

## **PROPOSAL 178**

### **5 AAC 57.170. Kenai River Coho Salmon Management Plan.**

Reduce the season for the Kenai River coho salmon sport fishery as follows:

(a) The purpose of this management plan is to ensure an adequate escapement of coho salmon into the Kenai River drainage and to provide management guidelines to the department. The department shall manage the Kenai River coho salmon stocks primarily to provide sport and guided sport fishermen with a reasonable opportunity to harvest these salmon resources over the entire run.

(b) Notwithstanding any other provisions in this chapter, for the conservation of coho salmon stocks, the department shall manage sport fishing in the Kenai River drainage as follows:

(1) coho salmon fishing is closed in the Middle and Upper Sections from November 1 through **July 31** [June 30], and in the Lower Section from December 1 through **July 31** [June 30]; any coho salmon caught incidentally must be released immediately without further harm;

(2) repealed 6/4/2008;

(3) coho salmon may be taken as follows:

(A) from **August 1** [July 1] through October 31, in the Middle and Upper Sections;

(B) from **August 1** [July 1] through November 30, in the Lower Section;

(C) from **August 1** [July 1] through August 31, the daily bag and possession limit for coho salmon 16 inches or greater in length is two fish;

(D) from September 1 through November 30, the daily bag and possession limit for coho salmon 16 inches or greater in length is three fish.

(c) If the commissioner determines that additional conservation measures are necessary for the inriver sport or personal use fisheries, the commissioner may close, by emergency order, the season and immediately reopen a season during which any or a combination of the following restrictions may be applied:

(1) the daily bag and possession limit for coho salmon is one fish;

(2) only unbaited artificial lures **shall** [may] be used;

(3) fishing time may be reduced;

(4) fishing areas may be reduced.

**What is the issue you would like the board to address and why?** Set netters are experiencing incredible hardships to protect Late Run Kenai King salmon, yet all that sacrifice is nullified by

Coho fishermen catching Kings when they're at their weakest as they prepare to spawn. In the name of conservation, set netters have experienced mandatory closures despite an exploitation rate on kings of less than 1%, while all other user groups see their fisheries liberalized. Rather than share the burden of conservation, in-river users have received relaxed regulations pertaining to habitat and salmon conservation:

- 1) Outboards were increased from 35hp to 50hp rather than mandating smaller, more efficient vessels be used. Larger horsepower engines emit higher decibel readings, which increases overall noise pollution directed at king salmon spawning beds.
- 2) Fresh water log books, are no longer required from commercial guides. Because of this the department is willfully ignorant to the number of kings "inadvertently" caught in the coho fishery.

Per Alaska Department of Fish and Game, returning chinook spend 30-60 days in river before they spawn and die. If the morbidity rate on unintended king catch is just one per day (on spawning kings counted with the chinook sonar project), the impact to the king run is greater than the entire yearly East Side Setnet king harvest averaged over the past five years. Since ADF&G is unable to provide current data on king bycatch from the in-river coho fishery due to the lack of log books, the BOF needs to error on the side of caution and restrict the fishery to avoid unintended king catch. The 2020 BOF took these same steps by closing the west side Drift River and Kustatan River gillnet silver fishery, since data was lacking on the sustainability of those runs. In the absence of no fresh water log book data, the BOF should also restrict the coho fishery on the Kenai to ensure the sustainability of spawning king salmon.

Throughout the entirety of July, coho numbers in the Kenai River remain low; at the same time Late Run Kenai kings are peaking. There is no justifiable reason to put additional pressure on the king run by attempting to harvest cohos, which are yet to arrive in any appreciable numbers. Permitting coho fishing in July allows fishermen to subvert king closures by "targeting" coho using slightly modified king gear, therefore engaging in a de facto catch and release king fishery.

In order to share the burden of conservation and help offset the above mentioned relaxed regulations, bait and time need to be restricted in the coho fishery in order to avoid any incidental king catch. Artificial lures, i.e. twitching for silvers, throwing spinners, etc, are very effective and efficient means of harvesting silvers with minimal impact on spawning king salmon. These methods are proven to avoid incidental king catch while still providing an effective means of harvesting coho salmon.

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