

This record copy addresses Agenda Change Request #8

As Board members may know there are both daily and cumulative sonar count management objectives (posted on the ADF&G website) for Copper River salmon from May 15 —July 29.

During the 2023 season the first daily objective was met on June 13 (after 29 days of counts below daily objectives). The first date the up-to-date cumulative objective was achieved occurred on June 25 (after 41 days below the cumulative objective levels at the start of the season).

A similar pattern of missed daily and cumulative sonar objects occurred during May of 2022.

If these Sonar Management Objectives mean anything — then to even a casual observer — there appears to be a serious conservation issue during all of May for at least the past two seasons— and maybe more years.

Potential over harvest of early-returning Upper Copper River Salmon stocks is an issue the board should consider before this conservation issue could become even worse. Currently the Copper River commercial gill net fishery and the Copper River Flats subsistence fishery appear to be the only targeted significant harvesters of these salmon before the are enumerated at the sonar counter. Continued over harvest of early returning Upper Copper River salmon stocks could likely have prolonged negative consequences for the early returning salmon resource and for all the users who depend upon this resource.

Upper Copper River salmon stocks provide one of the earliest significant harvestable salmon resources in Alaska. These fish are prized by all user groups including subsistence, commercial, personal use, sport, and guided sport users. Their earlier arrival time, compared to other Alaska salmon stocks (including middle and lower Copper River stocks), stacks heavier harvest efforts on Upper Copper River stocks.

Harvest analysis by ADF&G has shown that Upper Copper River salmon stocks (Gulkanna River and upstream) are often most heavily impacted during the first two or three commercial fishing periods.

Any Agenda Change Request that affects a minimum of 4 users groups will undoubtedly have allocative implications, which can be worked through during the board process.