

To: Committee on Coastal Erosion Impacts on Set Gillnet Operations

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I have been preparing shore fishery plots for fishermen throughout the state since 2003 and I have become familiar with the current erosion/boundary line situation at Graveyard Point. I am pleased to hear that the Board of Fish is addressing the issue of erosion and the ever-changing dynamics of the setnet fisheries throughout the state.

There is no doubt that there is rapid erosion occurring on the beaches near Graveyard point. The area is very dynamic and has created great challenges for the fishermen in the area. Setnet fishermen are getting pinched because the fishing area available is decreasing due to erosion changes. The solution to erosion issues is complex and will have to be examined by individual areas with some common goals. Ultimately, consideration should be made so fishermen are able to maintain their fishing areas without increasing the number fishermen along the given section of beach.

In the case of Graveyard Point this can be accomplished by moving the closure line northeast by approximately 550 feet. This would allow for some breathing room for fishermen to the south who are getting pinched off due to erosion; because the same number of permits are currently being fished within a shortened length of beach. Additionally, there seems to be a great deal of uncertainty regarding the history of the closure line because the signs have changed locations in the past due to bank erosion.

I would like to point out that uncertainty exists within other areas of the state, albeit for different reasons, with regard to the location of closure lines and should be included in this discussion. In my experience as a shore fishery lease mapping contractor these are my observations.

In many cases the coordinates listed in the Commercial Fishing Regulations do not match the physical location of the sign marking the closure line or a geographical feature that has been known on the grounds to be the historical point of closure. The coordinates listed in the State of Alaska Commercial Fishing Regulations, from my experience; do not match the known historical line or signs on the fishing grounds. There have been conflicts among fishermen in Prince William Sound, Cook Inlet, Bristol Bay, and Togiak because physical markers/geographical reference points do not match the coordinates listed in the State of Alaska Regulation booklets. Many of the points when plotted ended up hundreds of feet away from the historical line. How the coordinates marking closure lines and by what methods they were determined seems to be unknown in most cases. The points were determined before advancements in technology so naturally they are not accurate by today's standards. This is no fault of ADFG. It's a result of changing times with relation to technology.

It has been ADFG's position at times to use the coordinates listed in the regulations book even when there is a physical sign present marking the closure line which does not match the coordinates listed. This happened in the Main Bay set-net/drift fishery of Prince William Sound. It created a tremendous amount of conflict when suddenly the historical line changed within a setnet fishery. One can imagine the chaos that is created when suddenly a historical line marking a closure boundary is moved. Changing closure lines have far more implications to setnet fleets when compared to the drift or seine fleets. I would like to see ADFG do two things to prevent future conflicts.

1. Update the coordinates in the State of Alaska Regulations to match the signs and known historical closure lines.
2. Make a statewide regulation that closure signs take precedent over coordinates listed in regulation booklets until updates are complete.