

**1-12-16 Testimony to the Alaska State Board of Fish:**

Happy New Year and thank you for this opportunity. I'd also like to thank the BOF for the attention they've given to Kuskokwim Subsistence fishing issues through the establishment of the Kuskokwim Subsistence Salmon Panel and their visit to Aniak this past summer.

My name is Mark Leary. I'm the Upriver Subsistence Representative for the Kuskokwim River Salmon Management Working Group. I am also a member of the Central Kuskokwim Fish & Game Advisory Committee and Commissioner for the Native Village of Napaimute on the recently established Kuskokwim River Inter- Tribal Fish Commission.

I am here today not to speak for or against specific proposals but to advocate to you for the restoration of equal subsistence fishing opportunity for ALL of the People along the Kuskokwim River.

I have spent a lifetime living and working on the Kuskokwim River that includes commercial and subsistence fishing and tendering in both the lower and middle Kuskokwim. I also worked the entire length of the River for many years on barges as everything from deckhand to captain.

This lifetime of experience along the whole River has given me a unique well-balanced perspective. To this day I still live half the year upriver and half the year downriver. I can see the differences between the two areas and the changes that have occurred along the entire River. I try to think of everybody.

The biggest change that has occurred is the blossoming population growth of the Lower River while the population of the Middle and Upper River has stayed flat or even declined in some areas.

The 2010 U.S. Census counts 13,000 People in the Lowest 100 miles of the Kuskokwim River and adjacent coast. It is estimated that this area's population growth continues at 4% per year. That's like adding another village to the region each year.

In the remaining 500 miles upstream to the headwaters there are under 2,000 with about ½ of that located in the 3 villages of Lower Kalskag, Upper Kalskag, and Aniak.

As an adult I began subsistence fishing in support of my immediate and extended family solely in the Middle Kuskokwim – at Napaimute.

I quickly learned about the growing inequity in fishing opportunity as we scraped and scratched to meet our needs in the Middle and Upper Kuskokwim while the social media boomed with pictures of good fish harvests in the Lower River.

This culminated in 2013 when the Kuskokwim Manager allowed unrestricted harvest in the Lower River on what turned out to be a weak King run. This left little available for the Middle and Upper River fishers to harvest and resulted in the lowest escapement on record.

In-season managers consistently tell us that they have the tools to do the right thing – to manage for equal subsistence fishing opportunity and sustained escapement goals. But as we've seen the use of these tools is very discretionary and subject to individual interpretation by the managers....and they come and go....and they don't live with us.

We need these "tools" permanently established into the code that make up the Kuskokwim Salmon Management Plan.

You have before you a number of proposals – the heart of each is basically the same – restoring equal subsistence fishing opportunity to ALL of the People along the Kuskokwim River.

Whether it be by establishing In-River goals, nested ANS, a subsistence fishing permit system, or a set starting date for the Kuskokwim Subsistence King Salmon Season – it must be done.

2013 must never be repeated.

Thank you.