

PROPOSAL 225**5 AAC 61.118. Special provisions for the seasons, bag, possession, and size limits, and methods and means for Unit 4 of the Susitna River Drainage Area.**

Open rainbow trout fishing in Unit 4 of the Susitna River drainage year-round with a bag limit of 5 fish, 10 in possession as follows:

Susitna River Drainage Unit 4

Rainbow/Steelhead Trout

In flowing waters

No closed season 5 per day 10 in possession

Canyon Creek

No closed season 5 per day 10 in possession

Lake Creek

No closed season 5 per day 10 in possession

Talachulitna River

No closed season 5 per day 10 in possession

What is the issue you would like the board to address and why? Increase the opportunity to harvest rainbow trout for food and reduce predation of rainbow trout on depressed salmon populations that provide far more economic and food value to subsistence, sport, personal use and commercial user groups. It has been over 30 years since rainbow trout regulations were changed to reduce the human harvest of rainbow trout in the two major king salmon streams to catch and release only and limited much of unit 4 of the Susitna River Drainage to a reduced open water season and a daily limit of 2 fish. In that time frame the king salmon harvest for both sport and commercial fishermen has been reduced to zero. Rainbow trout numbers are significantly higher than when I started guiding here in 1993. This is a reflection of a successful management goal of increasing rainbow trout populations. Rainbow populations are overly abundant and possibly negatively affecting the king salmon and other salmon species as a main predator of salmon and their eggs. If we continue to have these overly restrictive rainbow trout regulations we will continue to limit people's ability to catch significant numbers of trout to replace the lost harvest of King Salmon and we may be limiting the growth of salmon populations due to overwhelming in river predation of salmon by the inflated rainbow populations that we created.

I considered proposing that we treat rainbow trout predators like we treat Northern Pike predators in Unit 4, however I rejected this as too extreme for the people who will come to

the board screaming and crying about this proposal. It will be a miracle enough, if this common sense proposal passes.

(EF-F23-

016)

PROPOSED BY: David McHoes

Opposed to this proposal– The following points support my opposition:

- Lack.of.Evidence.to.support.the.claims.put.forth.in.this.proposal: Hard evidence would be needed associating trout predation with direct decline of in-river chinook and/or other salmon populations before such a proposal should be considered. Such evidence does not exist and is almost impossible to assume that rainbow trout are a primary cause of declining salmon stocks. For this reason alone, this proposal has no substance as written.
- Dramatic.impact.on.native.trout.populations.in.Unit.0.rivers: Most rainbow trout fishing is focused on the Talachulitna River.and Lake.Creek, both rivers that receive a significant and steady amount of sport-fishing pressure. Opening harvest to rainbow trout to everyone at 5 fish per day year-round would have a significant and detrimental impact on native rainbow trout numbers. Rainbow trout by default have become the targeted sport fishery in June/July under current king salmon restrictions. Harvesting 5 rainbows per day per angler would have a fast, dramatic impact on trout populations.
- Disrupting.Age.Demographics: Harvest-focused fishers inevitably select for larger/mature fish. This disrupts the age demographics of existing trout populations, which is of great concern to the overall health and quality of the trout fishery.
- The current regulations for rainbow trout are very well written, fair, and balanced. They also protect the overharvest of larger/mature fish. The current regs also do currently reflect an adequate opportunity for harvest for those while still maintaining a healthy trout fishery for recreational sport-fishing opportunities.

. The current regulations should remain as written:

*Current Unit 4 Susitna Drainage, as of 2023: April 15-June 14: No retention.
June 15-April 14: 2 per day, 2 in possession, only 1 of which may be 20 inches or longer. • 20 inches or longer*

For local residents hoping to harvest more fish such as rainbows as a supplementary food source, a proposal for subsistence opportunity seems more appropriate here. Most recreational and sport fishing enthusiasts have no interest in over-harvesting rainbow trout nor see a decline in the quality of the existing Unit 4 trout fishery.