

STATE OF ALASKA

Turner Lake

JAY S. HAMMOND, GOVERNOR

DEPARTMENT OF FISH AND GAME

OFFICE OF THE COMMISSIONER

SUPPORT BUILDING
JUNEAU, ALASKA 99801

May 5, 1980

Steve Haavig
United Southeast Alaska Gillnetters
P.O. Box 1186
Juneau, Alaska 99802

Dear Steve:

As early as 1961, the Department recommended that Turner Lake be designated a "high-quality recreational fishing area". A "high-quality recreational fishing area" is defined by our region as "a watershed of outstanding natural aesthetic beauty in a wilderness setting with fishing characteristics that add up to an exceptional angling experience."

The rationale and criteria used for developing this definition and designating specific waters in Southeast Alaska are as follows:

- 1) There is and will be a future need for quality recreational fishing waters in Southeast Alaska.
- 2) Logging is rapidly encroaching on quality fishing areas. (Out of the twenty systems designated as "high-quality areas" approximately one-half have since been logged to one degree or another).
- 3) Native wild fish populations should be maintained for future generations to enjoy.
- 4) Some watersheds should be kept in pristine conditions for future scientific study i.e., population dynamics, disease studies, etc.
- 5) The genetic integrity of fish in the wild state should be maintained in some watersheds.

Based on the above, our policy in the management of fish resources in these quality fishing waters is the preservation and maintenance of the natural ecosystems processes.

In 1972, the Department of Fish and Game, under Joseph R. Blum, Chief, Habitat Section, recommended to Vincent N. Olson, Forest Supervisor, North Tongass National Forest, that Turner Lake be studied for classification as a dispersed recreational area in the Tongass Multiple Use Plan under Federal Regulation U-3(a), which read in part "(a) Areas which should be managed principally for recreation use substantially in their natural condition..."

Again in 1972, Bob Armstrong gave a verbal presentation for the Department to the Seaton Congressional Committee in Juneau concerning the impacts of logging on fisheries resources and identified the need that "a select number of our outstanding fishing areas should be left in their natural state".

In January of 1975, Governor Hammond gave a presentation to the American Fisheries Society in Juneau that addressed the steps we should take to protect and utilize the full potential of Alaska's fishery resources. In step 5, pages 11 and 12 of the Governor's presentation he made it abundantly clear that we should "begin now to identify, classify and protect our outstanding recreational fishing waters throughout Alaska". On page 13 he points out that the Department has selected several outstanding fishing waters in Southeast Alaska that should be classified as dispersed recreation areas.

The point in citing the above examples is that there has been, is now, and will be a future need for a diversified management program that considers all types of recreational anglers and that designating a specific number of high-quality recreational fishing areas in Southeast Alaska is a part of our Alaska Department of Fish and Game management program and philosophy that answers that particular demand. Further, the need for these high-quality recreational fishing areas has also been recognized by the Governor's Office and federal agencies as evidenced by Turner Lake's inclusion as a high-quality recreational fishing area in the Tongass Land Use Management Plan.

On December 6, 1977, Governor Hammond wrote John A. Sandor, Regional Forester with copies to the Honorable Ted Stevens, Mike Gravel, Don Young, Robert L. Leggett and John F. Seiberling regarding "Potential Sites for Salmon Enhancement in Southeast Alaska" and attached a report, "Salmon Enhancement in Southeast Alaska" prepared by Daniel M. Bishop, consultant, Environaid, for the two Southeast Alaskan Regional Aquaculture Associations. This document considered six rehabilitation/enhancement technologies. Turner Lake was considered among the many sites reviewed and was excluded because, among other management concerns, it was not consistent with the philosophy and management strategy for high-quality recreational fishing areas.

In 1979, six possible fish ladder sites in Southeastern were reviewed for inclusion in the 1980 Bond Issue. Turner Lake was one of the systems being considered, but it was rejected to facilitate its continuation as a high-quality recreational fishing area. The following considerations were fundamental to that decision:

- 1) Cabin use at Turner Lake, according to the U.S.F.S., has increased from 964 visitor days in 1970 to 2,100 visitor days in 1978, indicating that Turner Lake is very popular.

- 2) Turner Lake has unique populations of trophy size cutthroat trout, as well as Dolly Varden and kokanee populations, as substantiated by Sport Fish Division fish population surveys. There is evidence to indicate that in Southeast Alaska, some non-anadromous systems (i.e. Turner Lake) produce trophy size cutthroat (Schmidt, A. 1978). In anadromous systems, cutthroat are not as available to the angler during the summer months, most migrate out of the systems in May and return in September (Armstrong, R. H. 1971). Also anadromous cutthroat are shorter lived and hence smaller than cutthroat in some non-anadromous populations.
- 3) A trip to Turner Lake is relatively inexpensive for Juneau residents, as well as visitors who want a unique high-quality fishing experience.
- 4) Chinook salmon are also taken by anglers in the saltwater area adjacent to Turner Lake. Enhancement projects in Turner Lake would be likely to cause increased commercial fishing effort which would probably have detrimental impacts on wild chinook stocks. As an example, in 1974 the gillnet fleet operated during the week of June 16 (Stat Week 25) and captured 2,608 chinook salmon of which 1,387 were mature adult spawners. In light of present commercial and sport fish stringent regulations in the area, this type of incidental catch would be intolerable.
- 5) The outlet area is an extremely popular sport fishery for pinks and any development in this area could detract from the experience.

The commercial fisheries aspects related to enhancing Turner Lake are not very favorable, either. Although adult coho, sockeye, pinks and/or chums produced artificially at Turner Lake would contribute to gillnet harvests in the Taku area, large numbers of returns could not be harvested, and they would eventually accumulate in and around the Turner Lake outlet. Harvest in this area could not be conducted, however, without significant interception of wild Taku River sockeye and pink salmon stocks. Development of a late run sockeye stock (i.e., August) would theoretically avoid this problem by providing temporal segregation from wild sockeye, but the technical feasibility of developing a late run sockeye stock is simply not predictable at this time. A late sockeye run could also overlap with wild pink, coho and chum returns. Increased commercial effort needed to achieve a full harvest of artificially produced sockeye at Turner Lake would also be likely to increase the incidental harvest of king salmon, as mentioned earlier.

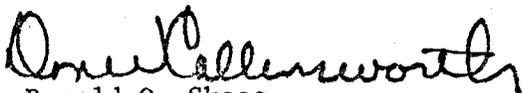
While partial solutions (i.e., mesh size, night vs. daylight fishing, timing manipulations of artificial stocks, carefully managed terminal effort, etc.) to the terminal area wild stock interception problems may offer some limited means of reducing negative impacts, the fact remains

May 5, 1980

that none of these appear to offer sufficient protection for wild Taku stocks. This, coupled with the need to protect high-quality recreational values in Turner Lake itself, leads to the very clear and understandable conclusion that enhancement at Turner Lake simply is not a viable option at this time.

Enhancement policies and statutory requirements have resulted in the Department guiding enhancement into areas where negative impacts on wild stocks can be minimized. Where options are limited, greater impacts on wild stocks may have to be accepted. Fortunately, in District 11, other options for enhancement do exist where impacts on wild stocks would be far less than at Turner Lake, and overall user benefits would, therefore, be greater. The Port Snettisham area with Crescent Lake, and possibly Indian Lake, Long Lake and even Canadian Lake is rich in enhancement potential and offers greater terminal harvest potential as well. The United Southeast Alaska Gillnetters should find exploration of enhancement opportunities in the Port Snettisham area to be a more productive use of their time. The Department staff will be available to assist and encourage those efforts to the extent that time and funds allow.

Sincerely,



for
Ronald O. Skoog
Commissioner
(907) 465-4100

cc: H. Heinkel
D. Cantillon
R. Armstrong