

**Testimony by Mike Rearden to Kuskokwim Salmon Subsistence Panel,
Bethel, Alaska . January 15, 2015**

I'm retired...so these comments are my own. I've got some broad concerns about how this Kuskokwim issue has been addressed and where it is going...Continuing to fight about fish every summer is not healthy for the people and does not contribute to successful management of the fish. Acceptable solutions must be found.

The primary mission of this panel is to consider how to insure equitable distribution of salmon on the Kuskokwim River. It is a complicated process intertwined with commercial fishing interests, management protocols, the so-called downriver/upriver conflict, difficulties in assessing run strength and composition and complexities of overlapping federal/state management laws.

I spent a career dealing with conservation management issues on the delta. Waterfowl , salmon, and moose conservation issues in particular took a huge amount of my and my staff's time. Managing fish or game is easy. Managing people, and getting the majority of users to agree on a course of action is very difficult. It requires a high level of commitment to communicating, listening and finding common ground. I believe that's why there seems to be reluctance to address the allocation issue. It takes a lot of effort.

Residents of the Kuskokwim are very dependent upon salmon . They have a larger stake in successful conservation than anyone, but currently I see a lot of denial—some residents don't believe the numbers , and many others think it will be better next year. I think we will all be better off if we prepare for many years of reduced King salmon numbers. I saw the same reaction on the Yukon 15 years ago. Their king fishery still has not recovered.

Working with the villages is going to be difficult. Fish and game fisheries managers don't live in this community...they come here to work in the summer. Relationships are developed in the local store, at basketball game or camp with them on the river. This isn't a reflection on the individual managers, but it is a poor reflection on the Department. It is disrespectful for an agency to manage people 's resources from afar.

It is not the working groups responsibility to do all of the groundwork for for the department. Their volunteer efforts are very difficult already. I Think the fisheries managers time would be far better spent traveling to villages to understand the residents viewpoints and needs and ultimately would contribute to resolution of this issue.

Without this most basic work being done, I'm concerned that actual agreement on conservation and allocation will be difficult to obtain. If some clear course of action toward insuring equitable allocation, such as Tier II or community allocations, isn't followed very soon, I suspect that it may require legal challenges to accomplish it. It appears that all legal requirements for demanding a Tier II are present...it people don't want that, then alternatives better be found.

Ironically, one of the driving forces for statehood was to have local (state) control of Alaska's fisheries, but now the Department, and to some extent the Board, don't seem to be concerned that the Federal government took over fisheries management last summer. An insider confided in me that some state managers would prefer the federal government manage Kings on the Kuskokwim because it is such a tough job. Those that wrote the state's constitution would surly

be offended if that is true. What is being done to insure that Kuskokwim King salmon are managed by the state in future seasons?

I have no objection to how the federal managers did last summer. In fact, they actively worked with local residents and made the tough management decisions needed to conserve King salmon. Frankly after the Department's dismal management in 2013 , and after requests from several tribes, they had no choice but to take over management.

Nevertheless, I believe the department is much better prepared to manage the fishery than USFWS. I've been immersed in this problem myself—the state maintains decades of fishery records, operates the test fishery, and staffs experts trained to manage fish. Furthermore, ADF&Gs authority encompasses the whole river...whereas the federal management only encompasses the river within the boundaries of the Yukon Delta NWR—essentially from the mouth of the river to Aniak. I think that a seamless management scheme for the entire river, by one agency will have a better chance of success and less confusion for local residents.

However, there will have to be changes before people will have confidence that this will work. Clearly, some very clear mandates must be established to insure that residents of the mid-river and upper river get an equitable share of surplus fish. This will require changes in management actions that will affect lower river subsistence fishermen and the commercial fishery. This may mean establishing a tier II system, or village quotas or something else. It may require a major rework of the states overall management strategy as it appears that managing for a drainage-wide escapement goal may insure that mid-river and upriver residents will never again get the opportunity to catch the number of kings they customarily use (Molyneaux). As a panel, that is your charge.

In summary:

Its going to take a lot of groundwork and interaction with local residents to find an equitable solution to the allocation issues on the Kuskokwim.

Dual management of the fish in the river will not contribute to seamless, equitable management

There is a clear pattern of allocation and to some extent conservation problems with ADF&G management of king salmon on the Kuskokwim.

Under depressed runs, ADF&G management plans and actions have not provided for an equitable distribution of the available surplus.

The existing drainage-wide ANS provides no incentive to ensure an equitable distribution of the available surplus. There is no benchmark by which to assess success in providing equitable distribution. There is a need to establish a nested ANS for two or more subregions of the watershed.

Some people support implementation of a Tier II system—as required by regulation—unless another equally or more effective tool to ensure equitable distribution in times of low abundance can be developed and implemented in a timely way.

The state BOF should work very closely with the federal subsistence board , state managers should work very closely with federal managers to regain state management that meets the requirements of federal law, yet will provide seamless fisheries management for the entire Kuskokwim.