

Proposal 158***Eliminate or modify in-season Non-resident King Salmon Daily Bag Limits and Annual Limits***

Submitted by: Larry McQuarrie and Don Westlund (Southern Southeast Alaska "Inside" charter and lodge operators) in cooperation with Theresa Weiser and other "Outside" charter and Lodge operators.

Problem:

- There are two primary restrictions on the taking of King Salmon by non-residents:
 - Daily Bag Limits
 - Annual bag limits
- In-season daily bag and annual limits ratchet downwards as the season progresses. Southern Southeast Alaska "Inside" charter operators lose the ability to market the "opportunity" to harvest King Salmon to non-resident anglers in late season, primarily August, when it is needed most.
- Close to 100% of Southeast Alaska charter and Lodge clients are non-residents.
- In 2013, under reduced abundance of King Salmon (Abundance Index of 1.20) the regulations for non-residents in Southeast Alaska were:
 - Daily Bag Limit of 1 King Salmon throughout the season;
 - Annual limit of 3 King Salmon from the beginning of the season through June 30th;
 - Annual limit of 2 King Salmon from July 1st through July 15th (15 days);
 - Annual limit of 1 King Salmon from July 16th through the end of the season.
 - A fish caught early (3-fish annual limit) counted against the Annual Limit later (1-fish Annual Limit).
- In 2014, under a record high AI of 2.57, non resident regulations were:
 - Annual limit of 6 King Salmon throughout the season;
 - Daily Bag Limit of 2 King Salmon during May and June
 - Daily Bag Limit of 1 king Salmon from July 1st through the end of the season.

Discussion:

- King Salmon are the most highly prized Sportfish and as such have value as a marketing tool. Conversely when the "opportunity" to harvest a King Salmon is reduced it has a strong negative impact on marketing.
- Current regulations (Emergency Orders) dictated by the *Southeast Alaska King Salmon Management Plan* follow a "one size fits all" rationale that has the unintentional effect of disenfranchising Inside non-resident anglers.
- Southeast Alaska "Outside" operators out of ports like Craig and Sitka need the liberalized limits early in their season (May and June) to attract clients and take advantage of the abundance of nearby migrating King Salmon, thus maintaining the length of their season, which is a key element to all fixed-base charter operators' viability.
- Southern Southeast Alaska "Inside" charters and Lodges do not have the availability of early King Salmon abundance (apart from very limited and localized Terminal Harvest Areas - THAs) to attract customers and, with the exception of a limited number of early season 4-hour cruise ship charters, these operations, in particular lodges, do not typically start operations until the last few days of June or the first few days of July.
- While the Outside operators start their seasons early, they tend to shutdown early (mid to late August or the first few days of September) as the fish, primarily Coho, move inside toward their natal streams. Thus, the viability of their early season is important to them

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- Conversely, Inside operators, who start later, are generally open later, well into September, to take advantage of marketing opportunities as the fish move inside. The viability of the mid-later season is important to them.
- It becomes obvious that Southern SE Inside (SSEI) operators, who are just getting their season into full swing are suddenly faced with the marketing challenge of a substantially reduced opportunity to access the highly prized King Salmon that are so important to their guests.
- Part of the rationale behind ratcheting down the King Salmon bag and annual limits as the season progressed was the thinking that pressure on the precious allocation of Treaty King Salmon could be reduced as other salmon species, primarily Coho, came on-line later in the season; a reasonable strategy.

The Glitch. Where the Strategy fails:

- Southern SE Inside charter operators face formidable competition, normally beginning August 1st, as the net fisheries, primarily the seine fleet, crank up inside. This is especially true in high abundance years for Pink Salmon, as the *Pink Salmon Management Plan* kicks in. It's a fact of life. They are entitled to their harvest which all fits into the grand scheme of things.
 - **Other facts of life:**
 - The seine fleet effectively preempts our access to the Coho and Pinks that we need to attract customers during August and into early September. It is classic gear conflict;
 - These Coho and Pinks that were intended to mitigate the lack of opportunity to harvest a prized King Salmon at that time of the season, are simply not available;
 - The double whammy is that the opportunity for a King Salmon that existed early in the season is gone as daily bag and annual limits are stepped down;
 - The repeat clientele so typical in successful operations, are savvy and know full well what happens in August. They will avoid August and early September dates.
 - The not-so-savvy, newly recruited guest, once burned in August either does not return or tries to book in July for following seasons.
 - August reservations are hardest to fill and result in heavy discounting or vacancies that are devastating, especially to lodges with staffs that must remain on site for the duration.
 - The necessity to maintain/extend the season, so essential to viability in a fixed base, fixed capacity, often remote facility, is lost.

Summary:

- Charters and Lodges market "Opportunities" for harvest. When the opportunity is diminished so is the value of their product;
- Daily Bag Limits and annual limits are a major part of the customer's perceived opportunity (and value);
- No other fish is valued as an opportunity more than the King Salmon;
- In order to meet the needs of lodge operators to market to their customers throughout Southeast Alaska there has to be opportunity provided through reasonable bag limits and annual limits that are stable, and as much as possible, unchanging throughout the length of the season.
- While it is recognized that King Salmon management is extremely challenging, and subject to the *Southeast Alaska King Salmon Management Plan*, regulations must be crafted to provide all lodges and charters in Southeast Alaska the means to maintain continuous opportunities throughout the season and to extend their seasons when possible. No other single fish under State jurisdiction affects those opportunities like King Salmon and if it means breaching the sanctity of the *Southeast Alaska King Salmon Management Plan*, these presenters respectfully suggest this should be considered, to explore what new options might be available. We are not optimizing opportunities under the existing management paradigm.
- Part of the solution to extend King Salmon opportunities to SSE Inside operations may lie in the reduced impact that Inside sport harvesters have on Treaty Kings. This aspect should be also be explored.

The Solution: What works and what doesn't – Non-resident King Salmon Management Options:

It becomes obvious that "one size fits all" management does not work and that two separate management scenarios may be needed to optimized opportunities for the SSE Inside operators and SE Outside operators.

- The most onerous in-season change for all operators is the Annual Limit. If the Annual Limit could remain stable throughout the season it would help considerably. Especially difficult for Inside operators is an Annual Limit that decreases as the season progresses into August.
- SSE Inside operators:
 - An acceptable solution is a 1-fish Daily Bag Limit from May through the end of the season with a 3,4,5 or 6-fish Annual Limit. More than a 1-fish Daily Bag Limit is not needed in May and June for Inside operators. With the exception of the two Terminal Harvest Areas, only in years of very high abundance are fish available to take advantage of higher Daily Bag Limits in May and June. In addition, most operators are not yet open for business until late June.
 - In years of higher abundance, unless the Daily Bag Limit can be raised for the entire length of the season, raising and maintaining the Annual Limit to as high as possible throughout the entire season, while maintaining a stable 1-fish Daily Bag Limit would be the preferred method of liberalizing management.
- Outside operators:
 - Maintain a 2-fish Daily Bag Limit in May and as far into June (and the rest of the season) as possible, then a 1-fish bag limit for the remainder of the season.
 - Prefer to maintain a constant Annual Limit of 4, 5 or 6-fish that does not change throughout the season.

Defining Southern Southeast Alaska Inside waters:

- Southern Boundary – Same as the southern boundary for Non-Pelagic Rockfish: A line due south of Cape Chacon then eastward along the Canadian boundary.
- Northern Boundary – Across the top of Prince of Wales Island from Pt. Colpoys eastward to Pt. MacNamara on Zarembo Island, and from Pt Nesbitt on Zarembo Island to Steamer Point on Etolin Island, and across the southern ends of Zimovia Passage and Eastern Passage.

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