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Seattle Group to Pay Nearly \$450,000 Settlement for Alaska Fisheries Violations

NOAA's Office of the General Counsel for Enforcement and Litigation has announced a settlement agreement with the Fishing Company of Alaska and the captains and the owner of the F/V *Alaska Juris* for fisheries violations occurring from 2002 through 2004.

The Fishing Company of Alaska, Leon J. Duvall, Christian Ralph Thome Jr., Brian Madruga, and Alaska Juris Inc. agreed to pay \$449,700 to settle the charges against them. They admitted violations of the Magnuson-Stevens Fisheries Conservation and Management Act, including interfering with observer sampling, tampering with observer gear, failing to assist observers, mishandling prohibited species, fishing in a habitat conservation area, and fishing during a closed period.

"Protecting the integrity of the observer data collection procedure helps ensure the integrity of the fisheries management program," said NOAA Enforcement special agent Mike Killary. "Our certified groundfish observers serve a vital role in providing real time data to fisheries managers that allows them to effectively conserve and manage Alaska's fishery resources."

NOAA's Fisheries Service law enforcement agents conducted the investigation that led to the civil administrative prosecution of the Fishing Company of Alaska and the vessel owner and captains.

"The regulations help protect observers from any form of interference that could undermine their ability to collect unbiased data," Killary said.

NOAA understands and predicts changes in the Earth's environment, from the depths of the ocean to the surface of the sun, and conserves and manages our coastal and marine resources.

On the Web:

NOAA's Fisheries Service: <http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov>

NOAA's Office of the General Counsel for Enforcement & Litigation:

<http://www.gc.noaa.gov/enforce-office.html>

NOAA's Office for Law Enforcement: <http://www.nmf.noaa.gov/ole>