

PROPOSAL 95

5 AAC 21.360. Kenai River Late-Run Sockeye Salmon Management Plan.

Amend the *Kenai River Late-Run Sockeye Salmon Management Plan* to remove and replace the provision to manage for commercial uses with a provision to manage for commercial, sport, and personal use groups, as follows:

5 AAC 21.360. Kenai River Late-Run Sockeye Salmon Management Plan

(a) [THE DEPARTMENT SHALL MANAGE THE KENAI RIVER LATE-RUN SOCKEYE SALMON STOCKS PRIMARILY FOR COMMERCIAL USES BASED ON ABUNDANCE.]

The department shall manage the Kenai River late-run sockeye salmon stocks based on abundance and acknowledge the value of all three major user groups - commercial, sport, & personal use - as viable management methods utilized to achieve a healthy and sustainable fishery. The department shall also manage the commercial fisheries to minimize the harvest of Northern District coho, late-run Kenai River king, and Kenai River coho salmon stocks to provide personal use, sport, and guided sport fishermen with a reasonable opportunity to harvest salmon resources.

What is the issue you would like the board to address and why? Since statehood the Cook Inlet - Kenai River Late Run Sockeye Salmon stocks have been managed primarily for commercial uses based on abundance. Over the past 50 years the state's population has grown from 200,000 to 737,000 (2018) and a vast majority of those new residents (the resource owners) reside in the Southcentral region of the state. It is acknowledged that nearly a half century ago the only viable means of managing salmon escapement numbers into our river systems, and specifically the Kenai & Kasilof rivers, was by commercial fishing set nets and drift nets.

The state has added more than a half million additional residents where a major portion of those rely on the resources of Cook Inlet, the Kenai Peninsula, and the Susitna/Knik regions to provide important recreational value as well as a vital food source for Alaskan harvesters. In addition, the visitor and tourism-related businesses and services, e.g. guides, lodges, & retail processors associated with the Kenai River late run sockeye salmon fishery have grown exponentially as well as seen major increases in the sport, personal use and subsistence user numbers. These fishery resources provide a vital infusion of money into local economies as well as create hundreds of seasonal and permanent jobs for Alaskans.

The management approach of "managing the Kenai River Late Run Sockeye Salmon stocks primarily for commercial uses based on abundance" as currently dictated in 5 AAC 21.360 (a) is outdated and creates a very disproportionate opportunity for the harvesting of these resources in today's world. Sport anglers and Personal Use harvesters continue to be ignored at present as a very capable and dependable management "tool" for controlling escapement numbers into the Kenai River no different than using commercial nets to harvest surplus fish. Whereas the commercial fishing industry of Cook Inlet has not created a single additional new job from the moment Limited Entry was adopted in 1974 and the number of commercial participants were frozen, the economic value of Cook Inlet fish resources to Alaska and the local communities and businesses relying on sport and personal use has grown and expanded at a very healthy rate year after year for decades.

The Department must adapt to a changing world with changing needs and priorities as it relates to our resources, economic development, and prosperity for Alaska. The proposed changes in this AAC wording (and philosophy) is to recognize the true value of each of the three major user groups and allow the Department to work between Commercial and Sport divisions to provide a more equitable distribution of surplus harvest based on the value not only to each individual user in each group but to the overall economic value each group contributes to Alaska's local economy. The Alaska State Constitution mandates the Department manage our fishery resources for all people of this state.

PROPOSED BY: Alaska Outdoor Journal/Gary Barnes

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