

Alaska Board of Fisheries Committee Summary

COMMITTEE A

Lower Cook Inlet Sport Fishing and Personal Use Salmon December 8-11, 2013

Board Committee Members:

1. John Jensen *Chair
2. Reed Morisky
3. Orville Huntington

Alaska Department of Fish and Game Staff Members:

1. Tom Brookover – Deputy Director, Sport Fish
2. Tom Vania – Regional Management Biologist, Sport Fish
3. Carol Kerkvliet – Assistant Area Management Biologist, Sport Fish
4. Mike Thalhauser – Assistant Area Management Biologist, Sport Fish
5. Mike Booz – Fishery Biologist, Sport Fish

Alaska Wildlife Troopers

1. Burke Waldron

Alaska Department of Law

1. None

Advisory Committee Members:

1. Mike Crawford – Kenai/Soldotna AC
2. Dianne Dubuc – Seward AC
3. Dave Lyon – Homer AC
4. David Martin – Central Peninsula AC
5. Jim Stubbs - Anchorage AC
6. Robert Rupura- Seldovia AC

Public Panel Members:

1. Gary Sinnhuber
2. Tom Hagberg
3. Lynn Whitmore

4. Dwight Kramer
5. Steve Vanek
6. Neil Dewitt

Federal Subsistence Representative:

1. George Pappas

The Committee met December 8, 2013 at 4:30 p.m.–5:30 p.m., and December 9, 8:30 a.m.–11:00 a.m.

PROPOSALS BEFORE THE COMMITTEE WERE: (18 total) 58, 59, 60, 61, 62, 63, 64, 65, 66, 67, 68, 69, 70, 71, 72, 73, 74, 75.

PROPOSAL 58 – 5 AAC 56.122. Special provisions and localized additions and exceptions to the seasons, bag, possession, and size limits, and methods and means for the Kenai Peninsula Area. Close Anchor River to sport fishing on Wednesdays.

Comment Summary:

Department:

- Exploitation has remained fairly low since 2003.
- In 2008, there was an average king salmon run size and with 20 fishing days including Wednesdays, there was a conservative exploitation.

Department of Law: None.

Federal Subsistence Representative: None.

Public Panel Comments:

- Department can use emergency order (EO) authority to close Wednesdays when runs are low.
- Takes away opportunity when runs are adequate.
- Changes regulations back to the way things were prior to 2008.
- Wednesdays are favored by local anglers.
- Catch rate on Wednesdays is not of consequence.
- Wednesday sport fishery was closed by EO in 2012 and 2013.
- Easier to leave current regulations in place and would be harder to add Wednesdays back during average to above average run years.
- Wednesdays should have never been opened in the first place.

Public Panel Recommendation: No consensus.

PROPOSAL 59 – 5 AAC 56.122. Special provisions and localized additions and exceptions to the seasons, bag, possession, and size limits, and methods and means for the Kenai Peninsula Area. Delay reopening Anchor River, Deep Creek, and Stariski Creek to sport fishing by two weeks.

Comment Summary:

Department:

- Niniilchik River hatchery king salmon are used as broodstock for Kachemak Bay terminal fisheries.

Department of Law: None.

Federal Subsistence Representative: None.

Public Panel Comments:

- Amend to include the Niniilchik River; they need this protection too.
- When salt water is closed the stream should be closed too.
- This is a reduction in Dolly Varden sport fishing opportunity.
- Dolly Varden aren't where the king salmon are in the river. King salmon are usually found in the deep pools and the Dolly Varden are in the riffles in between the deep pools.
- Entire river was open to Dolly Varden fishing on July 1 but the upper Anchor River was closed several years ago to king salmon fishing.
- Would eliminate illegal targeting of king salmon during the first two weeks in July.
- Gear restrictions such as 3/8" gap hooks might be a better solution. Gear restrictions can be enforceable.
- Could shift effort to other rivers if these streams are closed.

Public Panel Recommendation: No consensus.

PROPOSAL 60 – 5 AAC 56.122. Special provisions and localized additions and exceptions to the seasons, bag, possession, and size limits, and methods and means for the Kenai Peninsula Area. Modify sport fishing season to allow fishing during November and December on Lower Cook Inlet streams.

Comment Summary:

Department: None.

Department of Law: None.

Federal Subsistence Representative: None.

Public Panel Comments:

- Better to stay conservative and keep the streams closed to let steelhead rest through the winter.
- May allow a little more opportunity.
- Ice will cover these streams at some point in October or November and in a normal year it would not add significant amount of fishing time.
- Effort data from department creel survey from 1970s and 1980s is too far back to be pertinent. Effort has increased since then.
- Catch has dropped substantially in all streams.
- Steelhead are in decline.
- Now is not the time to liberalize this fishery.
- Most of the public supported this regulation change at the 2010 board meeting.
- Solitude experience in the past and now it is more crowded.
- Some locals have chosen to not fish steelhead to leave them alone.
- Guided effort may increase.
- If you hook enough steelhead, you will kill some fish.
- If there is a conservation concern there needs to be more serious restrictions.
- Most effort occurs in September.
- No biological concern with these stocks.
- Steelhead are likely to be caught multiple times.

Public Panel Recommendation: No consensus.

PROPOSAL 61 – 5 AAC 56.122. Special provisions and localized additions and exceptions to the seasons, bag, possession, and size limits, and methods and means for the Kenai Peninsula Area. Reduce king salmon bag and possession limit to one fish on the Ninilchik River.

Comment Summary:

Department:

- Suggested considering language to stop fishing after harvesting a king salmon, similar to language for other Lower Kenai Peninsula streams.

Department of Law: None.

Federal Subsistence Representative: None.

Public Panel Comments:

- Standardizes and simplifies regulations between streams.
- Not much opportunity for second fish during years of small runs.
- Put the weir in earlier to collect more broodstock and this proposal would not be necessary.
- Catch and release on wild fish is a source of mortality.
- One fish bag limit is more prudent.
- Lower Kenai Peninsula streams are all tied together and regulations should be the same.
- Keeping two king salmon bag limit at Ninilchik misleads some anglers to think there are more fish there, which could increase the effort.
- Fishing has been poor recently.
- Some anglers still want to harvest a second fish.
- Current regulations could increase the harvest of wild fish.
- Has been open to fishing after harvesting king salmon even when there was a one fish bag limit since it was an enhanced run.
- There is a lot of “lining” that occurs in this fishery, which snags king salmon.
- To make it consistent with other streams, need to consider language to stop fishing after harvesting a king salmon.
- Intent of the proposal was to bring it in line with the regulations in the other streams.
- If the Ninilchik River is not closed to sport fishing after harvesting a bag limit, then effort could shift to the Ninilchik River.
- Without “stop fishing” language it would defeat the purpose of the proposal.

Public Panel Recommendation: No consensus.

- See substitute language in RC 23.

PROPOSAL 62 – 5 AAC 56.122. Special provisions and localized additions and exceptions to the seasons, bag, possession, and size limits, and methods and means for the Kenai Peninsula Area. Change the Clearwater Creek drainage closed-waters boundary description for sport fishing.

Comment Summary:

Department: None.

Department of Law: None.

Federal Subsistence Representative: None.

Public Panel Comments:

- Makes it more clear.

Public Panel Recommendation: Consensus to support.

PROPOSAL 64 – 5 AAC 58.0XX. New Section. Allow use of sport-caught pink salmon for bait in the salt waters of Cook Inlet.

Comment Summary: Discussed with proposal 63.

Department:

- The Prince William Sound (PWS) regulation does not specify fresh or salt water fisheries.

Alaska Wildlife Trooper:

- Using sport-caught salmon as bait only applies to where it is being used, not where the fish was caught.
- Once salmon is processed for human consumption it can be used for dog food but can't be used as bait.

Federal Subsistence Representative: None.

Public Panel Comments:

- Would align regulations with PWS.
- Cook Inlet is not the same level of enhancement as PWS and Southeast Alaska (SEAK) and so the regulations don't need to be aligned.
- Most of the harvest is pink salmon, so this proposal wouldn't affect chum salmon much.
- Would create some complexity between Lower and Upper Cook Inlet management of chum salmon.
- Opposed to using chum salmon.
- There are no conservation concerns so anglers could use some pink salmon that are harvested as bait.
- Since pink and chum salmon runs in Cook Inlet are mostly wild, this could set precedent to use any wild salmon that does not have a conservation concern as bait.
- Concern with identification of silver salmon.
- May reduce the sales of commercially purchased pink and chum salmon to be used as bait.
- Release mortality may be high on pink salmon and using them as bait would prevent them from being wasted.
- Susitna River has a large chum salmon run and these fish will be harvested in Cook Inlet.
- There won't be targeted effort to harvest fish for use as bait.
- Harvest would count towards current bag limit.
- Cook Inlet pink salmon runs aren't robust enough to provide much commercial harvest opportunity.
- Commercial salmon fishermen can harvest pink and chum salmon for use in commercial halibut fisheries.

Public Panel Recommendation: No consensus.

- See substitute language in RC 24.

PROPOSAL 63– 5 AAC 58.0XX. New Section. Allow use of sport-caught pink salmon and chum salmon for bait in the salt waters of Cook Inlet.

Comment Summary: **Discussed with proposal 64. See comments for proposal 64.**

Department:

Department of Law:

Federal Subsistence Representative:

Public Panel Comments:

Public Panel Recommendation: No consensus.

PROPOSAL 65 – 5 AAC 58.0XX. New Section. Allow use of sport-caught spiny dogfish shark for bait in the salt waters of Cook Inlet.

Comment Summary:

Department: None.

Department of Law: None.

Federal Subsistence Representative: None.

Public Panel Comments:

- Large abundance of dogfish in Cook Inlet.
- Should use them instead of releasing them when they are caught.
- Dogfish are not targeted. They are caught incidentally when fishing for other bottomfish.
- Using dogfish for bait may help reduce catching more dogfish for anglers targeting halibut.
- Most are not surviving the release methods that are currently being used.
- Catch will not increase.
- The board liberalized the bag limit and it is not being reached.

Public Panel Recommendation: Consensus to support.

PROPOSAL 66 – 5 AAC 58.030. Methods, means, and general provisions – Finfish. Allow use of archery gear for sport fishing in Cook Inlet salt waters.

Comment Summary:

Department: None.

Department of Law: None.

Federal Subsistence Representative: None.

Public Panel Comments:

- Requires certain conditions to be successful. Anglers are shooting down in the water at a high angle.
- Gear is already specified in regulation and used for pike.
- Salmon archery fishing already occurs in other states.
- No incidents of anglers being injured in bow fishing.
- Lots of snagging injuries.
- There are states that allow the use of archery equipment but not snagging.
- Few steelhead observed in Cook Inlet salt waters.
- Catch and release mortality on steelhead would be much greater.
- No conservation concern.
- Provide recreational opportunity that will not attract a large number of anglers.
- More dangerous fisheries exist.
- Current regulations allow the use of spearfishing gear in Cook Inlet.
- Would be within current bag limit.
- No room for another method of take. Already fully allocated.
- Consider looser gear restrictions to allow homemade equipment (i.e., reels).

Public Panel Recommendation: No consensus.

PROPOSAL 67 – 5 AAC 58.022. Waters; seasons; bag, possession, and size limits; and special provisions for Cook Inlet-Resurrection Bay Saltwater Area and 5 AAC 58.055. Upper Cook Inlet Salt Water Early-run King Salmon Management Plan. Relocate the Bluff Point marker north to the southern Anchor River marker for management of Upper Cook Inlet saltwater early-run king salmon sport fishery.

Department: None.

Department of Law: None.

Federal Subsistence Representative: None.

Public Panel Comments:

- Verbiage in proposal was confusing relative to the intent of proposal and some would have voted differently with the correct language.
- Anchor Point light is a fixed marker that is more easily seen and is on every marine chart.
- GPS points are easily identified and most boats use them.
- Temporary markers are used in other locations in this fishery and better markers should be used in those locations too.
- Marker has been moving every year and it is hard to see.
- Will add ¼ mile of fishing area.
- Could increase king salmon harvest in this area.

Public Panel Recommendation: No consensus.

- See substitute language in RC 25.

PROPOSAL 68 – 5 AAC 58.022. Waters; seasons; bag, possession, and size limits; and special provisions for Cook Inlet-Resurrection Bay Saltwater Area and 5 AAC 58.055. Upper Cook Inlet Salt Water Early-run King Salmon Management Plan. Relocate the Bluff Point marker north to the southern Anchor River marker for management of Cook Inlet king salmon sport fishery.

Department: None.

Department of Law: None.

Federal Subsistence Representative: None.

Public Panel Comments:

- Will increase king salmon harvest.
- Opens up too much area when spawning king salmon are present.
- Intent was to increase the bag limit in this area so boats travelling from Deep Creek would not have to go as far to reach an area with the increased bag limit.

Public Panel Recommendation: Consensus to oppose.

PROPOSAL 69 – 5 AAC 58.022. Waters; seasons; bag, possession, and size limits; and special provisions for Cook Inlet-Resurrection Bay Saltwater Area and 5 AAC 58.055. Upper Cook Inlet Salt Water Early-run King Salmon Management Plan. Modify the Upper Cook Inlet salt water early-run king salmon season to end on June 24 instead of June 30.

Department: None.

Department of Law: None.

Federal Subsistence Representative: None.

Public Panel Comments:

- There are conservation concerns with these stocks.
- Not appropriate to liberalize due to low run sizes.
- Has been closed by emergency order (EO) the last two years.

Public Panel Recommendation: Consensus to oppose.

PROPOSAL 70 – 5 AAC 58.022. Waters; seasons; bag, possession, and size limits; and special provisions for Cook Inlet-Resurrection Bay Saltwater Area and 5 AAC 58.060. Lower Cook Inlet Winter Salt Water King Salmon Sport Fishery Management Plan.

Modify the date king salmon apply to the annual limit in the Lower Cook Inlet winter saltwater king salmon fishery from April 1 to May 1.

Department: None.

Department of Law: None.

Federal Subsistence Representative: None.

Public Panel Comments:

- Potential for increased king salmon harvest.
- Do not liberalize king salmon fisheries when low runs occur.
- Need more information on the harvest composition before making a change to this fishery.
- Need more conservation.
- April 15 would be a good compromise date because the composition of the harvest might have a higher proportion of feeder king salmon.
- Effort and king salmon harvest dramatically increases in April.
- Participation increases during mid-March which includes the winter king salmon tournament.
- If this proposal is adopted, it liberalizes fisheries with the same annual limit.
- Spawners are caught in April and April 1 is a good date to protect spawning king salmon.
- April 1 is an easier date to remember than April 15.

Public Panel Recommendation: Consensus to oppose.

PROPOSAL 71 – 5 AAC 58.022. Waters; seasons; bag, possession, and size limits; and special provisions for Cook Inlet-Resurrection Bay Saltwater Area and 5 AAC 58.060. Lower Cook Inlet Winter Salt Water King Salmon Sport Fishery Management Plan.

Decrease the Lower Cook Inlet winter saltwater king salmon bag and possession limit to one fish, and establish an annual limit of two king salmon.

Department: None.

Department of Law: None.

Federal Subsistence Representative: None.

Public Panel Comments:

- Current harvest is within the guideline harvest level (GHL).
- Fishery is important to Seldovia residents.
- Would impact Seldovia residents by loss of food.
- Harvest is comprised of non-local stocks.
- Would affect Halibut Cove residents who participate in this fishery to get out in the winter.
- Discussion with Canadian biologists suggested no concerns with stocks being harvested in Kachemak Bay.

Public Panel Recommendation: Consensus to oppose.

PROPOSAL 72 – 5 AAC 58.022. Waters; seasons; bag, possession, and size limits; and special provisions for Cook Inlet-Resurrection Bay Saltwater Area. Eliminate the third Saturday in August (late-run coho) from the youth-only fishery in the Nick Dudiak Fishing Lagoon.

Department: None.

Department of Law: None.

Federal Subsistence Representative: None.

Public Panel Comments:

- No coho salmon returning anymore so no use in having the fishery.
- Should continue to stock Bear Creek coho salmon and the fishery should be maintained.
- No spawning and minimal straying with Bear Creek coho salmon.
- If fish are brought back then the youth fishery should be returned.
- No need to mislead youth anglers about opportunity.
- Lost opportunity without late run stocking.
- Waste of time to have this fishery with so few fish present.

Public Panel Recommendation: No consensus.

PROPOSAL 73 – 5 AAC 77.545. Kachemak Bay Personal Use Dip Net Fishery Management Plan. Require personal use-caught salmon in the China Poot dip net fishery to be marked.

Department: None.

Department of Law: None.

Federal Subsistence Representative: None.

Public Panel Comments: None.

Public Panel Recommendation: Consensus to support.

PROPOSAL 74 – 5 AAC 58.022. Waters; seasons; bag, possession, and size limits; and special provisions for Cook Inlet-Resurrection Bay Saltwater Area. Decrease lingcod bag and possession limit in Cook Inlet from two to one.

Department:

- Although there is no assessment of abundance of lingcod in Cook Inlet there has been work done in North Gulf Coast waters.
- High resolution mapping has been done in several index sites to estimate the amount of rocky habitat.
- Lingcod densities have been estimated in these index areas using remotely operated video (ROV) equipment.
- Mapping work done in Cook Inlet waters suggests that there is a significant amount of lingcod habitat in Cook Inlet.
- Using a conservative estimate of density from North Gulf Coast waters and the estimate of rocky habitat in Cook Inlet, the current harvest represents a low exploitation rate ~3% to 4%.
- Sustainable lingcod target exploitation rates can be up to 15%.
- Based on this estimate of exploitation, the harvest increase in recent years likely went from 1% to 3%.

Department of Law: None.

Federal Subsistence Representative: None.

Public Panel Comments:

- Lingcod harvest has increased in this area.
- If charter fleet wants to self-restrict, they may have good reason.
- Ocean conditions seem to be favorable for lingcod.
- Indicators are good and management is working and the indicators can continue to be used in the future.
- Consider being more conservative; what if we are wrong?
- Maybe we should be proactive so that we don't make a mistake that could harm lingcod populations as we have seen with other fisheries (tanner crab).
- Lingcod used to be available in nearshore waters. Now you have to travel farther offshore to find them, which makes it harder on fishermen with smaller boats (private fishermen).
- There may be some depletion from particular areas but anglers are finding fish when moving to new places.
- Concern that age composition shows proportions of older fish being harvested is going up so we may be wiping out the older fish.
- Concerned about increased fishing pressure with changes in halibut charter regulations.

Public Panel Recommendation: No consensus.

PROPOSAL 75 – 5 AAC 58.022. Waters; seasons; bag, possession, and size limits; and special provisions for Cook Inlet - Resurrection Bay Saltwater Area. Modify the lingcod sport fishing season to begin on June 1 instead of July 1.

Department:

- Commercial fishing season is the same as the sport fishing season, with a guideline harvest level (GHL) of 52,500 lb.

Department of Law: None.

Federal Subsistence Representative: None.

Public Panel Comments:

- Don't want to chance harvesting lingcod in spawning season.

Public Panel Recommendation: Consensus to oppose.