,000 for third place. There are also weekly prizes, and \$500 cash for the biggest silver caught on Big Prize Fridays; the first and last Friday of the Derby on July 24 and August 28.
- **The Kids Pink Salmon Derby** and free barbeque will take place Saturday, July 18. First and second place anglers in each category will win a longboard and third



Opposite top, a crowd of women cheering for the now infamous sock toss at the Women’s Derby awards party.

Opposite bottom, Julie Roetman and Linda Dodge dressed up and enjoying the Silver Salmon Sisterhood opening celebration.

Top, Karen Stewart and Betty McIntosh fishing during the Women’s Derby. Above, kids showing off the prizes for their big fish during the Kid’s Derby.

Photos courtesy Valdez Fish Derbies

place will win a fishing pole.

- **The Silver Salmon Sisterhood** is Saturday, August 8, 2015, and features \$1,000 in cash and \$1,000 in prizes for first place, \$500 in cash and \$500 in prizes for second, and \$300 in cash and \$300 in prizes for third. The opening celebration is Friday, August 7, and the awards party follows the Derby on Saturday, August 8, 2015.

New in 2015

This year the Valdez Fish Derbies said goodbye to the truck raffle and hello to \$10,000 cash! Every daily ticket purchased equals one raffle ticket, and each season ticket purchased equals five raffle tickets for the \$10,000 drawing at the end of the season. Everyone who purchases a ticket has a chance to win!

They also said goodbye to the old Fish Derby website. The new website just launched and is packed with information. Visit www.valdezfishderbies.com for Derby info; where to purchase tickets, a list of sponsors, and much, much more. Interested in volunteering? Contact Doug Desorcie at 255-4727. ■