



March 4, 2019

Dear Chairman Morisky and members of the Board of Fisheries,

We are writing this letter of support to strongly urge you to pass the "Alaska Board of Fisheries finding on the religious and ceremonial use of king salmon by Alaska Native peoples of the Yukon River." We applaud the Board's effort to take meaningful action on Mr. Stanley Pete's original proposal. We hope this finding will be one small step of many that you will take to recognize and respect the Indigenous peoples as original stewards of these lands and animals.

We are social scientists and Indigenous scholars who study Alaska Native fisheries and well-being. We have been leading a project on "Indigenizing Salmon Management" and in this work have learned a great deal about the current struggles Alaska Native peoples face to have their political sovereignty and cultural practices recognized and amplified in the state.

Salmon are essential to Alaska Native cultures, traditions, connections to one another, spirituality, nutrition, and wellness. King salmon are the first salmon to enter the Yukon River, marking the end of a long winter and signaling the change of seasons. The first king salmon are rich in nutrients and healthy fats and are a much needed food to replenish empty stores. For this and many other reasons, the first king salmon were and are traditionally celebrated along the river. Numerous dances, stories, and ceremonies celebrate their return.

Alaska Native peoples have had to adapt to a regulatory framework that does not incorporate their deep Indigenous knowledge, traditional practices, or worldviews. This framework has resulted in a loss of cultural traditions passed down and significant hardships, as they have become criminalized with fishing closures or gear restrictions for practicing their traditional ways of life. Alaska Native peoples have always been conservation-minded – never taking more than they need and sharing what they have – and were the original stewards of the resource for millennia. The current regulatory framework treats Alaska Native peoples as one of many "stakeholders" to be managed and discounts or ignores the intimate relationship Alaska Native

peoples have with the salmon and fails to recognize Alaska Native Tribes as the sovereign governments that they are. Loss of access to traditional foods, a decline in fish camps, and criminalization of a way of life have led to a significant erosion of well-being for Alaska Native peoples.

By adopting this finding, the Board would be joining a growing list of entities making reparations for western management and regulatory systems that have had dire consequences for Alaska Native peoples. This finding would be an historic step toward much needed healing and reconciliation.

Thank you for your consideration on this important issue.

Sincerely,

Dr. Jessica Black, Dr. Courtney Carothers, and Dr. Rachel Donkersloot