

## **PROPOSAL 144**

### **5 AAC 09.369. Northern District Salmon Fisheries Management Plan.**

Restrict commercial fishing for salmon in areas both along the coast and in open seaward waters of the Outer Port Heiden Section and the open seaward waters of the Ilnik Section when the preseason Bristol Bay sockeye salmon forecast is 30 million fish or less, as follows:

This proposal seeks to restrict commercial fishing in areas both along the coast and in open seaward waters of the Outer Port Heiden and the open seaward waters of the Ilnik Section when the preseason Bristol Bay forecast is 30M salmon or less. The purpose of these area restrictions when the Bristol Bay preseason forecast is 30M salmon or less is twofold. First to appropriately spread the conservation of the Bristol Bay sockeye salmon amongst all users when the preseason forecast is 30M salmon or less; and secondly, when the Bristol Bay preseason forecast is 30M salmon or less., to direct more commercial fishing on local Northern Peninsula sockeye salmon stocks, particularly the Meshik River and Ilnik River stocks, that migrate within known channels in each section. This proposal seeks to further limit the distance open to commercial fishing seaward in both fishing Sections. When the Bristol Bay preseason forecast is 30M salmon or less, the seaward boundary limit would be 0.5 miles seaward throughout these two Sections.

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(j) In the Ilnik Section,

- (1) notwithstanding 5 AAC 09.320(a)(4), from June 20 through July 20,
  - (A) commercial salmon fishing will be permitted in the Ilnik Section
    - (i) southwest of the Unangashak Bluffs based on the abundance of Ilnik River sockeye salmon;

and

- (ii) northeast of the Unangashak Bluffs based on the abundance of Meshik River and Ilnik River sockeye salmon, combined;

**(B) If the preseason Bristol Bay sockeye salmon forecast is 30M salmon or less, fishing will be allowed seaward for 1.5 miles.**

**(i) If inseason assessment indicates a run larger than 30M salmon, the commissioner may, by emergency order, close the Ilnik Section, and immediately reopen the Ilnik Section, with fishery restrictions that the commissioner determines appropriate**

**(C) [(B)] notwithstanding (B)** if the commissioner closes that portion of the Egegik District specified in 5 AAC 06.359(c) for conservation of Ugashik River sockeye salmon stocks, the commissioner may, by emergency order, close the Ilnik Section and immediately reopen the Ilnik Section, with additional fishing restrictions that the commissioner determines necessary;

(I) The Outer Port Heiden Section is open from June 20 through July 31 to commercial salmon fishing in those waters west of a line from 57\_E0S.52' N. lat., 158\_E34.45' W. long. to 57\_E0S.85' N. lat., 158\_E37.50' W. long. based on the abundance of Meshik River sockeye salmon.

**(A) If the preseason Bristol Bay sockeye salmon forecast is for 30M salmon or less, the Outer Port Heiden Section is open from June 20 through July 31 to commercial salmon fishing in those waters west of a line from 56 59.68 N. lat., 158 E40.45' w. long. Under this scenario, this section will be open to commercial fishing seaward for 1.5 miles.**

**(i) If inseason assessment indicated a run larger than 30M salmon, the commissioner may, by emergency order, close the Outer Port Heiden Section, and immediately reopen the Outer Port Heiden Section, with fishery restrictions that the commissioner determines appropriate**

**(B) notwithstanding (A),** If the commissioner closes the portion of the Egegik District as specified in 5 AAC 06.359(c) for the conservation of Ugashik River sockeye salmon stocks, the commissioner may, by emergency order, close the Outer Port Heiden Section, and immediately reopen the Outer Port Heiden Section, with additional fishing restrictions that the commissioner determines necessary.

**What is the issue you would like the board to address and why?** Sharing the conservation of Bristol Bay sockeye salmon. Currently, in both Ilnik and the Outer Port Heiden Sections, conservation action on Bristol Bay salmon is only taken after a conservation closure occurs in Bristol Bay. Specifically, closure of that portion of the Egegik District specified in 5 AAC 06.359(c) for conservation of Ugashik River sockeye salmon stocks will prompt the commissioner to take unspecified conservation action in the Ilnik and Outer Port Heiden Sections. This delayed fishery management conservation action in the Ilnik and Outer Port Heiden Sections will no doubt cause the conservation of Bristol Bay salmon to be mis apportion to the Bristol Bay fishers. Because the Bristol Bay preseason forecast has been fairly accurate, we believe that it is prudent and precautionary to base conservation efforts in the Ilnik and Outer Port Heiden Sections on the Bristol Bay preseason forecast. Because Bristol Bay fishery managers are ultimately responsible for meeting subsistence needs and escapement goals, no additional conservation regulations are necessary for the Bristol Bay Management Area.

We recommend closing substantial portions of the Ilnik and Outer Port Heiden Sections to commercial fishing when the preseason Bristol Bay sockeye salmon forecast is 30M salmon or less. The 30M salmon preseason forecast represents an anticipated escapement of approximately 7.2M salmon, leaving approximately 22.8M for potential harvest. The estimated total Bristol Bay escapement of 7.2M salmon from a run of 30M salmon would provide for escapements that would fall near the midpoint of the low range of the individual system escapement goals. Note also that since 1996, the total run Bristol Bay sockeye salmon has only fallen below 30 M salmon in 6 of the 22 years of record. The median run size during the period, 1996-2017, is approximately 39.4M salmon. Incorporation of this trigger in the Northern District fishery management plan will assure that conservation of Bristol Bay sockeye salmon, when necessary, will be more appropriately shared among all commercial fishers that harvest Bristol Bay sockeye salmon. This recommendation to the management plan may preclude or possibly reduce additional inseason restrictions deemed necessary by the commission if a closure of that portion of the Egegik District specified in 5 AAC 06.359(c) for conservation of Ugashik River sockeye salmon stocks occurs. Accordingly, we propose that fishing be restricted both in shore length and seaward extension in the Outer Port Heiden Section and the seaward extension in the Ilnik Section. This would not only limit the area open to fishing in both Sections but may also focus fishing pressure on local salmon stocks, Meshik and Ilnik River stocks, that may or may not be affected by factors affecting the Bristol Bay sockeye salmon projection. Both Ilnik and Outer Port Heiden Section fisheries are to be managed on the abundance of local sockeye salmon stocks, Ilnik and Meshik River stocks.

If nothing is done, fishing may continue in the Ilnik and Outer Port Heiden Sections until it becomes obvious that restrictions are necessary because of closures in the Egegik District (Ugashik District). At that time, it will be too late to appropriately share conservation of Bristol Bay salmon amongst all commercial fishers. Bristol Bay Managers may be forced to restricted fishing periods or close the fisheries because of the need to meet subsistence needs and escapement goals. Additionally, if Northern Peninsula stocks are not affected by the factors negatively affecting Bristol Bay stocks, escapements to the Meshik and Ilnik Rivers could be well over the targeted escapement because of the lack of fishing pressure directed on these stocks. This preseason closure of waters in the Ilnik and Outer Port Heiden Sections when the Bristol Bay preseason forecast is 30M salmon or less may be relaxed based on inseason assessment of the run.

Other solutions considered was to substantially reduce fishing time in both the Port Heiden and Ilnik Sections based on the preseason forecast of less than or equal to 30M Bristol Bay sockeye salmon. This may be a viable alternative or a combination of area and time restrictions. Another solution was to dramatically reduce the area opened to fishing within the Outer Port Heiden and Ilnik Sections so that the major harvest would consist of local stocks. These restrictions could possibly be relaxed on inseason assessment of the Bristol Bay run. Finally, we considered setting various triggers, based on the Bristol Bay preseason sockeye salmon forecast (30M, 25M, 20M salmon), that would stipulate increased closed waters and/or fishing time in the Outer Port Heiden and Ilnik Sections, commensurate with the pre-season Bristol Bay forecast.

Note that the WASSIP study found that Northern Peninsula sockeye salmon stocks contributed an average of 48% to the SW Ilnik harvest (3 years); 30% to the NE Ilnik harvest (3 years); and 21 % to the Outer Port Heiden Section harvest (2 years).

**PROPOSED BY:** Lower Bristol Bay Fish and Game Advisory Committee (HQ-F18-022)

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