

Dear Board of Fisheries,

I am writing to you in support of proposals 99, 105, and 106. I moved to Sitka in August of 2017, and in the past 5 months, it has become abundantly clear to me that herring are essential to subsistence users in Sitka. Fishermen who oppose measures to reduce the harvest cap and expand the subsistence zone may say that they desperately need this fishery, but the community needs a sustainable herring stock just as desperately. And perhaps even more importantly, the Sitka Sound ecosystem needs a sustainable herring stock. Protecting the herring stock in the long term protects the fisherman who depend on this resource economically, the subsistence users who depend on the roe harvests each year, and the other creatures in the ecosystem who depend on herring to play a vital role in the food web.

I've heard many people defend the current harvest cap and subsistence zones by saying the fishery is currently managed scientifically. I am not a scientist, but I do work with marine scientists at the University of Alaska Southeast. I consider myself to be a science communicator. And my understanding is that there is much to learn about herring fisheries. It is probably comforting to say that the subsistence users are being hysterical and the scientists have things under control; it is also a lie. The reality is, herring fisheries have collapsed throughout the Pacific Northwest. The measures in proposals 99, 105, and 106 are conservative, but they also may very well be entirely necessary. The legacy of using climate science to defend the status quo and discredit conservation efforts is not a positive one. That is a strategy that history has proven careless time and time again. The conservative choice is often the more scientific choice; we will not be able to expand our understanding of the herring fishery if the fishery collapses.

Capping the fishery at 10% biomass and expanding the subsistence zone will have limited short-term economic consequences for fishermen (although the economic consequences are at times, I think, a bit overblown – there are quite literally other fish in the sea). But a sustainable herring fishery is ultimately an economic boost; not being able to sell as many herring hurts you economically this year, but never being able to sell herring again 10 years down the line will hurt much worse. The benefits that the Sitka Sound community would reap from a conservative, sustainable management of the herring fishery affects all users: even the non-human ones who live underwater and along the shore.

This is not even mentioning the cultural significance of subsistence herring to the Tlingit community, nor the thousands of years of generational knowledge that support a more conservative approach. There are many reasons that proposals 99, 105, and 106 make sense. The arguments most commonly wielded against them – economic consequences and scientific management – are both fallacious and short-sighted. For this reason, I highly encourage you to implement proposals 99 and 106.

Thank you for your time,

Jackie Ferro