

Dear Board of Fish Members,

My name is Greg Brush and I am a passionate Kenai King salmon conservationist that has participated in the Alaska Board of Fish process for nearly three decades.

I'd first like to thank you for this opportunity to speak to you in person today. Taking the time to travel to our small town is much appreciated by myself and others that care deeply about our fisheries.

With that said, I'd like to encourage you to keep sustainability of our resource as priority one during this winter's Board of Fish hearings, avoiding the all-too-common "fish politics" and the influence of some organizations that push their own agendas. I believe that if we collectively put the fish first and remain conservative in our decision making, all users can benefit and more importantly, our children can enjoy our resources for generations.

In my opening line, I mentioned that I considered myself a conservationist. As you know, the root word of that is CONSERVE. Some people involved in this fishery unnecessarily feel threatened by my stance on conservation, particularly my support of hook and release fishing, thinking it translates to lost opportunity and even closures. Nothing could be farther from the truth.

Hook and release, and any true conservation measure, actually promotes and increases opportunity. Never forget; the word CONSERVE means the wise use, while PRESERVE means no use. My family and I enjoy eating wild salmon just as much as your family, and I am advocate for harvest fisheries...IF AND WHEN there is a clear harvestable abundance. But if there isn't, then being conservative with our mindset and actions is the only reasonable approach.

The last Board cycle, three years ago, I penned seven Proposals, all of which addressed Kenai king salmon conservation. This year, I have prioritized and condensed my suggestions, submitting just four.

Please know that we are still in a period of low abundance on the Kenai, despite what others might lead you to believe. While the last two years we have seen a slight up-tick in Kenai king returns, we are not out of the woods yet. Numbers are nowhere close to what they used to be and sadly the overall size of these special fish is far below what made the Kenai world famous. For these reasons, I am asking the Board to be pro-active this cycle, rather than re-active.

My first proposal, Number 147, addresses the fact that our Early Run Kenai king salmon fishery in May-June has been closed to all angling for many years, allowing zero opportunity for anglers. Last year, the early run sport fishery was suddenly opened and quickly liberalized to a full-harvest fishery, going from a long "red light" to a full-throttle "green light" in less than two weeks. I believe the Board should adopt a more logical "step up" plan where the fishery automatically opens every spring to an ultra-conservative single hook, no bait, hook and release fishery and then progresses to a "catch and keep" fishery ONLY when returns guarantee a harvestable surplus. Once the escapement goal is met and exceeded, then and only then can fish be kept. If the Board were to adopt this logical "Step Up" proposal, anglers would have predictability and more importantly, the Department would have a more conservative plan that greatly minimizes mortality, ensuring sustainability for the future.

My second proposal, Number 161, is very similar, addressing inconsistencies between early run and late run Kenai King salmon management. Like my first proposal, this one asks the Board to consider adopting a more logical "Step Up" management philosophy for the late run, whereas the in-river sport fishery

begins July 1 with a conservative single hook, no bait, "hook and release" fishery until the run shows adequate numbers that ensure we will meet and exceed our escapement goal, at which time liberalizations can occur. These changes would provide for a more consistent, predictable and sustainable fishery for the future.

My third proposal, Number 158, also addresses Kenai king salmon conservation. It simply asks the Board to consider making changes to an annual bag limit of early and late run Kenai kings that has not changed in decades, despite our present period of low abundance. Presently, when harvest is allowed, Kenai king anglers can take two kings of any size annually, as if these special salmon were just as plentiful and just as large as they once were.

My suggestion is a more reasonable "over/under" two fish limit that would still provide anglers the opportunity to take two fish annually; however, one would have to be a smaller fish while the other could be an "any fish" size. In this way, the harvest of two large four or five ocean fish per person would be prohibited. These are the fish that the department has shown to be in decline and the very salmon that we badly need on our spawning beds to pass on their unique genes. By adopting this proposal and implementing this more conservative "over/under" bag limit year round, total fish harvested will drop, more small fish would be harvested, and less large fish would be harvested, in effect spreading harvest over all ages classes, addressing an alarming increase in small fish numbers and an even more alarming decrease in big fish numbers. Again, adoption of this proposal would provide more protection to these special fish without restricting opportunity.

I'd also like to show support for Proposal Number 150, by Mark Wackler. This proposal mirrors my Proposal 161, whereas we stop harvesting fish prior to having a good idea how the run will shape up. Clearly Mr. Wackler also wants "fish for the future", requesting changing the irresponsible management of opening the late run Kenia king sport fishery on July 1 to a full-harvest fishery to a more logical, conservative and sustainable practice of starting with single hook, no bait, and hook and release fishing.

So you see, there are others that can put their personal needs aside and put the fish first.

In sum, I'd respectfully ask the Board to put fish politics aside and avoid the "tit for tat" Sport vs. Commercial game that I've seen repeat itself at these meetings over the past thirty years. Please be proactive in your decisions and conservative in your actions, treating our beloved Kenai kings like the genetically-unique, limited-in-quantity fish that they are and making the necessary changes that says "they are special" and thereby provides sustainability for the future.

Thank You.

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