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Alaska Board of Fisheries
PO BOX 115526
Juneau, AK 99811-5526

RC-86

RE: Statement in Support of Personal Use Dipnetting

Dear Alaska Board of Fisheries,

I have lived in Alaska since 1984 and in Southcentral since 1999. Dipnetting on the Kenai River is the highlight of my summer, even with all the other adventurous activities available to Alaskans. Every time I participate in this annual ritual, I'm awed and humbled by this amazing resource. To quote a good friend, David Apperson, as he cradled his first sockeye salmon of the year. "These fish are very precious to me."

Indeed they are precious to my husband and I as well. We honor and appreciate every fish we harvest, ensuring each individual fish is quickly dispatched, bled, cooled down, and cleaned. My husband takes pride in his ability to butterfly each fish fillet so that we salvage all of the available meat. We especially enjoy the bellies which I strip, brine, and smoke into salmon candy. Even the skin is not wasted as we feed any scraps to our dogs. Each year we spend the extra money to get the fillets professionally vacuum packed and flash frozen to ensure they maintain their best quality and have a long storage life.

We both work in commercial construction in Anchorage and can afford to buy our protein, but harvesting these salmon and incorporating them into part of our healthy lifestyle is one of our most cherished benefits of being an Alaskan resident. It is so wonderful to know that we have access to this minimally processed, fresh Kenai salmon and there is no better satisfaction than knowing the freezer is full of good food as a result of our hunting and gathering activities.

As Alaska sinks deeper into its current economic recession, the availability of this personal use dipnetting program will become even more important for resident families. There will be mounting pressure for those who have the means to leave the State to secure better, more stable work. The Board would do well to maintain these unique personal use benefits as a deterrent to those who would consider leaving the State.

I have reviewed the proposed changes to the Upper Cook Inlet Personal Use Salmon Fishery Management Plan (5 AAC 77.540) and have the following comments on several of them:

- 1) Proposal 195 - Restriction of personal use fishery hours. I do NOT support this change because many residents, especially those who have to work regular jobs, have no opportunity to fish other than after-hours. In addition, there are many times when the salmon run is just starting to heat up around 11:00PM and this would not allow dipnetters to take advantage of the late night surge and remaining summer daylight to harvest their fish.
- 2) Proposal 196 - Prohibiting dip nets from being attached to a vessel. I do NOT support this measure. Having dipnetted from a boat on many occasions, I feel the nets need to be tied off to the front of the boat to prevent the nets from getting away from the fishermen. If they could not be tied off, this would create safety and pollution hazards to both people and fish.
- 3) Proposal 204 - Extending the personal use dip net boat fishery upstream to Cunningham Park. I DO support this measure because I believe it would reduce the intense congestion at the mouth of the Kenai River that the current boundaries create.

In general, my husband and I are happy with the current Upper Cook Inlet Personal Use Salmon Fishery rules, however last year's returns seemed particularly tough for dipnetters. Many friends and family reported attempting to dip net on more occasions than normal while catching less salmon. Some other suggestions that might be helpful in the future include:

- A) Proactively closing the commercial fishing 18-36 hours ahead of the weekend to accommodate working residents who can only dip net on weekends to improve their chances.
- B) Limit emergency commercial openers during the weekends to avoid user group conflicts between personal use fisherman.
- C) Require first time dipnetters to pass a ADF&G proficiency test to ensure they know how to properly dispatch, fillet, and care for their fish to prevent waste both on the river bank and later on after they return home due to spoilage, bruising, and freezer burn. This could be similar to a Hunter Education program and could also help foster sportsmanlike behavior and respect for this resilient, yet finite resource.
- D) Like many, I'm concerned with the decline in the physical size and return numbers of the Kenai's iconic Chinook salmon. I favor the Board continuing to limit or ban the harvesting of these salmon, until their returns have reached a more long-term, sustainable level. I would love to see us get back to a time when a group of 4 could hire an experienced river guide and reach their limit of 4 kings, each weighing 45-50lbs before 10AM, but that has not happened to me since 2003.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide these comments. It is very important that the Board preserve the commoner's access to these salmon through this Upper Cook Inlet Personal Use Salmon Fishery; "These fish are very precious to me."

Best regards,



Amber M. McDonough, P.E.