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Re-Opposition to proposals 292, 293, 294, 297

Alaska Board of Fisheries

Dear Chair and members of the board,

My name is John Gilcrist and I am a Northern District setnetter. My wife Betty and I setnet fish at Point Possession. Point Possession is on the northern tip of the Kenai Peninsula on the east side of Cook Inlet in the eastern subdistrict of the Northern District. I have only fished there 37 years. My wife has been fishing there her entire life.

My wife and I were born in the territory of Alaska. I was raised in Fairbanks and Anderson Alaska. I sport fished in the nearby streams primarily Clear Creek and Fish Creek. I also sport fished at another Clear Creek and Fish Creek out of Talkeetna. Also Larsen, Paxson, Fielding and Summit lakes. When I was a boy I built my own smoke house. As a young adult I dip netted in the Copper River. I value all of our fisheries.

My wife was born and raised in Anchorage and fished the summers at Point Possession.

Her mother was born at Point Possession in the early twenties. Her family has a history involving commercial fishing and barter longer than anyone knows.

Her family endured the Koniag raids from Kodiak. They survived the onslaught of the Russian fur traders. A handful survived the 1918 flu epidemic. The restrictions placed on the Northern District Setnetters in the last 20 years has reduced the people's ability to make anything substantial from fishing thus reducing their numbers further. Anymore restrictions in the Northern District may well be the demise of the few Point Possession fisherman left. Of a people that has been involved in commercial fishing or barter since their arrival.

We have been asked to share the burden of conservation yet we have been the most restricted commercial fishery in Cook Inlet. We feel we have carried the burden for many years.

When we fish in late May and June the fish we catch helps pay for our supplies. By regulation we can only set one 35 fathom net per permit spaced at 1200 feet [nearly 1/4 mile] once per week for 12 hours. There are 168 hours in one week.

When we are restricted to a 6 hour opening there are certain times of the tide that due to strong tides, large minus tides and large breakers out of Turnagain Arm we may only get a small amount of time in the water. Sometimes as little as one hour. Bear in mind that the majority of the kings are running outside our nets [stationary gear] in the strong currents, even when we are in the water. A run of salmon also has the ability of going through in one tide.

Salmon are not only money in a commercial guys pocket. They provide for a very important food source. The user group rarely heard from are the people that choose to buy their salmon at the store or restaurants. They choose not to purchase all the equipment necessary to catch fish. Some are unwilling, some are unable.

In late July we are restricted to one net per permit for several periods to let coho into the Northern streams. Point Possession used to have fairly productive sockeye sites relative to the Northern District. We need to utilize all five species of salmon if we expect to remain viable.

My wife and I do not understand why we should be regulated by the Deshka River which is totally on the other side of Cook Inlet from us. The same for the Little Su. In our mind this is the same as regulating the Kenai River according to what enters the Big River.

We do not support anything that takes the Kenai set netters out of the water during their openings other than a biological emergency called by the department. When they are out of the water it has a cause and effect on Northern bound fish. The department has to utilize the drift fleet to harvest the surplus sockeye and they cannot let them on the beach so they have to put them in the Inlet where they impact Northern bound fish.

A note on sport fishermen. It is not the sport fisherman that destroys the spawning beds or stresses the fish as to where they change their behavior patterns. It is and has always been the masses. I have witnessed this my entire life with fish and wildlife.

We stand opposed to proposal 292. This proposal potentially closes an entire fishery for one river system. We stand opposed to 293. We already have restrictions in late July. We stand opposed to 294. By the time the weir count counts an escapement goal the fish have already gone by us. One of the departments best tools is what is being caught in the commercial fishery. We stand opposed to 297. As stated before, closing and entire fishery because of one river does not seem prudent. Also July 7 is long past any King return at our sites. This could cause us to miss a small sockeye run that normally shows up around the 4th of July. Together these proposals could potentially cause our harvest to be pretty much nil.

Sincerely,

John and Betty Gilcrist

