

PROPOSAL 33

5 AAC 06.330. Gear, and XX.XXX. New section.

Allow the use of beach weirs in commercial salmon fishing in Bristol Bay, as follows:

5 AAC 06.332

(a) Set beach weirs and their holding pens must be operated 400’ away from any other set gill net, beach weir or boundary line.

(b) Weirs are defined as a fixed net or fence system not more than 300’ in length and should be operated perpendicular to the shore.

(c) The weir should be constructed of mesh size not larger than 3 inches and be no deeper than 12 feet.

(f) The seaward end of the weir must be not more than 600 feet from the 18 foot mean high waterline.

(e) When fishing periods are closed weirs must be left open to allow fish to pass through without entanglement.

(f) Holding pens for the weir must not go dry with any fish in them, and all weirs must be outfitted with an emergency release door on the down current side of at least 4 feet by 4 feet to let fish out quickly should need arise.

(g) All regulations pertaining to the allocation, opening periods, and districts for set gill nets shall also apply to set beach weirs.

What is the issue you would like the board to address and why? Allow for a new gear group called a beach weir. Alaska salmon are under increased pressure to compete on quality with new salmon farming methods that result in near picture-perfect grocery store presentation. Bristol Bay’s gill nets are an effective way of catching fish by a large fleet of small boats, but salmon harvested with gill nets don’t yield a high enough quality product to compete in today’s market place. It was fine when salmon was all being salted or canned but not when it is sold “fresh frozen” behind glass cases at the grocery store. A beach weir could be a way of harvesting fish with minimal bruising or net marks, non-target species like Kings could be released, and fishermen would never have to go over their processor imposed limits. The new method isn’t meant to increase a fisherman’s harvest volume just their quality.

Weir permits can be obtained by trading in two valid set net permits. Make this a provisional article lasting two years in order to evaluate its ability to effectively improve quality without disproportionately affecting catch volumes, and to give the stake holders opportunity to repeal it easily if it is found to be disliked. By requiring 400' between a weir and the nearest set net it would require two neighboring set net lease holders to collaborate in order to operate a weir, and the extra space would provide more access to fish for neighboring fishermen.

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(EF-F18-107)
