

ISSUE PAPER ON SUBSISTENCE KING SALMON DRIFT  
GILLNETTING YUKON AREA SUBDISTRICT 4-A  
(PROPOSAL #463)

by  
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Technical Paper Number 17

Alaska Department of Fish and Game  
Division of Subsistence  
Galena, Alaska

Issue Paper on  
Subsistence King Salmon Drift Gillnetting  
Yukon Area Subdistrict 4-A  
(Proposal #463)

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INTRODUCTION

Proposal #463, submitted by the Galena Fish and Game Advisory Committee (communities of Kaltag, Nulato, Galena, and Koyukuk), requests that the Board of Fisheries legalize the taking of subsistence king salmon by drift gill net in subdistrict 4-A the Yukon River fishery. The proposed regulation would allow up to a 100-ft. drift gill net to be used during a 10 fishing-day period prior to the opening of the commercial fishing season. Commercial buying usually begins about July 1. This issue paper addresses responses to an informal user survey conducted by the Subsistence Section, Alaska Department of Fish and Game, regarding traditional use and user preferences and attitudes toward the proposal. A table showing harvest trends from 1961 to 1979 is included as Appendix A.

METHODOLOGY

Subsistence fishermen in the villages of Ruby, Galena, Koyukuk, Nulato, and Kaltag were informally surveyed between October 1 and November 15, 1980.

Table I. Households surveyed by village:

Village	Total Households in Village	# Households Surveyed	% of Households Surveyed
Kaltag	30	30	100
Nulato	39	34	87
Koyukuk	16	16	100
Galena	38	38	100
Ruby	24	20	83

The survey form (see Appendix B) was prepared to solicit comments on the proposal and to gather data on traditional use, user preferences, and attitudes toward the proposal. Personal interviews were conducted by the researcher for each household that fished subsistence in 1980. The interview was done in conjunction with the annual subsistence fish



harvest survey conducted by the Subsistence Section. The villages of Ruby, Galena, Koyukuk, Nulato, and Kaltag were visited during the months of October and November while families were waiting for the river to freeze over so trapping could begin. The researcher gained cooperation from all persons interviewed.

## RESULTS

Historic use of drift nets in certain Yukon River villages is established in the literature (Frenchen 1951). The households surveyed indicated that drift netting was common about 30-40 years ago and was accomplished by using two canoes. This was a rather dangerous undertaking as the net could be caught on a snag and possibly overturn the manpowered craft.

Drift netting using "kicker"-powered boats came into use 5 or 6 years ago. The two villages most concerned about prohibitions on drift netting are Kaltag and Nulato, where there has been traditional drift net use. Koyukuk and Galena residents, additionally, now see drift netting as a viable solution for the problems of new fishermen facing the increased competition for set net sites. Ruby residents report that they are not experiencing this competition as yet and appear to be satisfied with their fishing methods and number of king salmon set net sites. They do not, however, object to other fishermen in Y4-A drift netting for kings, and the Ruby Advisory Committee has gone on record in support of proposal #463.

The value of the king salmon as an eating fish, in the minds of local residents, has no match. A valued staple of every household, king salmon heads and backbones are dried even for dog food, although people never use the meat for dog food. Although most of the fish is processed by smoking, bellies are salted, and half-dried filets (called giyoga) are baked and eaten as a staple all summer. Many families are also putting up fish in jars. With all the villages (except Koyukuk) now hooked up to electricity, more king salmon is put away frozen.

Several people in the villages commented on the increased runs and attributed them to the 200-mile limit. Kaltag is now reportedly catching a large trout (perhaps Dolly Varden) that wasn't available before.

If allowed to drift net, villagers argue, they would catch only as much as they could handle and process. King salmon spoils quickly if the weather is warm because of the high oil content and must be processed as soon as possible. A commercial market does not exist that early in the season.

## DISCUSSION

Residents of the villages of Kaltag, Nulato, Koyukuk, and Galena expressed similar concerns about the current regulation system which prohibits subsistence drift gillnetting in Y4-A:

1. Kaltag and Nulato have few king salmon set net and fishwheel sites. These sites have been fished by the same family for generations and do not allow entry of new subsistence fishermen into the fishery. These sites, however, have the sandbars which are necessary starting points for drifting.

2. Some people prefer to subsistence fish in June as they are busy later fishing the summer chum (commercially or for subsistence). The Yukon River water levels are high at that time and set nets fill up with drift; subsistence king salmon harvest, as a result, is minimal.

3. Many people stated that drift netting was the only way to catch the large strong king with the rich meat. Most set nets catch the weak fish near the shore, averaging under 20 lbs., while the fishwheel often catches the small jack king.

4. Fishing effort has decreased with the 2-day-on, 1-day-off, 2-day-on schedule. Many women and older people felt it was too strenuous to follow that schedule so put less effort into fishing, averaging 2-day weeks. Another factor, the increased cost of gas used to set nets, made people feel as though the trips were wasteful when they would return home with an empty boat.

5. Commercial sale of king salmon, residents argue, should be prohibited unless subsistence users have first priority. Only one fisherman during the commercial season sells his kings and only when his family cannot keep up with the cutting and drying.

With the exception of two families in Ruby, no one commercially sells king salmon strips. They are used as a barter item between families in the same village and often sent to relatives living in other villages or in Anchorage or Fairbanks.

The following comments summarize local attitudes toward the proposal:

"Drift netting would allow the working person to go out and get what he needs without having to worry about checking, setting, and pulling a set net."

"We would not need to drift net if we could keep our nets in five days straight."

"I never caught a king over 20 lbs. with a set net."

"Drift netting is OK so long as people don't sell kings."

"King salmon is only used for eating fish."

"Drift netting is good for people with temporary fishing sites."

"I didn't fish much this year but would put more effort if I could drift net."

"It's the only way to get good kings."

"Only for subsistence fishing though. Don't let commercial fishing take over."

Mouth to	180	116	921	52	49	127	755	728	1,093	882	462	165	283	108	122	302	91	
Shelton	185	53	261	177	263	263	291	852	589	1,116	667	461	569	130	363	213	5	
Atakanuk	137	21	67	145	160	160	541	810	627	627	300	1,071	208	55	398	62	1,362	
Emmonak-Kwiguk	179	181	293	53	281	645	950	147	23	42	37	1,006	5	0	0	64	533	
Apraka Pass & vicinity	111	35	195	53	162	162	162	551	394	328	342	1,008	394	204	173	773	2,879	
Kotik-Hamilton	772	406	1,610	328	783	1,242	2,704	3,179	2,595	2,595	1,788	2,811	1,459	497	1,355	750	5,246	
Subtotal	4,938	1,732	6,494	2,093	2,780	1,506	4,178	1,955	2,225	2,168	4,720	4,893	2,923	1,375	2,866	1,668	3,964	
Anuk River to Owl Slough	1,110	619	2,427	985	510	217	1,345	557	348	2,036	932	912	460	394	397	172	1,025	
Mountain Village	1,910	391	1,254	521	626	499	1,993	1,888	737	1,915	1,517	1,270	878	438	1,273	576	1,314	
Pitkas Point - St. Marys	753	219	801	237	502	440	1,534	784	367	1,403	1,568	1,508	517	107	1,502	556	1,027	
Pilot Station	1,265	503	2,012	290	942	350	306	285	598	988	713	1,163	1,068	436	694	364	806	
Marshall	4,938	1,732	6,494	2,093	2,780	1,506	4,178	1,955	2,225	2,168	4,720	4,893	2,923	1,375	2,866	1,668	3,964	
Subtotal	1,563	641	1,392	1,185	1,393	800	2,019	2,170	707	993	975	1,387	1,243	2,088	1,338	639	1,498	
Owl Slough to Bonasila R.	2,648	1,111	3,123	2,443	2,351	2,645	2,876	1,418	1,677	1,678	3,334	3,708	2,243	2,782	1,462	1,920	1,476	
Russian Mission	4,211	1,752	4,515	3,428	3,744	3,445	4,895	3,568	2,984	2,671	3,334	3,099	3,466	4,890	2,820	2,404	1,787	
Holy Cross	2,762	1,255	3,722	3,884	3,057	1,881	2,322	2,326	3,500	2,736	4,641	4,530	6,444	3,750	4,057	4,605	4,953	
Subtotal	2,379	332	1,414	329	524	421	151	627	683	361	428	965	789	80	1,338	858	1,851	
Illinois Cr. to U.S. Can. Border	605	1,438	1,231	990	1,041	669	368	922	321	150	1,190	2,614	452	517	581	1,194	987	
Rampart	650	831	1,073	325	910	620	534	795	350	851	750	1,002	590	362	643	1,252	1,820	
Stevens Village	185	442	491	710	480	31	210	495	458	773	777	358	34	188	188	299	394	
Beaver	2,958	1,822	2,831	2,098	2,747	1,074	692	632	75	1,019	706	520	1,030	215	1,158	1,061	2,642	
Fort Yukon	496	393	250	1,200	1,200	17	100	111	111	66	666	345	406	15	528	262	1,175	
Circle	875	400	500	17	100	100	100	111	111	66	666	345	406	15	528	262	1,175	
Engle	8,148	5,658	7,790	5,669	5,802	3,015	1,955	3,463	1,887	3,154	4,628	5,379	6,146	1,377	5,069	6,129	11,997	
Subtotal	2,379	332	1,414	329	524	421	151	627	683	361	428	965	789	80	1,338	858	1,851	
Tanana River	347	92	325	468	276	146	12	76	138	7	99	58	176	213	326	752	298	
Minto-Manley Hot Springs	310	115	213	194	157	272	252	462	465	357	2,357	887	1,431	533	864	742	807	
Henana	657	207	538	662	433	418	252	474	541	627	2,462	1,176	767	778	1,221	1,561	1,231	
Fairbanks	2,231	2,000	1,500	3,476	351	50	50	100	100	40	100	99	25	233	61	105	269	
Subtotal	10,376	10,500	7,750	6,646	3,621	2,635	3,170	2,872	973	2,092	2,791	2,096	3,279	2,903	67	2,906	4,200	
Chandalar River	2,231	2,000	1,500	3,476	351	50	50	100	100	40	100	99	25	233	61	105	269	
Venetie	2,231	2,000	1,500	3,476	351	50	50	100	100	40	100	99	25	233	61	105	269	
Subtotal	2,231	2,000	1,500	3,476	351	50	50	100	100	40	100	99	25	233	61	105	269	
Porcupine River	2,231	2,000	1,500	3,476	351	50	50	100	100	40	100	99	25	233	61	105	269	
Gayton Village	2,231	2,000	1,500	3,476	351	50	50	100	100	40	100	99	25	233	61	105	269	
Chalytsi & Kevinjik R. Fish Camp	2,231	2,000	1,500	3,476	351	50	50	100	100	40	100	99	25	233	61	105	269	
Old Crow, Y.T.	2,231	2,000	1,500	3,476	351	50	50	100	100	40	100	99	25	233	61	105	269	
Subtotal	2,231	2,000	1,500	3,476	351	50	50	100	100	40	100	99	25	233	61	105	269	
Yukon Territory Villages	2,231	2,000	1,500	3,476	351	50	50	100	100	40	100	99	25	233	61	105	269	
Dawson	2,231	2,000	1,500	3,476	351	50	50	100	100	40	100	99	25	233	61	105	269	
Stewart River	2,231	2,000	1,500	3,476	351	50	50	100	100	40	100	99	25	233	61	105	269	
Mayo-Stewart Crossing	2,231	2,000	1,500	3,476	351	50	50	100	100	40	100	99	25	233	61	105	269	
Brashear Falls	2,231	2,000	1,500	3,476	351	50	50	100	100	40	100	99	25	233	61	105	269	
Forbes-Burne R.	2,231	2,000	1,500	3,476	351	50	50	100	100	40	100	99	25	233	61	105	269	
Forbes-Burne R.	2,231	2,000	1,500	3,476	351	50	50	100	100	40	100	99	25	233	61	105	269	
Pelly	2,231	2,000	1,500	3,476	351	50	50	100	100	40	100	99	25	233	61	105	269	
Pelly	2,231	2,000	1,500	3,476	351	50	50	100	100	40	100	99	25	233	61	105	269	
Poro River	2,231	2,000	1,500	3,476	351	50	50	100	100	40	100	99	25	233	61	105	269	
Poro River	2,231	2,000	1,500	3,476	351	50	50	100	100	40	100	99	25	233	61	105	269	
Minto	2,231	2,000	1,500	3,476	351	50	50	100	100	40	100	99	25	233	61	105	269	
Tachum Creek	2,231	2,000	1,500	3,476	351	50	50	100	100	40	100	99	25	233	61	105	269	
Carmacks	2,231	2,000	1,500	3,476	351	50	50	100	100	40	100	99	25	233	61	105	269	
Late Loberge-Whitehorse	2,231	2,000	1,500	3,476	351	50	50	100	100	40	100	99	25	233	61	105	269	
Takhini	2,231	2,000	1,500	3,476	351	50	50	100	100	40	100	99	25	233	61	105	269	
McClintock R.	2,231	2,000	1,500	3,476	351	50	50	100	100	40	100	99	25	233	61	105	269	
Carrcross	2,231	2,000	1,500	3,476	351	50	50	100	100	40	100	99	25	233	61	105	269	
Reslin-Johnson's Crossing	2,231	2,000	1,500	3,476	351	50	50	100	100	40	100	99	25	233	61	105	269	
Subtotal	10,376	10,500	7,750	6,646	3,621	2,635	3,170	2,872	973	2,092	2,791	2,096	3,279	2,903	67	2,906	4,200	
Total	31,664	21,610	32,970	22,877	19,723	14,272	19,661	15,006	15,000	15,974	28,384	21,905	26,459	23,137	15,866	19,329	20,374	35,205

1/ Includes Black River catches. 2/ Includes Shageluk-Iloikachuk fish camp catches. 3/ Includes New Minto fish camp catches. 4/ Includes Minto catches. 5/ Data by village obtained from annual reports. Subtotals includes revised catch data and summation of village catches may not equal subtotals. 6/ Catch by village not available.

APPENDIX B.

YUKON KING SALMON DRIFTNET SURVEY/1980

The Fish and Game Advisory Board of Kaltag, Nulato, Koyukuk and Galena has proposed to the Board of Fish that subsistence king salmon drift-net fishing be allowed in units 4A and ~~4B~~ for 10 fishing days prior to the opening of the commercial fishing season. These questions are to gather information that will help the Board make their decision.

How long have you fished for king salmon? \_\_\_\_\_ yrs.

What method do you use?

Drift net \_\_\_\_\_

Set net \_\_\_\_\_

Fish Wheel \_\_\_\_\_

What method have you traditionally used?

Drift net \_\_\_\_\_

Set net \_\_\_\_\_

Fish wheel \_\_\_\_\_

What type of fishing site do you have? \_\_\_\_\_

How much king salmon do you put away? \_\_\_\_\_

Dried \_\_\_\_\_

Frozen \_\_\_\_\_

Smoked \_\_\_\_\_

Salted \_\_\_\_\_

Do you fish for relatives not in this household? \_\_\_\_\_

If yes, how many? \_\_\_\_\_

Were you able to put up enough for your families needs this year? \_\_\_\_\_

Do you sell fresh king salmon? \_\_\_\_\_

Do you sell smoked king salmon strips? \_\_\_\_\_

What problems with king salmon subsistence fishing did you run into this year? Was fishing more difficult this year than previous years?

What changes would you like to recommend for king salmon subsistence fishing that would improve your method of fishing?

Comments: