

PROPOSAL 23

5 AAC 52.022. General provisions for seasons, bag, possession, annual, and size limits, and methods and means for the Upper Copper River and Upper Susitna River Area.

Prohibit catch-and-release sport fishing in the Upper Copper River and Upper Susitna River drainages, as follows:

(a)(15) In the Upper Copper River and Susitna River drainages, it is unlawful under sports fisheries to catch and release fresh water finfish.

What is the issue you would like the board to address and why? In the Upper Copper River and Susitna River drainages, it is unlawful under sport fisheries regulations to catch and release fresh water finfish. Salmon, trout, and other fresh water finfish are fatally harmed when caught and released into water bodies.

Releasing freshwater finfish into water bodies necessitates rough handling of fish when releasing it into rivers, streams, etc. Fish are struggled with to get fish hooks out of its mouth, grabbing and man handling fish harms it. Finfish are injured when fish hooks are hooked into its mouth or incidentally snagged into its body, then released into waters. Wounds in the mouth increase susceptibility to infection, disease and delayed death. Disease started by a catch and release wound can infect a whole population of returning and rearing salmon stocks. Wounds in the gills result in a more rapid fatality. Continuously catching and releasing finfish eventually kills it as well.

Research studies on the Kenai River by ADFG has confirmed that salmon are harmed when caught and released into water bodies. The report states that, “chinook salmon that was gilled had a significantly reduced chance of surviving compared to a salmon that was not gilled”. We also know that the larger salmon are also more susceptible to handling injuries due to increased body mass and greater force on internal organs, delicate circulatory connections with the gills and skeletal and nervous system structures when handled out of the water.

It is not customary and traditional to catch and release fish. Catch and release is considered to be Engii by the Ahtna people and will make salmon not return to you. Ahtna traditional laws, state that when fish is deliberately harmed, or played with, it is Engii, and will eventually disappear or “not come back” if it is not properly and respectfully cared for. This is what we are seeing with the King Salmon not returning in recent years. They have not been respected. We will see more of this if we don’t change the way we respect the salmon. Not allowing catch and release is a way to start doing this in a small way.

PROPOSED BY: Ahtna Tene Nene’ (HQ-F17-020)
