

Jim Sykes
Fish and Wildlife Commission
Matanuska Susitna Borough
Public Testimony
2024 UCI Board of Fish Meeting

Fish Habitat Improvements

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Board, My name is Jim Sykes, Member of the Mat Su Fish and Wildlife Commission and personal use dipnetter who used to fish the mouth of the Kasilof, but can now dipnet on the Lower Sustina and Fish Creek since the Conservation Corridor was implemented.

The Conservation Corridor allows more salmon get to their northern natal rivers. It has been effective and needs to be maintained.

Our Commission strongly believes it is essential, and also more sensible and economical, to protect salmon habitat and salmon populations instead of suffering the long and expensive process of restoring them. While the Conservation Corridor seems to be working, we are worried about new declines in coho runs that have historically been healthy. We can't afford to have cohos follow the King declines.

The Borough has worked hard to maintain salmon habitat within our 4000 plus miles of mapped anadromous rivers and streams. It continues to expand its extensive network of fish passage improvements that have reopened over 1000 stream miles and more than 6000 acres of lake habitat for salmon rearing, spawning and fishing. The U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service has recognized the Borough and its many partners for “doing it right” with several national awards.

The investment by local partners totals over \$20 million, and the Borough’s robust culvert replacement program is ongoing as fisheries remain a priority.

The Native Village of Eklutna, with the Great Land Trust conserved thousands of acres of lands for hunting, fishing and foraging, including the wetlands at the mouth of Knik River.

Knik Tribal Council and Chickaloon Native Village have contributed to habitat restoration throughout the region.

In addition, local bank protection programs, pollution cleanup,

and important vegetation stream buffers have also been successful projects. The Commission continues its efforts to protect water body setbacks with individuals and groups who are concerned about their local salmon streams.

We do have some pike infestation problems, which is why the Commission is supporting a number of proposals that will liberalize northern pike harvests, along with continued research and dedicated funding to eradicate pike from salmon spawning and rearing areas.

I personally look forward to the day we can have a huge pike fishing contest, with a celebrity chef cook-off and a strategy to make pike available for people needing food.

Support for salmon habitat is strong and we need to ensure that the salmon destined for our Northern Cook Inlet Rivers have a good opportunity to reach the rich habitat that awaits their return.

We appreciate any help you can provide that ensures northern bound Cook Inlet salmon can have a healthy and sustainable future that will ultimately return more fish to Cook Inlet.