

The   
OUR HOME, OUR FUTURE

March 7th, 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 Alaska Center works to engage and empower Alaskans to stand up for our clean air and water, healthy salmon habitat, and a strong democracy. We acknowledge and support the critical role that salmon play in sustaining culture, traditions, connection to one another, spirituality, nutrition, and wellness.

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 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,

Polly Carr  
Executive Director  
The Alaska Center