

Alaska Board of Fish Proposal 21

Hello, in order to not miss any points, I will read my statement on proposal 21.

1 My name is Al Poindexter. I was born here in Seward in 1948. My family operated the Totem Egg Farm with 17,000 chickens up to the 1964 Earthquake. I attended the University of Alaska, Fairbanks, and completed a bachelor's degree, in education with a minor in biology. I am the owner of Anchor Point Greenhouse, LLC. Even though I spent 20 years teaching, my family and I have continuously been involved with agriculture. Since my age of 12, we have collected seaweed for our gardens. I have not missed a year, except for my time at the university, so you could say that I have spent a lifetime observing beached seaweed.

My dad was always looking for agriculture economic opportunities but was rarely successful in implementing his ideas. One of those ideas, however, was to find a way to utilize the tons of fish waste being pumped back out into the ocean. He began experimenting with different techniques and formulas for composting that fish waste. The fish waste compost lacked essential micro-nutrients required for proper plant growth hence the introduction of seaweed. Seaweed has around 60 micro-nutrients plus beneficial bacteria and a gel that benefits soil structure. Seaweed also was the ingredient that speeded up the composting process. The final formula provided an all- natural complete fertilizer derived from Alaska natural resource waste. Coupled with Alaskan peat, another underutilized Alaska natural resource, we now have Fishy Peat Potting soil that rivals and competes with all the imported potting soils from national and international sources. This is a story where underutilized and waste Alaskan resources are value added into a useful and needed product that replaces in many cases lower quality imported products. All the money derived from this project stays in Alaska and further improves Alaskan Agriculture and state economy. Now some say this is a booming business. I have to say it is a break- even business but it does employ people and it keeps more money in Alaska by displacing imports. Beached seaweed is a key ingredient and without it, we would not have Fishy Peat. It has continued now for forty years because its value adds what might otherwise be discarded and it continues my dad's legacy. Finally, a lot of people from Kodiak to Prudhoe Bay depend on it.

2 The seaweed we collect is storm battered and surf pounded and left in windrows, mixed with sand, gravel, driftwood and trash all up and down the beach. What we pick up is usually a blackish, gooey, smelly mass of mixed species of seaweed. If we catch it early, we can see colors and some texture of the different species. The mix of those colors, reds, browns and greens ensures that we will have some representation of all the micronutrients even though it would be impossible to separate them out or even to determine percentages of each.

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Seaweed has been documented being used for food and fertilizer as far back as 2700 B.C. Ireland, Scotland, and Iceland have been collecting beached seaweed

for fertilizer since year 1200. Their collection is intense leaving little to wash back into the ocean. They also grow it for food and fertilizer. I have not been able to find any reports through my internet research about any negative environmental effects this collection may have caused. Seaweed is used extensively in Japan and China for food but also for fertilizer. I have not found anything in literature that relates seaweed collection to negative environmental concerns.

Three years ago, I was informed by the University Extension service that they thought it was illegal to collect seaweed off the beach. I thought, how could that be. Other gardeners are collecting, and no one seems to be getting into trouble. So, I attempted to find a law that stated that it was illegal. I couldn't find one, so I called Mr. Glenn Hollowell at the Homer Dept. of Fish and Game. He told me that it was in fact illegal and that I could not continue unless I received a commissioner's permit. I then called the Department of Fish and Game Commissioner, Sam Cotton. He was unaware of the regulation and at the time thought that it was not true. The next day, he called back and told me it was a rule and that Mr. Hollowell would help me obtain a commissioner's permit. And I appreciated that.

Mr. Hollowell said in The Alaska Journal of Commerce that the department wants to be very cautious as we start doing new things with it, to make sure we don't allow something we will regret. It might cause damage to that kelp population or other species. He continues that a commissioner's permit is needed to document thoroughly to make sure they are not taking the wrong species or not taking from below the high tide line. The wholesale removal of this stuff in large quantities might have a negative impact on the ecosystem.

Granted, I have seen changes over the years. In the 70's or 80's we would have to spend days, driving up and down the beach picking up thin ribbons of seaweed in order to get enough for our compost. That coincided with a huge reduction in sea otter populations. With those populations decreased, sea urchins increased and conversely seaweed decreased. We have two dynamics going on now, producing mountains of seaweed on the beach. We have climate change (warming water and increased CO-2. Those two factors alone would account for the huge increase of seaweed on the beach. The other is that the sea otter population has increased dramatically, hence less sea urchins and more seaweed.

I would say to the department that restrictions on beached seaweed collection is based on an unfounded fear. First, this is not a new thing we are doing. It was reported in the Anchorage Daily News, May 16 that subsistence seaweed harvests have been happening along Alaska's coastline for a millennium. It has gone on since before my lifetime and I have not found any documented evidence that beach seaweed collection has created any negative environmental effects. In fact, I have not found any documentation that beached seaweed collection have caused any negative environmental effects anywhere. The mere fact that each one of us

existing has an impact on the environment, whether we drive a diesel truck or eat salmon. Because we exist, makes us a part of the environment, not apart from it. Our activities to exist and thrive has an impact on the environment but it is not necessarily negative. Least of all using what has always been used. The concern of taking the wrong species is also an unfounded fear because all species are in a tangled partially decomposed mat. The idea that viable spores may have an opportunity to wash back into the ocean to germinate in my opinion is minimal because of several factors. One, is that what we are picking up is partially decomposed. The time of the year we collect is in the late fall is when we begin to have a decrease in daylight and temperatures begin to cool. Neither are conducive to good germination and plant growth.

Glenn Hollowell is concerned about wholesale removal of this stuff. I have not seen any documentation that that has occurred and if it did, I have not been able to find what the result was. I don't think that any of us who have be participating in beach seaweed collection are collectively engaged in wholesale removal of this stuff. Second, it is a renewable resource. One permitted Kodiak kelp farm collected between 150,000 and 200,000 pounds of kelp this year. That still is not considered a large amount. Ireland and Japan collect Millions of tons per year. I collect between 3 and 6 approximate thousand pounds per year. What I collect is comparable to collecting one teaspoon of sand off the beach.

I am proposing that no permit is needed unless the department wants to document what is being collected. If that is the case, then why am I the only one with a permit. All users should have a permit if that information is of importance to the Department. If you are going to have a law, then you must have the ability to enforce it. The word on the street is, "just be quiet and they won't bother you". You wouldn't even know about me if I hadn't called. The proposal you have before you, were drafted by Glenn Hollowell. In the draft regulation language, I have a problem with section b item 1, may specify season dates, this causes me some concern because it is arbitrary to the person writing the permit for any reason or for no reason at all. There are always weather concerns, labor concerns, health concerns, seaweed availability that a permit cannot foresee. Section b Item 2 defining the area may become problematic. I have on two occasions had to drive to Ninilchik to collect the seaweed as that is where the wind carried it and on other occasions, I'd have to cover much more beach to collect enough during the time it was needed. Section b Item 3 limiting quantity should be based on a scientific reason not arbitrary. The last problem I have is the stipulation that collection should take place above the high tide line. Seaweed is not left above the high tide line. As far as I know, removing any amount has not produced one real problem. Depending on who is writing the permit, that person out of unfounded fear or even with a bad attitude could prevent us from meeting our needs for the season. As long as we are using pitch forks, there is no danger of clearing the beach.

No one wants to work that hard. All of us are concerned about our environment. After all it is what allows us to do what we do. Why would we damage that?

My last request is that because of my age, and the fact that I have not taken advantage of the lifetime fishing and hunting license, I would like to trade that privilege for a lifetime seaweed collecting permit for Anchor Point Greenhouse.

Thank you for listening. Are there any questions

