

PROPOSAL 125

5 AAC 04.310. Fishing Seasons.

Lengthen the commercial salmon fishing season in the Norton Sound-Port Clarence Area, as follows:

5 AAC 04.320

...

Except as provided in 5 AAC 01.190 and 5 AAC 04.320 – 5 AAC 04.390, salmon may be taken only follows:

- (1) In Subdistrict 1, from a date established by emergency order after July 1 through August 31
- (2) In Subdistricts 2 and 3, from a date established by emergency order between June 8 to June 20 through August 31
- (3) In Subdistricts 4–6, from a date established by emergency order between June 8 to June 20, through September 7;
- (4) In the Port Clarence District, during fishing periods established by emergency order from July 1 through July 31.

What is the issue you would like the board to address and why? It is recommended that season dates in northern Norton Sound, including Subdistrict 1, be amended to reflect recent management practices of prosecuting salmon fisheries beyond the existing regulatory closure date of August 31. Since the early 2000s, the overall trend toward increased coho salmon abundance in northern Norton Sound has led to commercial fishing opportunities being extended into September via Emergency Order. This is particularly evident in low water years with delayed coho salmon migration and in years of above average coho salmon runs that often have late pulses of fish near the tail end of the run.

Additionally, in warm years with earlier than average chum salmon run timing, there is no reason to delay the onset of Nome Subdistrict commercial chum salmon fishery in years of sufficient abundance. In years of lower abundance or later salmon run timing, the department retains the discretion to delay openings until escapement goals are achieved and subsistence uses of chum salmon are not jeopardized. However, in years of high abundance, an earlier start would provide the department with early indices of run strength and provide commercial users with additional opportunity.

Therefore, we propose that the potential opening of a commercial fishery in the Nome Subdistrict occur via a date established by Emergency Order on or after June 20. This would result in an alignment of season dates for all northern Norton Sound Subdistricts. We propose amending 5 AAC 04.310.

PROPOSED BY: Northern Norton Sound Fish and Game Advisory Committee (HQ-F18-012)

PROPOSAL 126

5 AAC 04.320. Fishing Periods.

Remove restriction on the length of commercial salmon fishing periods in Norton Sound Subdistrict 1, as follows:

5 AAC 04.320

...

In the Norton-Sound Port Clarence Area, salmon may be taken only during periods established by emergency order. In subdistrict 1, salmon may be taken during no more than two 24-hour fishing periods per week established under this section.

What is the issue you would like the board to address and why? We propose to amend 5 AAC 04.320 so that fishing periods are established by Emergency Order throughout the Norton Sound District and Port Clarence District, including the Nome Subdistrict (Subdistrict 1). The department has incrementally increased the length of fishing periods from 24-hours to as much as 72-hours in certain instances in response to strong salmon runs. Nome Subdistrict chum salmon stocks have been re-built and are no longer designated as stocks of concern. Additionally, coho salmon runs to Nome Subdistrict rivers have supported record subsistence and commercial harvests in recent years. Substantial ground-based escapement monitoring infrastructure with several years of data have been established in the years following the adoption of severe restrictions to Nome Subdistrict fisheries. Commercial fishing effort is limited to a handful of permit holders and is expected to remain so. Removing the restriction on fishing period length in the Nome Subdistrict will ensure regulations are consistent with current management practices and give managers flexibility to set fishing periods that take run abundance and anticipated fishing effort into account.

PROPOSED BY: Northern Norton Sound Fish and Game Advisory Committee (HQ-F18-011)

PROPOSAL 127

5 AAC 04.362. Guideline harvest range for Port Clarence District.

Repeal the Guideline Harvest Range for the Port Clarence District and replace with the *Port Clarence District and Pilgrim River Salmon Management Plan*, as follows:

5 AAC 04.362. Port Clarence District Salmon and the Pilgrim River Sockeye Salmon Management Plan.

(a) The purpose of this management plan is to provide the department with management guidelines for the sustained yield of sockeye salmon stocks in Port Clarence District and in the Pilgrim River from July 1 through August 15.

(1) In the subsistence fishery,

(A) If the average sockeye salmon escapement from the previous two years is below the lower bound of the Pilgrim River sockeye salmon escapement goal range, the subsistence harvest limit for sockeye salmon will be no greater than 25 sockeye salmon per household;

(B) If the average sockeye salmon escapement from the previous two years is between the lower bound and midpoint of the Pilgrim River sockeye salmon escapement goal range, the subsistence harvest limit for sockeye salmon will be no greater than 50 sockeye salmon per household;

(C) If the average sockeye salmon escapement from the previous two years is between the midpoint and upper bound of the Pilgrim River sockeye salmon escapement goal range, the subsistence harvest limit for sockeye salmon will be no greater than 100 sockeye salmon per household;

(2) If the Pilgrim River sockeye salmon escapement goal is projected to be achieved, a commercial fishery may be opened by emergency order in the Port Clarence District consisting of not more than

(A) two 24-hour periods per week if the average sockeye salmon escapement from the previous two years is above the midpoint of the Pilgrim River sockeye salmon escapement goal range,

(B) two 48-hour periods per week if the average sockeye salmon escapement from the previous two years is above the upper bound of the Pilgrim River sockeye escapement goal range.

(a) Notwithstanding the provisions of (a), emergency orders may allow additional inseason adjustments to fishing time, area, and gear, including waiving subsistence limits and implementation of fishery closures, to achieve escapement goals and ensure optimal utilization of salmon harvestable surpluses.

What is the issue you would like the board to address and why? 5 AAC 04.362 was promulgated in 2007 when there were only four years of weir counts and an incomplete limited

understanding of the adverse impacts of large sockeye salmon escapements on the health of Salmon Lake. Beginning in 2009, the stock underwent a collapse due to successive large escapements ranging from 35,000–85,000 sockeye salmon from 2003–2007 that most likely exceeded the carrying capacity of the lake. Beginning in 2014, runs to Salmon Lake began to increase dramatically again resulting in record-setting subsistence harvest levels in the Pilgrim River and Port Clarence District. Recent limnological, smolt outmigration, and adult age, sex and size composition data indicate that another dramatic decline in runs is likely in the coming years.

At the time 5 AAC 04.362 was adopted, an arbitrary threshold level of inriver abundance was put forward as a trigger point to allow commercial fishing. This was largely due to incomplete knowledge regarding the level of subsistence need on the Pilgrim River, as well as an absence of a ground-based escapement goal for sockeye salmon. Since this regulation was adopted, several more years of high quality escapement, age, and subsistence harvest data have been collected.

These data have led directly to the department proposing a weir-based goal of 6,800–30,000 sockeye salmon, and more reliable estimates of subsistence harvests needs in high abundance years (10,000–15,000 fish). If the new proposed escapement goal range is adopted, subsistence and commercial fishery management should be predicated on escapements evaluated in the context of the goal, cumulative impacts of recent year escapements on the capacity of Salmon Lake to support rearing sockeye salmon, and anticipated subsistence harvest needs. Specifically, we recommend amending 5 AAC 04.362 to an escapement-based management plan and harvest policy that takes into account impacts to Salmon Lake of recent year escapements, current year escapement observations and projections and subsistence harvest needs.

PROPOSED BY: Northern Norton Sound Fish and Game Advisory Committee (HQ-F18-013)
