

RC 013

A Response to Several 2014 Kodiak Finfish Proposals

I would like to thank all the members of the Alaska Board of Fisheries for this opportunity to respond to the 2014 Kodiak Finfish proposals. Thank you for your time, your efforts and your thoughtful consideration.

It's a new year and a new cycle of proposals to the Board of Fish, but with some things, the more they change the more they stay the same; once again the Area K seiners find themselves defending their well-established, traditional and historic right to a livelihood. Since 1988 the islands' seine fleet has dwindled from an active participation of nearly 360 permits to about 170. Roughly 190 boats, with 760 persons manning them and all the attendant business these people and boats generated has vanished from the local economy. During all these years participation in the Chignik seine fleet and area K set net fleet has been remarkably constant and near full participation.

After years of struggle all of the salmon fisheries have made a turn-around; experienced crewmen are becoming new boat owners, numerous vessel improvement projects and long delayed maintenance are filling the nearby boatyards and putting the local tradesman back to work. It should be the best of times; everybody is making money, the runs are well managed and for the most part very healthy. Despite this the seine fleet in Kodiak has a long way to go to even approach historic participation and yet here we are again, defending our right to make a living.

Here is my take on the list of proposals before the board this meeting:

- **Proposal 89- Opposed**

Why? - This is simply reallocation masked as conservation. The Alitak runs are well managed; this is simply an attempt to load Olga Bay up with more sockeye to be harvested by a select few. Catches in the Outer areas will drop with this proposal.

- **Proposal 90- Strongly opposed**

Why?- The Humpy- Deadman section is a traditional well-managed fishery that addresses the need for daily fishing in the area during times of strong pink salmon abundance. Pulsed openings during the peak of the pink fishery will allow huge waves of pinks to build up in confined areas near and behind stream markers creating a disorganized and dangerous opening set (herring style) race for fish requiring expensive monitoring by the state (possibly flare openings and the presence of Troopers on a bi-weekly basis) to ensure the fishery proceeds in a legal manner. In addition during peak times in big pink years local processors are already struggle to handle the volume of fish available, allowing huge pink buildups will exacerbate this situation. This proposal will turn an organized fishery chaotic and may reallocate the small historic seine catch of sockeye in this section. Again, there is no question of a mismanaged fishery, the Alitak sockeye fishery is sustainably managed and healthy, and it is simply not in a peak-production phase.

- **Proposal 91- Opposed**

Why?- Greater Early Upper Station escapements is biologically unnecessary, however this proposal will flood Olga Bay with Upper Station and Fraser sockeye robbing the Outer set nets and Alitak beach of their historic harvest opportunities.

- **Proposal 92- Strongly opposed**

Why?- June and early July harvest of the Chignik run by area K seiners has been the traditional harvest strategy since it was implemented in 1969, the harvest only rarely exceeds 15% much more often it falls under that. Legislating a system that forces Fish and Game to never exceed the 15% will open the department to all sorts of lawsuits if it makes a small misstep and will surely cause the traditional harvest of Chignik stocks to fall significantly. Additionally, back-loading the fishery into July and August will have a much greater impact on Chignik and Kodiak mainland pink and chum stocks, almost surely leading to overharvest of these already weak stocks.

- **Proposal 93- Strongly opposed**

Why? - See response to Proposal 92. Also there is no hardship in Chignik, with only 99 permits and a healthy sockeye fishery it is one of the most exclusive and lucrative salmon fisheries in the world.

- **Proposal 94- Opposed**

Why? - This Proposal is a solution looking for a problem. Little, if any Cape Igvak fish gets unreported, the fish are distinctly larger and less mixed with incidental salmon species than island sockeye stocks. Most of the markets already require delivery of Cape Igvak fish on the grounds as a means of quality control. It will add a considerable work load to both Fish and Game and Enforcement and accomplish nothing.

- **Proposal 95- Strongly opposed.** The Westside set netters have had some tough years no doubt- but there are no guarantees in this business and when you choose to fish a set-net in one small spot never leaving the comfort of your established site and cabin things can get chancy indeed.

Why? - I hardly know where to begin with this one, it's wrong on so many different levels. If setting up a special non-traditional gillnet only fishery which allows nearly 5 days and 4 nights of harvest on Early Karluk stocks that haven't met escapement goals during the last opportunity they have to meet them to profit one group of fishermen using weak data to support claims to a historical harvest of fish on an artificial run that's less than 20 years old isn't enough to create grave doubts about this proposal, how about this.

Cost recovery for the maintenance of this run is funded largely by a special harvest in Telrod Cove. This is a seine only area miles inside the boundary limits for set-nets. What this means in effect is that with all the mathematical disputes about relative catch percentages aside (and there are plenty) the seiners pay the entire cost recovery program. Under the current regime we are footing the bill for the lion's share of the program and getting less than 1/2 the fish.

This so called allocation problem (please note allocation wasn't a problem when the gillnetters were catching 70% of the run!) - is primarily the result of two factors. First, due to legal and practical difficulties with securing brood stock, stock for this fishery was changed from Late Upper Station to Saltery Cove sockeye stock. While these are both technically late run stocks the Late Upper Station run is a significantly later returning run, peaking in early to mid August versus the newer Saltery brood stocks peak of early to mid July. What this means in effect is that the Spiridon sockeye fishery falls into the early pink salmon management time slot when Fish and Game must manage

the season openers cautiously based on weak Early Karluk sockeye runs and expected pink salmon returns. There are often closures during this period which allow more of the fish past the nets of seiners and gillnetters alike, this is exacerbated when Early Karluk and the Westside pink forecast is weak.

If the Spiridon run had been initially stocked with Saltery fish the current harvest patterns would be the undisputed status quo.

- **Proposal 96 – Strongly opposed.** This proposal scares the willies out of me and here's why.

Why? - This is another completely shameless fish grab which casually replaces over 100 years of tradition and common sense with greed. As it stands the relationship between the two gear types is tenuous at best. Imagine the chaos that would ensue when 20 set gillnet skiffs try to cut off the markers at Brown's Lagoon or Uyak Bay or Packers Spit in Uganik. **A single set net could easily usurp a spot where a dozen seiners used to share hauls.** Dozens of other gill nets would then go in filling all available gaps leaving nothing but the fishless open bay for the seiner's to work in. The bickering, squabbling, and hard feelings created would get even worse as the set netter's set up their dummy sites, littering anchors and buoys throughout the bay to further rob the seine fleet of fishing opportunity and create obstacles and navigational hazards for the seine fleet that remain year-round.

If that doesn't paint a grim enough picture, imagine the dismal heap of proposals and the animosity at the next board meeting when the seiners try to take back the fishery they've lost and the gillnetters attempt to make further inroads into traditional seine areas. Please do not consider this proposal. As the streams recover from the recent catastrophic washouts, Westside pink stocks will rebuild and fishing time will increase.

- **Proposal 98- Strongly opposed**

Why?- Permit stacking is a scheme in which the wealthiest members in the fleet put to work permits (which they already hold) for a few years, then if the prices rise enough or retirement is near they sell them back into the market place for a tidy capital gain. I think it's a terrible scheme for gillnetter's and a worse one for seining, here's why.

The permit holder with the longer net is effectively stealing fish from the fellow in the next set down the beach and the fellow setting off of him if boats are hauling 2 or more sets out. When a person is fishing in fog or at night it will create

difficulties maintaining an orderly line-up without knowing how long the net next to you is- right now a seine is about ¼ mile long which makes it reasonably easy to make an estimate of the other person's net with radar. Also, relatively few boats in the fleet can fit more than 250 fathoms of seine on their boats. This is a proposal by and for a fairly small group of area K seiners. Without getting into a debate about whether or not it is a good thing to have a fishing permit affordable to new entrants, and whether or not it is a good thing to have a larger fleet generating more income for local supporting business, this proposal simply does not solve the problem it claims to address. **Unless these permits become permanently attached to each other they will ultimately be sold in the market place when the permit holders retire or sell out.**

- **Proposal 98 Strongly opposed**

Why? - As stated in response to Proposal 98 this permit stacking solves nothing. In addition, some powerful family "dynasties" have already formed in the Kodiak set net fleet, is it really in the best interests of the fishery to further consolidate ownership into so few hands? The proposal addresses the problem of the expense to purchase a set net site, and then proposes to make it even more difficult and expensive for new participants.

Thank you again for the opportunity to voice my opinion.

Submitted by Fred Stager