

PROPOSAL 241

5 AAC 60.122. Special provisions for the seasons, bag, possession, annual, and size limits, and methods and means for the Knik Arm Drainages Area

Allow use of bait in the Little Susitna River sport fishery based on location of commercial fishery openings as follows:

Each day salmon are allowed to be harvested commercially within one statute mile of the terminus / channel of Little Susitna River as measured at mean lower low water— the use of bait shall be allowed in the Little Susitna River sport fishery up to the Parks Highway bridge, and (matching the commercial limit) the sport bag and possession limits shall allow harvest of coho, sockeye, king, chum, and pink salmon without limit.

What is the issue you would like the board to address and why? Declining numbers of sockeye, king, and coho salmon returning Little Susitna River since 2000 in combination with regulation allowing commercial salmon harvest within one mile of the Little Susitna River mouth / tide gut is the issue.

I believe this issue has contributed to reduced inriver salmon harvest opportunities and restrictions on what has been one of the most significant coho, sockeye, and king salmon sport fisheries in the Mat-Su Valley. In addition, the most commercially harvested salmon from Susitna Flats statistical area (where Little Susitna River flows into Knik Arm) is coho. According to Northern District Salmon Management Plan intent: the commercial fishery should be managed to “minimize” harvest of coho salmon.

In Upper Cook Inlet commercial fishing is normally closed within one mile of many salmon producing streams. I believe such regulation allows more consistent salmon migration into freshwater streams throughout their entire salmon run.

Through the first week of August Little Susitna River coho salmon appear to stage, for an extended period of time, in the intertidal zone before continuing their migration upstream. This behavior may be why large Susitna Flats commercial coho salmon harvests consistently occur during the last week of July and first week of August. These large commercial harvests (if occurring within one mile of the Little Susitna River mouth) would appear to “maximize” rather than “minimize” commercial coho salmon harvest, and occur at the same time the sport fishery is restricted to artificial lures (through August 6). Coho salmon escapement through Little Susitna River weir and coho salmon harvest from the inriver sport fishery is modest, at best, during this portion of the season.

Even if commercial fishing were to be closed within one mile of the Little Susitna River mouth / tidal gut: 1. I believe significant commercial salmon harvests (including coho salmon harvest) could continue. 2. Higher salmon escapements through the weir and earlier in the season would likely occur - thereby decreasing the chance of inseason restriction or closure for all users. 3. I believe a more reasonable inriver salmon harvest opportunity (throughout the entire season), as specified in the plan, would also be provided.

If there is some measurable salmon abundance on which the current liberal commercial harvest opportunity is based, then inriver users should also have a shared liberal harvest opportunity. Unfortunately, as a sport angler experiencing how few coho salmon are available inriver during the last half of July and first week of August, I believe there is little — if any — biological, scientific basis for providing this commercial opportunity to harvest salmon with large gill nets within one mile of the river mouth. Scientific justification is most problematic early in the season — before inseason and reliable abundance estimates can be made by ADF&G from coho salmon passage through Little Susitna River weir.

My work schedule may preclude me from participating during most of the 2024 Upper Cook Inlet BOF meeting. Through this proposal I bring current commercial regulation to the board's attention. In hopes of providing a science-based discussion, including ADF&G's historical and most recent data, I make a proposal providing a similar liberal harvest opportunity for inriver users. Feel welcome to view my first fishing regulation proposal as you will. Bottomline, it is my intent, the board will adopt a better Science-Based regulation to address shared harvest opportunities in saltwater and inriver during the 2024 Upper Cook Inlet meeting.

PROPOSED BY: Chuck Martin

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