

To:  
 Alaska Board of Fisheries Members  
 My Comments for the Record  
 fax # 907-465-6094.

From:  
 Eric M Beeman  
 1004 Third St.  
 Kenai, Alaska 99611  
eric\_beeman@yahoo.com

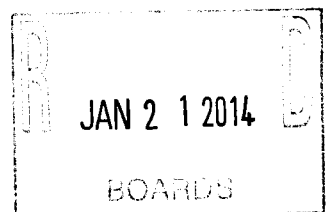
Dear BOF Members:

I will not be able to attend the upcoming Upper Cook Inlet meetings in Jan/Feb. In lieu of an oral testimony, I am submitting these written comments for the Board's consideration. I have been a Kalgin Island setnet fisherman for the last 45 years. My testimony references proposals 79, 123, 126, and 134.

**First proposal 134, Big River Sockeye Salmon Management Plan—and some history:** The Big River Sockeye fishery began in 1989. It was implemented to harvest a sockeye stock which passed through the area prior to the seasons opening date at that time. Concerns about a potential intercept of Chinook salmon, were mitigated by the adoption of a 1000 fish Chinook cap. Gear was a single 35 fm. shackle and a minimum distance of 1800'. The area opened was from the Kustatan river south to Drift river terminal, an area of approximately 16 miles. River mouth closures reduced this area somewhat. It soon became apparent that only the area south of Big River was good for catching sockeye, effectively reducing the viable area further. In 2005 the western 1/2 of Kalgin was included. This increased the area substantially, and allowed many of us who had up till that time fished the original area to now fish our own sites on Kalgin. Several Island fishermen who had not participated in this fishery also joined our ranks. At present, there are an estimated 29 permits fishing on Kalgin and another 6 between Drift and Big Rivers. These are pretty much the same local families that have fished either from the fisheries inception or from when the western 1/2 of Kalgin was added. Proposal 134 seeks to open the other 1/2 of Kalgin Island and cut fishing days from the current 3 openings per week to 2. I'm against this for reasons listed below:

1. This fishery works! In the 26 years, the Chinook cap has been reached only once. By being careful, and by only fishing 1 net per permit we have been able to harvest an average of only 480 kings per year for the entire fishery. This is only accomplished when all individuals work as a team to minimize king catch.
2. Opening the 15 miles of additional beach would potentially increase the number of participants, with a resultant increase in chinook harvest. Sports interests don't want this. Fisheries managers would have a more difficult time. Big River sockeye fishermen don't want this either—we have managed to pull off a stable fishery for 25 years by working together, not easy to accomplish with a bunch of new entrants.
3. Weather. This is early June, the Inlet is still cold and we often have blows which put part of the fleet down. A few years ago my neighbors and I were blown off our sites for the first 3 openings—pretty bad for a season which may be only 9 openings in total. Unlike the main season, we often lose a day or two to weather, so having 3 days/week helps out.
4. Four fifths of the involved families incomes would suffer, mine included. This is not a high volume fishery. Total average sockeye catch since 2005 is 17,355 per year for the entire fishery. Kalgin is that kind of place: a low-volume, longer season fishery where having a lot of chances (days) is important.

Proposal 79 has to do with increasing the closed areas around stream mouths and moves the point at which it is measured from high tide to low tide. This is a complex proposal, and looks like it was submitted because of issues with the Big and Kustatan Rivers, but has some major implications for the entire Inlet, so please be cautious when considering this. I often setnet in this area and would like to offer some observations. First, driftnet pressure has increased in late July and August—pretty much to the point that I don't fish there if I can see a number of boats (I can see much of this area from my house). On certain years this can be an important segment of my fishery, so I'm not pleased to see this gear expansion either. I will say, however, that the Board also needs to look at the sport/guided sport end of the equation also. We pick berries along Big River and have boated up into and camped at Big River Lake, and it is a real zoo—a mini Lake Hood with planes landing and disgorging multitudes of clients into waiting boats and fishermen zooming around the lake. I can think of no better summation of the situation than that offered by # 79's proposer.



Sport fish participation has increased dramatically in the last decade and these systems cannot continue to support commercial harvest at their mouths without threatening sustainability.

Kind of an arrogant viewpoint, I'd say. Perhaps curtailing some of the "dramatically increased" commercial sport and air taxi-based harvest would help with sustainability also. As a member of the only non-expanding gear group in this area, the setnetters, I'd like to see some relief from both gear types.

Proposal 123 seeks to switch the days we normally fish on Kalgin (Monday and Thursday) to Wednesday and Saturday. Although I sympathize with my neighbors who had were told by the processor to quit fishing partway through the opening, I oppose this plan as I believe it has the potential to increase fishing effort on Kalgin Island. I was originally asked to submit this proposal in my name, asked by an individual who had both a drift and setnet permit. By changing the weekdays each gear group would fish, a person with both permits could drift on Monday, fish Kalgin on Wednesday, etc., etc. Additionally, with the recent ESSN closures, a similar scenario could occur if fishing families register part of their permits on the Kenai side and part in the Kalgin/Western area. I don't know how often this would happen, but the potential is real, and I am against any step which would put additional gear in the waters of Kalgin Island.

As president of the Ugashik Setnet Association, I spent many hours last year arguing against the sunset of setnet stacking in Bristol Bay. I think all Board members know where I stand on proposal 126. The only additional points I would like to make pertain specifically to Cook Inlet. First, unlike stacking in BB and Kodiak, there was unanimous support from the setnetters when this was first passed and the Board saw this and passed it without any sunset clause. As far as I know, this is still the case—all members of the setnet fraternity are in agreement. The proposal comes instead from the Kenai River Sportfishing Association, primarily tasked with wiping my kind off the face of Cook Inlet, to put it sort of bluntly. Last year I saw strong stances by several Board members on this issue and a couple of open minds. From actions in Kodiak and in Bristol Bay, we know how the Board's majority feels when dealing with divisiveness within the user group. It will be interesting to see the outcome when the conflict is commercial sport vs. commercial netters.

I appreciate your time spent considering these issues. If anyone would like any clarifications, I can be reached at the above email.

Sincerely,  
Eric M Beeman