

UPPER COOK INLET TASK FORCE MEETING SUMMARY

November 16, 2012
Kenai Peninsula College
Kenai, Alaska

December 16, 2012 note from Tom Kluberton: "During the Bristol Bay meeting this month, the Board of Fisheries reviewed and approved the language defining the Task Force's purpose as published with the Notes from the November 16, 2012 meeting. The Co-Chairs of the Task Force have since reviewed Notes from the November 16 meeting and narrowed-down the comments to those pertinent to the Task Force's Purpose as agreed-upon by the Board in Naknek. These comments will be considered "on the table" at the next meeting (January 14th 2013) of the Task Force."

MEMBERS PRESENT:

Vince Webster (BOF)
Tom Kluberton (BOF)
Dennis Gease (Personal Use)
Jim Butler III (Set Gillnetter)
Robert Williams (Set Gillnetter)
Ian Pitzman (Drift Gillnetter)
Dwight Kramer (Sport Fisher)
Kevin Delaney (Sport Fisher)
Andy Szczensy (Guided Sport Fisher)
Luther Anderson (Guided Marine Sport Fisher)

MEMBERS ABSENT:

Ken Coleman (Set Gillnetter)

PURPOSE OF THE TASK FORCE:

- To identify and discuss alternative management strategies that allow set gillnetting for sockeye salmon in the East Side Set gillnet fishery (ESSN) and inriver use of Kenai River king salmon during times when the department projects the abundance of late-run king salmon will be below the escapement goal.
 - Input from the public is imperative.
- To bring forward a set of recommendations to the Alaska Board of Fisheries (BOF) at the March 2013 Statewide Finfish meeting.
 - Should have a board generated proposal several weeks in advance of the March BOF meeting.
 - Town hall style meetings with the focus on task force members similar to BOF committee meetings. Consensus on alternatives is preferred but not necessary for the BOF to discuss changes.
 - Management alternatives would likely be reflected in the Late Run King Salmon Management Plan 5AAC 21.359.

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DISCUSSION ON AMENDMENTS TO THE AGENDA:

- Need a discussion of what the king numbers are, whether to discuss the science and uncertainty that exists around development of escapement goal, then plan task force accordingly.
- Get escapement goal(s) first and then build upon that foundation.
- Interim escapement goals will be brought forward by department at January task force meeting.
- Should this task force also discuss the early-run Kenai kings?
- Is it possible to adjust schedule to give AC's time to comment on possible changes before March BOF meeting?

TASK FORCE MEMBER DISCUSSION POINTS:

- During a normal king salmon run nothing should change, restrictions would only be implemented during times of low king salmon abundance.
- There should be a 1 year sunset clause on task force recommended restrictions to the fisheries.
 - This will allow the issue to be brought up again at the Upper Cook Inlet regular BOF meeting in 2014.
- This discussion should be science driven and be based upon knowing what the new king salmon escapement goal will be.
 - Preference of co-chairs is to be able to discuss how to adapt fisheries (commercial/sport) regardless of new interim escapement goal. Whatever the interim escapement goal is, we may again find ourselves at a point where we are having a problem reaching that goal so we need to plan for that. We can have that discussion prior to knowing what the goal may be. We can move forward to have action points and describe the management actions/set of tools the department would implement without knowing what the numerical "trigger" points are.
 - Options for harvesting sockeye salmon in the commercial fishery with a limited harvest of king salmon will not change with the knowledge of escapement goals.
- How would the department reopen fisheries if the run comes in later than normal? Would the restrictions remain?
- What the task force and BOF do here will have tentacles that could spread into other plans as well (i.e., changes to the Late Run Sockeye Salmon Management Plan).
- Restricting commercial fishing hours is the most effective method of reducing commercial harvest.
- Have a step up plan to put the fish first
 - Start the season with restrictions and liberalize both fisheries as the run progresses.
- Windows tie manager's hands, so following that logic, why do we have regular openings? What is so good about regular periods?
 - Many fishermen feel that Monday and Thursday regular periods are all they have left.
 - Agreed that there is a similarity between regular openings and mandatory windows.

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- Regular periods are important for processors and fishing crews.
- Could have a mix of standard openings and abundance based openings (i.e. fish the set nets when sockeye are abundant and get out when they are not).
 - For abundance based fishery, the department needs more tools to assess how many fish are in the inlet.
 - Does the department have the funds to operate an abundance based sockeye salmon fishery?
- Set net fishery needs some fishing time when there are not many fish present to work out the bugs in their operation.
- Tie set net restrictions to sport fish restrictions.
- From the marine recreational fishery, look at data that indicated fish are coming in later than they used to. Scale things back instead of closure. Close weekends. If there are high winds off the beach it is virtually unfishable for several days.

PUBLIC COMMENTS:

- Someone claimed that the ESSN CPUE is the best for understanding sockeye and king salmon runs inseason and inriver data is not good.
- Have an OEG for both sockeye and king salmon and initiated in best public interest of fishery.
- Member of the public stated that the run timing of king salmon in the Kenai River has become later every year.
- Effort in the commercial set gillnet fishery has remained constant since limited entry in the 1970's, regulating fishing time is a proven tool, need more management of inriver fishing because only inriver use has been allowed to increase.
- Should develop a list of restrictions for both fisheries. Have sport fishermen write up a list of restrictions for set net fisheries, and have set net fishermen write up a list of restrictions for inriver fisheries. List all we can think of and have each group go through their list and see what they can live with.
- How would the public be guaranteed that the changes to the management plans will be followed by the department?
- Enhancement of king salmon in Upper Cook Inlet should be implemented.
- The marine fishery is too restrictive at times. Marine fishery harvest many feeder kings.
- Inriver fishery should never be restricted more than catch & release.
- Tremendous tides in Cook Inlet make it viable to flag set net. You can pick the net when you want, kings caught in net are viable and can be released, able to take better care of fish and get a better price. Does decrease catch rates of all fish.
- Flagging nets is foolish. Set nets don't catch enough kings to matter anymore.
- Move away from calendar based fishing. Abundance based fishing will challenge processors with loading up on a given day. Need to include processors in the discussion.
- Need to treat beach segments differently. No fewer than 4 beach segments because they vary widely in fishing conditions.
- Step up management makes it difficult to book clients for inriver fisheries.
- Some king salmon restrictions are purely social and they need to be removed.
- There isn't a step down measure for set nets. Maybe there should be one.

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LIST OF PROPOSED ALTERNATIVE RESTRICTIONS FOR THE ESSN AND INRIVER FISHERIES:

- Move toward abundance based management of sockeye salmon and away from mandatory openings and windows.
- Create a step up plan which starts the season with restrictions for both fisheries.
- Flag set gillnets and release live king salmon.
- Acoustic deterrence devices.
- Restrict the distance from shore set gillnets can fish.
- Restrict the depth of set gillnets.
- Reduce the number of nets per permit.
- Mesh size restrictions.
- A rolling closure of inriver sport fishing based on king salmon spawning areas (i.e. let the upper river fish early, then close. As the run progresses, move closure downriver).
- Reducing annual king salmon limit from 2 fish to 1 fish in the sport fishery.
- Start inriver fishery with no bait, barbless hooks.
- Close fishing above the bridge.
- Have more drift boat only days on the Kenai River and drift only downstream; no upstream movement
- Additional early season restrictions for the marine fishery.
 - Close weekends to guided saltwater fishing.
- Need to address the personal use dipnet fisheries.

LIST OF INFORMATION REQUESTS:

- Run timing information for late and early run Kenai River king salmon and sockeye salmon.
- Catch/Harvest information and exploitation rates for all user groups for king salmon.
- Genetic stock composition estimates of king salmon commercially harvested in the ESSN.
- Long term trends for age, sex, and length of king salmon in Upper Cook Inlet and Statewide.
- Kenai River king salmon spawning escapement values and proposed interim escapement goal.
- 2013 king salmon forecast
- Overview of future king salmon sonar operations.
- Inriver harvest composition during transition from early-run to late-run.
- Relationship between early- and late-run Kenai River king salmon run strengths.
- DIDSON conversions.
- Data on fish traveling outside of sonar coverage in Kenai River.
- Data to support estimates of harvest savings when bait is prohibited or catch-and-release is required.
- Revised brood tables for Kenai River king salmon.
- Escapement goal priority statement.
- Review of current and historical mark-recapture studies on king salmon.
- Latest department reports relating to Kenai River king salmon.