

Proposal 376 is a board-generated proposal created by the board at its December 2013 Lower Cook Inlet Finfish meeting. This proposal will be considered at the Statewide King and Tanner Crab (except Southeast/Yakutat) Meeting, March 17–21, 2014, Anchorage, Alaska.

PROPOSAL 376 – 5 AAC 05.362. Yukon River Summer Chum Salmon Management Plan. Authorize use of purse seine gear for commercial harvest of Yukon River summer chum salmon in districts 1–3 during times of king salmon conservation; secondarily, the proposal asks for consideration of allowing monofilament purse seine web in this fishery as follows:

5 AAC 05.362(k) is amended to read:

(k) In Districts 1 – 3, during times when the commissioner determines that it is necessary for the conservation of king salmon, the commissioner may, by emergency order, close the commercial gillnet fishing season and immediately reopen a fishing season during which

(1) a permit holder may fish with

(A) up to four dip nets, as a dip net is defined in 5 AAC 39.105;

(B) beach seine gear, with mesh size that does not exceed four inches stretched measure;

(C) purse seine gear (INSERT ANY PURSE SEINE LENGTH, DEPTH, AND MESH SIZE SPECIFICATIONS, AND ANY EXCEPTIONS TO GENERAL PROVISIONS IN 5 AAC 39.260); notwithstanding 5 AAC 39.170, a purse seine used under this subsection may consist of monofilament web; and

(2) all king salmon caught in dip net and [BEACH] seine gear must be returned immediately to the water alive, except that a dead king salmon may be taken but may not be retained; the dead king salmon must be recorded on a fish ticket and forfeited to the state.

What is the issue you would like the board to address and why? Harvest of surplus Yukon River summer chum salmon has been greatly reduced during recent years because of the need to minimize incidental harvest of king salmon during poor king salmon runs. In January 2013, the board adopted new regulations in an effort to allow for the selective harvest of surplus summer chum salmon while minimizing the impact on king salmon. By emergency order, during times of king salmon conservation, commercial permit holders may use dip net and beach seine gear to harvest summer chum salmon and are required to release king salmon alive. Additionally, commercial gillnets may be restricted to five and one half inch or smaller mesh size, not exceeding 30 meshes in depth.

Despite the marked improvement in commercial summer chum salmon harvest using dip net gear (approximately 189,000 summer chum salmon were harvested in districts 1 and 2 by dip net), there was a foregone commercial harvest of approximately one million summer chum salmon in 2013. This foregone summer chum salmon harvest resulted in a very large escapement that may negatively impact future yield of summer chum salmon. In addition, the king salmon run in 2014 may be so low that commercial gillnet fishing opportunity in the Yukon Area will be further reduced. The inability to capitalize on the available surplus of summer chum salmon will likely continue because of the inefficiency of the current selective harvest gear. In 2013, few, if any, beach seine sites were available because of typical high river water levels during June.

Preliminary feasibility work using purse seine gear and monofilament webbing to selectively harvest chum salmon was conducted by Yukon Delta Fisheries Development Association in July and August 2013 after most of the king salmon run had passed. Therefore, releasing king salmon from this gear type was not fully tested. However, methods for fishing purse seines of 50 fathoms in length and 3.5-inch mesh inriver with small skiffs were developed to catch chum salmon, which could be released. There was incidental mortality of small non-target fish species, such as Bering cisco and small pink salmon that had been gilled in this mesh size. Purse seine gear may assist in increasing harvest of summer chum salmon while minimizing or eliminating king salmon mortality during the summer chum salmon fishery. This could reduce forgone commercial chum salmon harvests, and reduce the potential negative impacts on chum salmon production in the future.

Currently, the use of monofilament purse seine web is prohibited under 5 AAC 39.170. Light-weight monofilament web would facilitate the use of purse seines by the relatively small boats used in this fishery and would also have the additional advantage of a smaller mesh size (possibly 2 inches or smaller) so that the risk of gilling non-target fish species, such as Bering cisco and pink salmon, could be reduced.

Any effort to provide additional commercial summer chum harvest opportunity must first and foremost ensure continued conservation of Yukon River king salmon, which is a stock of concern.

PROPOSED BY: Alaska Board of Fisheries from an emergency petition request by Yukon Delta Fisheries Development Association.