

Investing in Alaska Pollock



By Daniel Mintz

A veteran vessel returns from the Atlantic with a new name and new capabilities

After 10 months and millions of dollars of shipyard work, the *F/V Dōna Martita* has returned to Alaskan waters as a radically different, rebuilt boat with a new name, the *Bering Defender*.

Upgraded and operated by the Seattle-based **Global Seas LLC**, it's almost unrecognizable from its original incarnation – its bow has been rebuilt, its trawl deck is raised, there's more fish hold capacity, and an array of sonar and video technology has been installed to make the *Bering Defender* one of the most effective vessels in the Alaskan Pollock fishery.

Built in 1986 and working the Bering Sea through 2001, the *Dōna Martita* was moved to the East Coast to take advantage of an Olympic-style mackerel and herring fishery, which saw declines in the years leading to 2010.

Back to Alaska:

Global Seas CEO Bob Desautel said a thriving Pollock fishery motivated a return to Alaska, where his company operates three other fishing vessels. "I think we have a positive outlook

for that fishery,” he continued. “It should last quite a while, and that’s why we decided to make the investment in the boat.”

The initial idea was to simply raise the trawl deck and increase hold capacity, said Desautel, and the boat was taken to the **PATTI Marine Enterprises** shipyard in Pensacola, FL. A fire took out the galley and crew accommodation, influencing a decision to launch a more ambitious rebuild.

It spanned June 2011 to April 2012 and in late July, Global Seas held a reception celebrating the conversion at Seattle’s Jacobson Terminal. Then, the *Bering Defender* headed from Dutch Harbor to enter into the Pollock fishery.



The *Bering Defender*'s 21st century wheelhouse.

Job Done:

Desautel said his company succeeded in achieving three main goals with the rebuild – more hold capacity, higher speed, and enhanced safety. Fish storage capacity was upped to 1.35 million pounds, a 35 percent increase. Maximum speed reaches 12 knots now, up from 9 knots, with twin 3516 Cat mains generating a total of 3,000 horsepower.

The elevated trawl deck separates crew members from the water, and the redesigned, bulbous bow provides “tons of stability,” said Desautel.

The boat’s length is now 174 feet, a 10-foot increase. Two new five-blade propellers deliver maximum efficiency, and an expanded wheelhouse improves visibility. Also included in the slew of improvements are new gantries, rebuilt hydraulic deck winches, and a Pentagon AutoTrawl control system.

So much cutting-edge technology has been added that a new deck and electronics storehouse were built to accommodate it. The *Bering Defender* is the first boat to use the Simrad FX80 net sounder system, which delivers real time video imagery from inside the net.

Also on board is Simrad’s newest sonar system, downsounder, and bottom mapper. New radar navigation, communications, and onboard video monitoring systems round out the boat’s electronics.

Seasoned skipper:

A lot was riding on the *Bering Defender*'s first venture, and Global Seas chose a veteran of the Pollock fishery, Kevin Doyle, to helm it. He’s been working in Alaska’s Pollock and crab fisheries since he was 18 years old, when he started as a processor on a factory trawler based in Washington.

“He’s pretty damned fishy. That’s why he got the new boat,” said Desautel.



Doyle's career advanced in the 13 years that he worked for Aleutian Spray Fisheries, eventually becoming captain of the F/V Arctic Wind, which was sold to Global Seas in 2003.

"I came with the boat," Doyle mused. Switching to the *Bering Defender* has been a learning curve, but its first Pollock season was successful, with its quota reached despite a late entry in to the season.

"We didn't know how this boat was going to fish," said Doyle. "We were lucky and chose the right size gear and the right size nets, and it did pretty well right out of the box."

Doyle supervised seven crew members, and a federal observer was on board to monitor catches. Most crew members have individual rooms with complete Internet access and 32-inch flat screen TVs. "You can't expect young guys to come into the fishery without the comforts of home," said Doyle.

The boat also moves comfortably through the water, with its redesigned bow easily breaking the force of waves and providing enhanced mobility. "It's amazing for a boat of this size to turn the way it does," Doyle said.



The *Bering Defender*'s crew accommodations.

Tech matters:

His initial doubts that the new technology would deliver better catch potential have been erased. The combination of a live video feed and sonar allows him to observe what's happening inside the trawl net and beyond.

"If you're able to target bigger schools and stay on them, you're not towing as long," he said. "That's important because there's more by-catch on longer tow, and shorter tows save fuel."

The shore-based boats on the Bering Sea are aging, but the Pollock fishery has a strong future, Doyle said. Operating on a rationalization system, it's "one of the most regulated fisheries there is," and he believes I can offer younger fishermen the same opportunities he's had.

"I hope other companies start investing in the boats because this fishery has plenty of money," he said. "It would be nice to attract younger people in this fishery. Its' well managed, and I'd like to see it continue."

Global Seas is confident that it will, hence the emergence of the *Bering Defender*. Doyle's verdict on it: "I think they nailed it," he said. "Everything they did with this boat is right on."



The former F/V *Dóna Martita* prepares to enter the water as the *Bering Defender*.