

Jim Stava , phone number: 001 435 640-4536, has sent you the following inquiry from our website:

I am writing to comment on Proposal 239 regarding Bristol Bay fisheries, specifically the proposal to eliminate using bait to fish for Kings on the Nushigak River. I am a private party camper and sports fisherman from Utah who has been coming to the Nushigak to fish the King Salmon run pretty much every summer since 1996. I have brought many friends and family to this wonderful adventure over the years even though it is logistically difficult and expensive (and always getting more so). I pay to store a boat and trailer in Dillingham and pay to have it repaired and serviced there. We always provision and buy fuel in Dillingham as well as patronize lodging and restaurants before and after our trip up river. In addition to buying licenses and paying camping fees, I also pay to store the bulk of my gear in Portage Creek as well as buying fuel and supplies there during the trip. Frequently I charter air service in and out of Portage. Everyone in my group has always primarily fished with single barbless hooks using bait (cured salmon eggs). Very occasionally we use flies or lures modified with single barbless hooks. In the years since I have been doing this trip my subjective view is that the quality of the fishery has declined. At one time I could boast of nearly 100 fish days but that has been years in the past. The fish now are generally smaller, fewer in number, and seem to arrive later than when I first started coming. We have always adhered to published and modified bag limits and have complied with other restrictions and instructions to cease fishing for Kings during the season when issued by Fish and Game. I have almost pulled up stakes a couple of times in the past five years because of the lack of numbers of fish as well as uncertainty around the length of the season. It is not tenable to have friends and relatives plan time and pay for such an expensive trip and subsequently have the river closed to the only viable sport fish on the lower Nushigak before or during their visit. I applaud efforts to manage and restore the fishery. In my view, however, the proposal to eliminate bait fishing on the Nushigak will have a miniscule, if any effect on the quality and viability of the fishery. The goal is to get fish up the river to spawn. If the numbers entering the river are managed properly, the goal for the sport fishermen should be to take no more than bag limits, and not injure the fish caught and released. I agree that eliminating barbed treble hooks will be a positive in that regard. With regard to restricting bait, however, I see no benefit to the fish, only a detriment to the fisherman. Very close to 100% of the fish I catch on baited single barbless hooks are hooked in the lips of the mouth. Their gills are uninjured. Foul-hooking fish is rare. Keeping it on the line for any appreciable time is more rare. I sometimes agonize over the decline of the fishery as I contemplate all of the factors that may be contributing to the pressures faced by Alaska King Salmon. I want to do my part to maintain this wonderful resource. It is my opinion, however, that eliminating the use of bait for sport fishermen on the lower Nushigak is not part of a useful strategy to help the fish, but certainly could be viewed as one to hurt the fisherman.