

Richard Walsh
BOF Testimony
Feb 24, 2013

Comments on Area M, Northern District, Port Moller to Port Heiden

Mr. Chairman and members of the board, my name is Richard Walsh. I'm a life long resident of Alaska and have fished commercially since 1966. I have operated my own gillnet vessel in Area M since 1982.

I oppose proposals 201 through 208.

The authors of these proposals portray the North Peninsula as unusual because we do not fish in terminal areas. In fact, the reverse is true. It is accepted practice in most areas of the state to close terminal areas and provide opportunity for a more orderly commercial fishery away from the stream terminus. This management style provides a sanctuary for returning salmon as they make the transition from the salt-water environment to their natal fresh water streams.

Whose fish are they? That's the big question. Salmon are often referred to as a "public resource" so I guess that means they really belong to all of us. I don't think I've heard anyone say that because salmon originated in a particular stream the fishery nearest that stream is entitled to the entire run when they return.

I would like to site some other mixed stock fisheries that may help you with allocation issues at this meeting.

In SE Alaska and Yakutat there are three large trans-boundary rivers, the Alsek, Taku and Stikine. These rivers have their terminus in the US and their spawning grounds in Canada.

At the far southern border of SE Alaska is the Tree Pt gillnet district, which is largely dependent on Nass River sockeye. The Nass River is located entirely in Canada.

A very important seine fishery is located at Noyes Island on the west coast of SE. This fishery harvests many sockeye of Canadian origin and is managed for them until mid-summer.

The SE troll fishery operates all through the channels of SE Alaska and in the open Gulf of Alaska. This fishery targets king, coho and recently chum salmon. The kings originate from various streams and hatcheries in California, Oregon, Washington, British Columbia and Alaska. Their management is very complex, involving inter-governmental agreements and years of data from coded wire tags.

The above-mentioned fisheries are all under the regulatory oversight of the Pacific Salmon Commission, created by a 1985 treaty. Two panels, one US and one Canadian, composed of stakeholders were formed for each of the geographic areas. The various panels meet to consider technical information and other pertinent data including history and each country's contribution to the fishery. The panels negotiate recommendations, which are passed on to the Pacific Salmon Commission and finally to the Governments of Canada and the United States for final approval and regulatory implementation.

In Alaska our Board Of Fish has the final word on the details of this implementation. This process has enabled these complex, mixed stock, interception fisheries to proceed successfully for several decades.

Neither the Canadian government nor its panels insist the US regulate its fisheries so that fish of Canadian origin can transit unimpeded to their natal streams. No request is made to limit US fishing to small terminal areas or inner bays leaving the larger straits and channels open for fish passage, instead both countries work for the health of the resource and an equitable division of the harvest.

The Alaska Department of Fish and Game Management Plan for the North Peninsula has been refined over the years and works very well. It needs no change. The stock composition and harvest rate figures from the recent WASSIP study show that we are effectively harvesting our local runs while maintaining a very low harvest rate on non-local stocks. Not all salmon fisheries need to be forced into terminal areas. Before voting in favor of proposals that change the North Peninsula, please consider past Board findings and decisions that have made our fishery what it is today.

Thank you.