

Draft Board Finding submitted on behalf of Board members Reed Morisky and Robert Ruffner



**Alaska Department of Fish and Game  
Board of Fisheries**

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## ALASKA BOARD OF FISHERIES

### ALASKA BOARD OF FISHERIES FINDING ON THE RELIGIOUS AND CEREMONIAL USE OF KING SALMON IN OF THE YUKON RIVER

The Board of Fisheries ("board") makes the following findings:

At its 2019 Arctic-Yukon-Kuskokwim meeting, the Alaska Board of Fisheries (board) heard testimony on Proposal 94, which sought to allow the taking of the first king salmon entering the Yukon River for religious and ceremonial uses. The board heard public testimony about the longstanding ceremonial and religious uses of the first king salmon in support of the proposal, in addition to public comments opposed to the proposal. The proponent stated in his written public testimony that these "First Salmon Ceremonies" celebrate "determination, renewal, prosperity, and most importantly, honor the creator...there are fish dances and songs that honor king salmon." The board heard testimony that king salmon are family – relatives who are honored and revered by Alaska Native peoples along the Yukon River. The board also heard testimony that these Alaskans have a connection to king salmon that is at the core of who they are and essential to their spiritual, cultural, and physical well-being. The Alaska Department of Fish and Game opposed the proposal in part on the grounds that the department already provides some level of early season harvest opportunity for all users in the subsistence fishery, when run sizes allow, and increases that opportunity based on abundance. The board took no action on Proposal 94 by a vote of 7-0.

The board would like to formally acknowledge ceremonial and religious uses of first king salmon entering the Yukon River. The board supports efforts by the department to provide fishing opportunity on the first king salmon returning to the river, when the department determines that king salmon may be taken consistent with maintaining a healthy and sustainable king salmon population, so that "First Salmon Ceremonies" may be practiced, taught, and handed down. The board supports similar efforts by the department to provide for ceremonial and religious uses of fish to meet the sincere religious beliefs of all Alaskans.

Vote #-#  
March 10, 2019  
Anchorage, Alaska

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Reed Morisky, Chair  
Robert Ruffner, Vice Chair  
Alaska Board of Fisheries