

RC 68

March 20, 2013

Alaska Board of Fisheries Statewide Proposal Testimony **RC**

Chairman Johnstone and Members of the Board of Fisheries,

My name is Andrew Couch, for the past 30 years my primary income has come from guiding salmon anglers in Upper Cook Inlet rivers and streams. I currently serve on the Matanuska - Susitna Borough Fish and Wildlife Commission and I am also a member and secretary for the Matanuska Valley Fish and Game Advisory Committee. This testimony represents my personal and business interests.

I support Proposals 218, 222, 225, 227, 228, 229 / 230, 236, and 249.

As a sport fishing guide whose guests harvest primarily king and coho salmon, I am focusing my comments on Proposal 227 that may have a direct impact on preserving the health of these salmon stocks while maintaining sport fishing opportunity for all participants fishing these stocks.

Proposal 227 would clearly provide the Department of Fish and Game emergency order authority to adjust proxy bag, possession, and annual limits during times of resource shortage. In the Northern Cook Inlet Management Area of Upper Cook Inlet 6 stocks of king salmon have already been listed as Stocks of Concern by the Board of Fisheries. In 5 of these 6 stream drainages sport king salmon fishing has been entirely closed and significant saltwater area has also been closed to commercial fishing. Most other freshwater king salmon fisheries throughout the Northern Cook Inlet Area and other fisheries throughout Alaska have seen increasingly restrictive emergency sport fishing regulations aimed at reducing the overall exploitation of wild king salmon in an effort to achieve king salmon spawning escapement goals. Two regulations that have been used in Northern Cook Inlet in an effort to reduce king salmon exploitation by sport anglers are a reduction in the annual seasonal limit to two king salmon, and a stipulation that anglers must quit fishing for king salmon for the remainder of the day after they have harvested a king salmon that same day. These two regulations have reduced sport fishing harvest opportunity, while attempting to preserve opportunity for all sport fishing participants. Unfortunately an increasing number of sport anglers have started using proxy fishing as a means to harvest additional king salmon and / or to keep fishing for king salmon after they have already harvested a king salmon that same day. This practice increases competition for a highly desirable fishing opportunity, increases king salmon mortality, increases the likelihood of failure to attain king salmon escapement goals, and therefore, increases the likelihood of further emergency restrictions and closures to all user groups -- **even users primarily focused on harvesting other salmon species.**

When considering proposal 227, I urge Board members to weigh the benefits of sustainable salmon production, and more stable regulations for all users versus a likely reduction or proxy fishing opportunity during times of resource shortage. Thank You.