

PROPOSAL 119

5 AAC 21.359 Kenai River Late-Run King Salmon Management Plan.

Allow the Kasilof River Special Harvest Area to remain open when the remainder of the commercial set gillnet fishery in the Upper Subdistrict is closed as follows:

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(d) If projected late-run king salmon escapement is less than 15,000 king salmon 75 cm mid eye to tail fork and longer, the department shall

(1) close the sport fishery in the Kenai River

(2) close the commercial drift fishery

(3) close the commercial set gillnet fishery in the Upper Subdistrict in the Central District, **except**

(i) the Kasilof River Special Harvest Area is to remain open, and the fishery should be conducted as described in 5 AAC 21.365 (f)

What is the issue you would like the board to address and why? The issue in this proposal is to exempt the closing of the Kasilof River Special Harvest Area (KRSHA), when the Upper Sub District commercial set net gillnet fishery is closed under the Kenai River Late-Run King Salmon Management Plan (KRLRKSMMP).

At the 2020 Board of Fish (BOF) Upper Cook Inlet meeting, with a recommendation from ADFG, the BOF lowered the Kasilof River sockeye salmon optimum escapement goal (OEG) of 160,000 - 390,000 to 140,000 -370,000 sockeye salmon.

Part of the reasoning was in 1985 over 500,000 sockeye salmon passed the counters in the Kasilof River. The 1985 escapement failed to replace itself. Since the adoption of the KRLRKSMMP, in 2017, 5 out of 6 years the Kasilof River has exceeded the upper end of its escapement goal.

Since 2020 when the KRLRKSMMP was changed to 15,000 -30,000 OEG the Kasilof River has annually exceeded its escapement goal. In 2022 almost ONE MILLION sockeye salmon made it into the Kasilof River. This is over 250% of the top end of the ADFG recommended goal and BOF approved goal.

It would seem to me that if a stock can become a "stock of management concern" for continually not making its minimum escapement goal, the same "stock of management concern" could be made for a stock continually exceeding the upper end of their escapement goal.

If 400,000 of the almost 600,000 sockeye salmon that exceeded the goal, were harvested; at \$2 a pound, would mean over \$3 million in revenue to the fishermen. Local canneries and processors would also benefit as they would have fish to process. In 2018, the last year the KRSHA opened, my cannery paid the going season price of \$2 a pound for sockeye salmon harvested in the KRSHA.

The KRSHA is very efficient at harvesting Kasilof sockeye salmon, while having a minimal, almost nil, harvest of large Kenai River king salmon. I don't have the harvest data at the moment, but I am confident when this proposal is discussed at the 2024 Upper Cook Inlet BOF meeting, ADFG will verify a very small harvest of large Kenai River king salmon.

There are step downs, for commercial set gillnet fishermen in the Kasilof River Management Plan, full fishery, half mile fishery, 600 ft fishery, and finally the KRSHA.

It would be the intent of this proposal to exempt from closing the KRSHA when the KRLRKSMP has closed the Upper Subdistrict set gillnet fishery.

PROPOSED BY: Gary Hollier

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