

ASSOCIATION OF VILLAGE COUNCIL PRESIDENTS

Raymond Watson, Chairperson | Vivian Korhuis, CEO | AVCP.org



Administration

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March 8, 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 acknowledge that Mr. Pete's original request for a regulation change is not feasible within the current regulatory and legal framework and appreciate the Board's consideration to take alternate action.

The Association of Village Council Presidents (AVCP) is the largest tribal consortium in the United States. We provide community development, education, social services, culturally relevant programs, and advocacy for the people and Tribes of our Region. Our members consist of the 56 federally recognized Tribes located in the Yukon-Kuskokwim Delta in Southwestern Alaska. Our Region encompasses approximately 6.5 million acres – or 55,000 square miles – and is an area the size of the State of New York. Our geographic boundaries extend from the Yukon River village of Russian Mission downstream to the Bering Sea coast, north up through Kotlik and south along the coastline to Platinum, and then extending up the Kuskokwim River to Stony River, including Lime Village on the Stony River tributary.

Salmon are essential to our culture, traditions, connection to one another, spirituality, nutrition, and wellness. Alaska Native peoples often refer to salmon as their family – they are one of us. We do not see them as something to manage. They are not a resource to own. They are our one of us. This is our worldview.

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. Often, when the first king salmon arrived in the river, we would be at the very end of our winter food supply but knew that we would survive with those first salmon. For this and many other reasons, the first king salmon were traditionally celebrated along the river. We have dances, stories, and ceremonies celebrating their return.

Alaska Native peoples have had to adapt to a regulatory framework that did not incorporate their local knowledge, traditional practices, or worldview. The unintended consequences of this framework have resulted in a loss of cultural traditions passed down and significant hardships, as they have become criminalized with fishing closures or gear restrictions. Alaska Native peoples have always been

Nunaput umyuallgutkut pinirluteng-Ilu, Tegganerput qigcikliki pirpakluki-Ilu, ayagyuaput-Ilu ciuliqagcimaui yuuyarakun. Our Tribes are united and strong, our Elders are respected and valued, and our youth are guided by Yuuyaraq.

Akiachak, Akiak, Alakanuk, Andreafski, Aniak, Atmautluak, Bethel, Bill Moore's Sl., Chefornak, Chevak, Chuathbaluk, Chuloonawick, Crooked Creek, Eek, Emmonak, Georgetown, Goodnews Bay, Hamilton, Hooper Bay, Lower Kalskag, Upper Kalskag, Kasigluk, Kipnuk, Kongiganak, Kotlik, Kwethluk, Kwigillingok, Lime Village, Marshall, Mekoryuk, Mtn. Village, Napaimute, Napakiak, Napaskiak, Newtok, Nightmute, Nunakauyak, Nunam Iqua, Nunapitchuk, Ohogamiut, Oscarville, Paimiut, Pilot Station, Pitka's Point, Platinum, Quinhagak, Red Devil, Russian Mission, Scammon Bay, Sleetmute, St. Mary's, Stony River, Tuluksak, Tuntutuliak, Tununak, Umkumiut

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conservation-minded – never taking more than they need – and were the original stewards of the resource for millennia. However, the regulatory framework treats Alaska Native peoples as “stakeholders” to be managed and discounts or ignores the intimate relationship Alaska Native peoples have with the salmon. Yes, low salmon populations have necessitated conservative regulatory actions by fishery managers; but those actions still failed to take in to account the many important religious and ceremonial practices, like those mentioned by Mr. Pete. Loss of access to their traditional foods, a decline in fish camps, and a subsequent criminalization of a way of life have led to a significant decline in 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 unintended 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,

ASSOCIATION OF VILLAGE COUNCIL PRESIDENTS

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Vivian Korthuis". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Vivian Korthuis,
Chief Executive