

Chairman Morisky and Board of Fisheries Members,

My name is Andy Couch and I am speaking on behalf of the Mat-Su Fish and Wildlife Commission's support for personal use / dip net opportunities for Alaska residents and residents of the Matanuska - Susitna Borough. I am familiar with lower Susitna River proposed dip net areas, and have participated in two other personal use dip net fisheries.

The commission supports proposals 234, 235, 236, 237, and 238 — each of which, if adopted, would create slightly different personal use dip net fishing opportunities in the lower Susitna River. The commission's support of these proposals is based on the idea of providing reasonable personal use salmon dip net fishing opportunities for Alaska residents in the Mat-Su Valley. Therefore, the commission encourages Board members in adopting one of these proposals, or lumping concepts from multiple proposals, to create a reasonable personal use salmon harvest opportunity for residents who live in or near the Matanuska - Susitna Borough.

The commission recognizes efforts made by proposal writers to create a conservative personal use fishery. We share the Department's view that current management tools used by the Department, would mostly provide post season assessment. Therefore, in recognition of participation and harvest level knowledge gaps, the Precautionary Principle is called for.

Participation and harvest level knowledge gaps would be replaced with better understanding with each fishing season. The Department's postseason tools currently used in managing the combined Central District commercial, Northern District commercial, and Susitna River sport harvests of Susitna River salmon stocks would provide data that included personal use harvest starting with the first year of a personal use fishery. Depending upon reporting requirements, dip net harvest data could provide for timely inseason management decisions.

The Department's 2020 Upper Cook Inlet sockeye salmon forecast calls for a, much higher than average, 571,000 return of Susitna River sockeye. Therefore, adopting a Susitna River personal use fishery in 2020 should provide a significant opportunity to learn impacts from this fishery at less risk to attaining established sockeye salmon escapement goals. Keep in mind during July substantial numbers of bright chum salmon, pink salmon, and coho salmon would also be available for personal use harvest in the lower Susitna River.

This fishery could provide an opportunity for Alaska residents to harvest a reasonable amount of prime quality salmon from the glacially-turbid lower Susitna River drainage — but at present (according to data request information provided to Board member Payton) the sport fishery only took 4% of the Susitna River sockeye harvest between 2005-2018.

There are currently 138 Public Comments supporting Proposal 234 / Susitna River personal use dip net fishery. Feel welcome to ask questions.

The Commission continues to support personal use fisheries as currently configured on Kenai River, Kasilof River, and Fish Creek.

Thank you for your service on the Board of Fisheries,

Andrew N. Couch