

Chairman John Jensen and Board of Fisheries Members,

As you all know by now I am Steve Merritt and you have heard my many arguments for not delaying the Chinook Summer Troll season date. The conservation benefits of delaying July are truly unknown and I have quoted numbers and data inconsistencies til I am blue in the face, but to no avail. So maybe we should go over the results I know you will get if you delay the opening date.

1. Unnecessary hook and release mortality. There will be a build up of Chinook in the region due to kings not being fished as yet and the restricted winter and spring fisheries actions. A Chinook non-retention fishery opening on July 1 results in an increase in hook and release mortality of all July Chinook stocks, including the very stocks this action targets to protect. A fish that would have been counted towards the 70% troll Chinook quota, but died during the first week of July, is now laying on the bottom, and another must be killed to take its place July 8. This results in the overall total mortality of the July Chinook fishery being larger than normally incurred. On a low Abundance Index year, where coast wide productivity is low and conservation is the intent of that AI, a July 8 opening counters that intent. A speculative conservation measure that ends in an increase in total mortality.

Each of you have been selected as Board of Fisheries members because you have been deemed good stewards of the fisheries resources. With the above in mind please ask yourselves if the July delay is consistent with that principle.

2. Increase in processor expense. All processors hire personal in preparation of a glut of fish during that first week of July. In some cases processors may have contracted workers based on the history of the July 1 opening. But, they may truly not be needed until July 8. Yet they will be on payroll regardless.

A coho fishery during the first days of July results in far less product than anticipated. Most trollers will not go out and fish coho's because there isn't enough time to fish coho, get resupplied, and relocated to their favorite Chinook fishing grounds before July 8. Only the smaller more locally focused fishing boats would participate. Meager participation in a 5 day coho fishery will most likely result in meager product. But, how can the processor truly know? The only safe way to handle it is to hire at maximum levels to be sure the plant is not understaffed should there be a flood of coho delivered.

A speculative conservation measure resulting in an increase cost to the public, is the result of delaying the July opening date. If you had some true idea of the conservation

savings garnered from a delay, then you could in good faith, burden the public with such a cost as being the necessary evil of a conservation measure. But as you well know from testimony and written comments, you do not know to any degree of certainty there will be any conservation savings by delaying July.

3. Small town infrastructure consequences. In Craig Alaska the city ice machine holds about 37 tons of ice. Due to the large SPC fleet in the area, SPC fisherman have to ice up 3 days early on an initial opening. This is the only way to insure every fisherman gets ice for the opening since the ice machine can only handle about 16 fisherman a day.

Boats which fish the 5 day coho fishery would join the boats just getting ready for the upcoming king opening on the ice list, and overwhelm the ice making capacity of the ice house. This results in some fisherman not getting enough ice or ice at all for the opening. A speculative conservation measure having potential to overwhelm small town infrastructure and again resulting in negative financial impacts on fisherman.

I ask you again to reconsider delaying the July start date for the above new and very real consequences of that questionable conservation measure.

Concerning the region wide spring fishery closure May 29 to June 14 denoted in the Troll fishery Chilkat plan. This closes the spring fishery in the Craig area by plan regulation. The Port Saint Nicolas spring fishery has yet to catch a Chilkat tagged salmon or even have one within 100 miles of the sight. This closure adversely affects the community of Craig for few if any logical reasons. The return of this release starts beginning of June. Please reconsider this regional closure to be less region wide and more Chilkat orientated.

Sincerely,

Steve Merritt
Craig Advisory Committee