

Oral Testimony: Dwight Kramer

Representing: Kenai Area Fisherman's Coalition (KAFC)

Ref. Proposal 156: Proposal 156 seeks to protect more of our larger and older age class Kenai River Chinook by restricting harvest to only those fish under 42 inches in length.

Current Regulations: Have in place a slot limit protection whereby fish between 42 – 55 inches in length have to be released in the lower river through June 30 and in the middle river through July 14.

Why is This Change Necessary?

- * **Over Time, we have lost our biggest Kenai River King salmon.**
- * Since 2002, it has been a requirement to have fish over 55 inches registered and sealed. Between 2002 and 2006 we averaged 7 fish being sealed annually and then in 2007 only 3 fish, one in 2009 and none since.
- * The 2016 weir information on the Killey River and Funny River, which make up about 75% of our ER return, showed less than a 5% return of the 1.4 age class fish. The historical return of 1.4 ER age class fish has been around 40%.
- * Numerous Chinook salmon studies have emphasized the importance of larger / older, fish for stock stability and sustainability. They also point out that “selective harvest” of the larger fish can cause shifts in the population towards smaller fish, younger age distributions and lowered reproductive rates.

Neala Warren Kendall, of the U of W wrote in a 2011 research paper, **“Selective harvest on wild fish populations has been associated with shifts towards smaller fish, younger age distributions and is linked to decreased fecundity and lowered reproductive rates.”**

Likewise, the 2013 AYK Chinook Salmon Research Plan concluded that “Fishing Induced Evolution (FIE)” or selective harvest as we know it, can cause declines in Chinook salmon abundance and decreased size of spawners.” It goes on to say, **“Without efforts to counteract size selectivity and exploitation rates, improvements would be slow to materialize, requiring multiple generations.”**

- * The current slot limit restrictions do not provide adequate protection for our larger and older age class fish because they do not run through the entire season..
- * The Kenai River probably hosts one of the largest sport and guided sport fisheries in the world and it is highly geared towards the “Selective Harvest” of our largest fish.

What will this proposal accomplish?

- * It will give us the best possible chance to help promote future returns of our large Chinook back into the Kenai.
- * This measure will also reduce the affects of erroneous sonar calculations as they pertain to in-season harvest liberalizations. **KAFC has some serious concerns about the reliability of the new ARIS sonar and test netting regime to count and proportion fish accurately.**
- * By releasing these larger fish it will mean that there will be more large fish in the system for everyone to have a better opportunity to catch a big Kenai River King.

We believe future demand on our fishery resources is certain to increase over time and it is incumbent on us to protect these resources and provide sustainability for future generations to enjoy. This management change would provide that protection along with balanced fishing and harvest opportunities.