

Draft Minutes
Joint, Northern & Southern Southeast Regional Planning Team Meeting
Thursday, December 5th, 2024
Centennial Hall
330 Harbor Drive, Sitka
Plus, virtual via Zoom

The Joint, Northern and Southern Southeast Regional Planning Team Meeting was held in-person at Centennial Hall, in Sitka. A virtual option was offered via Zoom. The list below is a “best effort” to capture attendance. The minutes are meant to capture the main points of the conversation, rather than quote the speaker.

ADF&G RPT Representatives:

Flip Pryor, Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ADF&G) Division of Commercial Fisheries (CF), Aquaculture Section, Juneau (Chair)

Matt Catterson, Division of Sport Fish (SF), Enhancement Coordinator, Douglas

Anne Reynolds-Manney, CF, Regional Supervisor, Fisheries Management, Ketchikan

Southern Southeast Regional Aquaculture Association (SSRAA) RPT Representatives:

Chris Guggenbickler, Gillnet, Wrangell

Leif Dobszinsky, Seine, Fox Island, WA

Brian Warmuth, Troll, Ketchikan (virtual)

Northern Southeast Regional Aquaculture Association (NSRAA) RPT Representatives:

Dave Gibson, Gillnet, Juneau

Justin Peeler, Seine, Sitka

Eric Jordan, Troll, Sitka

Non-Regional Hatcheries with a Northern Southeast Region RPT Representative:

Katie Harms, Executive Director- Douglas Island Pink and Chum, Inc. (DIPAC) Juneau (ex officio)

Department of Commerce, Community, and Economic Development Representatives:

, Division of Investments, Juneau (ex officio)

U.S. Department of Agriculture, Forest Service RPT Representatives:

Eric Castro, USFS-Tongass, Fisheries Biologist, Petersburg (ex officio) (virtual)

SSRAA Staff: Ketchikan

Susan Doherty, General Manager

Bill Gass, Production Manager

Tessa Frost, Research and Evaluation Manager (virtual)

NSRAA Staff: Sitka

Scott Wagner, General Manager

Ben Adams, Research and Evaluation Manager

Chelsea Huckbody, Evaluation Program Assistant

Annie Causey, Special Projects Manager

Taylor Scott, Research Coordinator

DIPAC Staff: Juneau

AKI Staff: Sitka/Port Armstrong Hatchery

ADF&G Staff:

Forrest Bowers, CF, Acting Director, Juneau (virtual)
Lorraine Vercessi, CF, PNP Hatchery Coordinator, Juneau (virtual)
Lorna Wilson, CF, Assistant PNP Hatchery Coordinator, Juneau (virtual)
Grant Hagerman, CF, Commercial Troll Fishery Manager, Sitka (virtual)
Troy Thynes, CF, Southeast Regional Coordinator (virtual)
Bo Meredith, CF, AMB, Ketchikan (virtual)
Justin Priest, CF, Salmon Research, Sitka
Troy Tydinco, SF, AMB, Sitka
Anthony Wallock, Assistant AMB, Sitka (virtual)
Andy Piston, CF, SE Salmon Research Supervisor, Ketchikan
Teresa Fish, CF, Fisheries Biologist, Ketchikan (virtual)
Whitney Crittenden, CF, Assistant AMB, Ketchikan (virtual)
Kristen Gruenthal, CF, Gene Conservation Lab, Juneau (virtual)
Scott Forbes, CF, AMB, Juneau (virtual)
Aaron Dupuis, CF, AMB, Sitka (virtual)
Mike Vaughn, CF, Assistant Troll Biologist, Sitka (virtual)
David Starynski, SF, Enhancement (virtual)
Nicole Zeiser, CF, AMB, Haines (virtual)
Jeff Rice, SF, AMB, Petersburg (virtual)

Other Participants:

Kathy Hansen, Executive Director, Southeast Alaska Fishermen's Alliance (SEAFSA), Juneau (virtual)
Ryan Cook, Gillnet, Haines
Phil Doherty, Southeast Alaska Seiners Association, Ketchikan (virtual)
Abby Fredrick, Silver Bay Seafoods, Juneau (virtual)
Max Worhatch, Interested Person, Petersburg
Mike Collins, General Manager, Sitka ?
Angela Christensen, Silver Bay Seafoods (virtual)
Charlie Waters, NOAA Fisheries, Little Port Walter Manager, Juneau (virtual)
Ryan Reeves, Gillnet, SSRAA Board, Wrangell (virtual)
B. Doro (virtual)
Joel Zarate, Alaska General Seafoods, Ketchikan (virtual)

1.0 Call to order. Flip Pryor called the meeting to order at 9:03 a.m.

2.0 Introduction/Public Comment. Pryor noted the meeting was being recorded for keeping the minutes. Comments from the public were accepted throughout the meeting. The meeting was advertised on: State Online Announcements webpage, ADF&G webpage, an Advisory Announcement to all Southeast salmon, and the Southeast RPT e-mail distribution list.

3.0 Amend or approve the agenda. There were no edits.

Action: agenda **APPROVED** by unanimous consent.

4.0 Review recommendations for the April 10th, 2024, meeting.

Southern Southeast Regional Planning Team (SRPT)

- The SRPT had no action items.

Northern Southeast Regional Planning Team (NRPT)

- The NRPT reviewed the Little Port Walter Hatchery application and unanimously recommended approval.

Joint Southeast Regional Planning Team (JRPT)

- The JRPT, in accordance with 5 AAC 40.435 Southeast Alaska, reviewed the status of allocation of enhanced salmon and submitted recommendations to the commissioner.

5.0 Approval of the minutes from the previous meeting.

Action: minutes **APPROVED** by unanimous consent.

6.0 Action Items:

Southern Southeast Regional Planning Team

6.1– No action items.

Northern Southeast Regional Planning Team

6.2 – No action items.

Joint Southeast Regional Planning Team

6.3– Southeast Board of Fisheries Proposals.

Introduction: (Flip Pryor, ADF&G, Chair) Proposals were not placed on the agenda ahead of time. RPT members were encouraged to bring proposals up for discussion and then action may be taken by the Joint RPT. The department's comments on each proposal were not published at the time of the meeting, therefore department members of the Joint RPT abstained from voting.

Discussion:

Proposal 156: Reduce Southeast Alaska hatchery permitted pink and chum salmon egg-take level by 25%.

Discussion: Because of all the complexities around changes in hatchery production, the local RPT advising the commissioner on hatchery issues is the current system for reviewing hatchery production. Proposing that the board act on hatchery production circumnavigates that system. It is

unfortunate that the Board continues to allow people who don't participate at the RPT level to attack the hatchery program every Board cycle. The proposer does not live in Southeast, nor have they participated in the Southeast RPT process, which encourages public participation and provides a virtual attendance option. The proposal is overly broad, will have negative effects on the economy, and does not explain how these cuts would biologically benefit wild stocks. The proposal asks the board to cut pink and chum salmon production by modifying the enhanced salmon allocation management plan (5 AAC 33.364) but fails to address the effects the proposed cuts would have on allocation between the gear groups within the plan. The proposal fails to lay out how this cut would be implemented as the permitted capacity of each hatchery is on the permit issued by the commissioner, not in regulation. The proposed cuts in pink and chum salmon would be financially devastating to hatchery associations and need to be balanced by cuts to programs that don't pay for themselves, such as king and coho salmon programs that are popular in local communities and are part of the Pacific Salmon Treaty mitigation. Most of the Southeast Chinook salmon program infrastructure was paid for using Pacific Salmon Treaty mitigation money and those programs are currently paid for by chum salmon cost recovery. Losing hatchery Chinook salmon programs, as well as Troll access to hatchery chum salmon, would add to the losses Trollers feel due to Treaty harvest restrictions. Additionally, the proposed cuts would mean eliminating release sites that are not cost effective, which will have negative effects on the allocation between gear groups. The proposed cuts also negatively affect the state. SSRAA, NSRAA, and DIPAC all run state owned facilities at no cost to the state, and the proposed cuts will affect their ability to continue to operate those facilities. In addition, the state revolving fund uses pink and chum salmon production as an asset on loans. Board action to cut pink and chum salmon production could affect a hatchery association's ability to pay back loans from the revolving fund. The proposed cuts will also negatively impact local economies with reductions in fish tax and place more harvest pressure on wild stocks. In Southeast Alaska, food and other goods arrive on barges from the south and fish containers are backloaded on the return. If the amount of fish being transported is reduced, it will increase the cost of shipping of all goods, which affects everybody in the region. A Board action to cut pink and chum salmon production creates instability at a time when the fishing industry is already struggling. The board's legal authority to regulate egg collection within a SHA has been questioned in the past (O'Callaghan v Rue).

Action: Guggenbickler **MOVED**, and Dobszinsky **SECONDED** to **OPPOSE** Proposal 156 and captured comments in the meeting summary. **VOTE:** the motion **CARRIED** 6-0 (with the department representatives abstaining).

Proposal 104: Allocate 5,000 king salmon for the Alaska's all gear quota to a king salmon subsistence fishery and establish provisions for king salmon subsistence fishery.

Discussion: This proposal may allow opportunities for residents to harvest king salmon for food, with rod and reel, which they don't currently have under current sport fishing regulations. However, there may be unintended consequences if subsistence fishing is allowed at hatchery release sites, especially in terminal areas where hatchery broodstock is collected. There was discussion on how king salmon entering a terminal area are managed under the terminal area management plan, which includes personal use and sport fishing provisions, but not provisions for subsistence. An example is personal use permits in Anita Bay for both coho and king salmon, which are part of the management

plan. Including “hatchery exempt” language on subsistence permits would be needed to keep hatchery broodstock from becoming a targeted fishery.

Action: the JRPT took no position on Proposal 104 and asked that the discussion be put on record.

Proposal 132: Establish a minimum size limit for king salmon of 26 ½ inches from snout to fork of tail in spring troll fisheries.

Discussion: This discussion is for Proposal 132 and 133; and was provided as information only. The Andrew Creek stock king salmon has a flatter tail than other stocks. This proposal would allow the troll fleet to keep more 2-ocean male hatchery king salmon in the spring troll fishery. This way of measuring also reduces the handling of fish. The troll fishery currently must release mature hatchery king salmon that are barely under 28 inches in terminal areas, which negatively affects the troll allocation.

Proposal 133: Allow for king salmon of 26 ½ inches snout to fork length be retained in District 13 spring troll fisheries.

Discussion: See Proposal 132.

Proposal 157: Establish a terminal harvest area and associated management plan for harvesting hatchery produced salmon at Burnett Inlet.

Discussion: This proposal gives SSRAA the option to allow common property harvest in Burnett Inlet once broodstock and cost recovery goals have been met. This proposal adds another tool to help mop up fish returning to the hatchery.

Action: Peeler **MOVED**, and Gibson **SECONDED** to **SUPPORT** Proposal 157. **VOTE:** the motion **CARRIED** 6-0 (with the department representatives abstaining).

Proposal 158: Modify boundaries of the Hidden Falls terminal harvest area (THA) for chum, king, and coho salmon and the Hidden Falls special harvest area (SHA) for chum and king salmon.

Discussion: The department submitted this proposal to put into regulation the boundaries of the Hidden Falls THA and SHA as latitude and longitude, rather than the current language which reads “within two nautical miles of the Baranof Island shoreline”. Emergency Orders used to manage the fishery have used latitude and longitude for several years.

Action: Jordan **MOVED**, and Gibson **SECONDED** to **SUPPORT** Proposal 158. **VOTE:** the motion **CARRIED** 6-0 (with the department representatives abstaining from voting on the department generated proposal).

Proposal 159: Modify the Wrangell Narrows-Blind Slough Terminal Harvest Area Salmon Management Plan.

Proposal 162: Reduce king salmon sport fish bag limits outside of the time when the Wrangell Narrows-Blind Slough Management Plan is in effect.

Discussion: SSRAA submitted these proposals to modify the management plan that was developed in 1997 and modify harvest outside Blind Slough to correlate with the management plan. SSRAA believes modifying the management plan is needed to get more broodstock to Crystal Lake Hatchery, which has missed its egg-take goal 8 out of the last 10 years despite getting 1,000 fish to the hatchery. This proposal closes an area in Blind Slough to sport fishing and redefines another area of Blind Slough that allows sport fishing from shore when fishing is allowed in Wrangell Narrows. In addition, the proposal modifies bag limits that currently promote a catch and release fishery that returns a disproportionately high number of males to the hatchery. The Petersburg Advisory Committee has a similar proposal (Proposal 160) working closely with SSRAA, along with a couple other proposals from concerned citizens, which will complicate discussions by the Board, who tend to discuss like proposals all together. SSRAA's support for this proposal is dependent on the passage of complimentary Proposal 162.

Action: Guggenbickler **MOVED**, and Dobszinsky **SECONDED** to **SUPPORT** the concept of updating the management plan, to address fishing access, while allowing for adequate broodstock collection to meet egg-take goals at current survival rates. **VOTE:** the motion **CARRIED** 6-0 (with the department representatives abstaining).

6.4– Plans for moving forward with broodstock sanctuaries.

Introduction: (Flip Pryor, ADF&G, Chair) This is a carryover from the last meeting, with a plan to continue discussion at this meeting and finalize draft language for an addendum to the Comprehensive Salmon Plan in the spring of 2025. Draft language is submitted to the department for review and then made available for public comment. The RPT must respond to public comments and may incorporate them into the draft document, before submitting the document to the commissioner for approval.

Discussion: For the North, Glacier Bay National Park has been singled out as a place to start. For the South, Portland Canal is the first step. There are still concerns of future interpretations of the definitions. Kathy Hansen noted the need to edit page 2 (drop Chilkat as a formal escapement goal) and page 3 (lacks consistency). Eric Jordan would like included in the document that Alaska has the strongest wild salmon protections in legislation of anyplace in the world and noted the work of former State Senator Richard Ellison, who Eric elected to the Wild Salmon Hall of Fame. The chair will redistribute the document, and the maps Andy Piston produced, to the RPT members and the hatchery associations, with a plan to have edits completed and ready for review at the spring meeting.

Action: Jordan **MOVED**, and Pryor **SECONDED** to The Joint Regional Planning Team **APPROVE** The Joint Regional Planning Team prepare a document, for review at the spring meeting, which will become an addendum to the Comprehensive Salmon Plan on broodstock sanctuaries in Southeast Alaska. **VOTE:** the motion **CARRIED** by a vote of 9-0.

7.0 Information and Discussion Items:

7.1– A long-term solution to SSRAA’s Andrew Creek broodstock.

Introduction: Susan Doherty (SSRAA, General Manager) This subject was touched on earlier with the two Board proposals. On two occasions, the department has approved the release of king salmon other than Andrew Creek stock and one time that application was denied. The 1997 management plan did not include provisions for the Anita Bay king salmon release. For the second year in a row there will not be a king salmon release at Anita Bay because the egg-take goal was not met at Crystal Lake Hatchery. SSRAA needs 1,700 fish for broodstock to meet current egg needs, non-resident fishing effort has dramatically increased, rising temperatures in Blind Slough are making fish hold longer, 2 over 28” and 2 under 28” bag limit creates catch and release fishery that increases mortality especially with females. Six action items: 1-2) support board proposals 159 and 162, 3) physically move adults in Blind Slough to the hatchery during non-favorable water conditions, 4) take measures to accelerate maturation, if necessary, 5) take Chickamin River stock king salmon eggs at Whitman Lake as a back-up brood for the Anita Bay release until broodstock issues are solved, or 6) amend the permit to allow an “either/or” release of Andrew Creek/Chickamin River stock at Anita Bay. SSRAA presented data that doesn’t support the straying concern based on very few CWTs recovered in the Stikine River (4 since 2003) and high harvest rates of king salmon during the chum and coho salmon fisheries in Anita Bay. The intent of the releases at Anita Bay is not to switch stocks to Chickamin River stock, but to maximize Andrew Creek releases and use Chickamin River stock as a backup to ensure a full complement of fish are released annually.

Discussion: The sensitive and non-sensitive zone is defined in the Chinook Annex, which is an addendum to the Comprehensive Salmon Plan. Anita Bay being in the sensitive zone does not preclude a release from happening, it just means extra care should be given when considering a permit to release king salmon. The Anita Bay king salmon release currently provides the only king salmon harvest opportunity in the Wrangell area before July 15th due to restrictions from two stocks of concern in the Stikine River. Providing the CWT recovery data and the harvest data in the Anita Bay terminal harvest area may ease concerns by department reviewers. Since brood year 2020, all SSRAA king salmon have been 100% marked with adipose fin clips. Eric Jordan stressed his personal belief, that the concerns about straying of king and coho salmon being a threat to wild stocks is overblown with very little evidence to show that the genetic integrity of wild stocks are being compromised.

7.2– SSRAA moving summer chum eggs from Burnett Inlet Hatchery to Neets Bay Hatchery, for release at Nakat Inlet.

Introduction: Bill Gass (SSRAA, Operations Manager) The Port Asumcion site is permitted to release the progeny of 27.5 million green chum salmon eggs. Eggs can be collected at Neets Bay Hatchery (NBH) or Burnett Inlet Hatchery (BIH) and hatch at NBH (7.5M), BIH (12M), and Port Saint Nicholas Hatchery (8M). The Nakat Inlet site is permitted to release the progeny of 15.2 million green chum salmon eggs, all collected and hatched at BIH. Neets Bay Hatchery cut back on fall chum production, which opens space to incubate summer chum. A PAR will be necessary to

consolidate all Port Asumcion summer chum at BIH and move all Nakat Inlet summer chum to NBH. This consolidates and simplifies transports, otolith marking and reporting. No increase in release number at either site.

Discussion: There was no discussion.

7.3 – Tongass Land Management Renewal – Eric Castro

Introduction: Eric Castro (USFS-Tongass, Fisheries Biologist, Petersburg) Tongass Fish Pass Program presentation and an update on the Forest Plan Revision process and the complimentary Cooperative Fisheries Planning Status Report.

Since inception in the 1950's, the Tongass Fish Pass Program has contributed to fisheries enhancement in Southeast Alaska. Currently, there are 41 active fish pass structures on the Tongass National Forest, increasing access to 660 miles of stream and 6,420 acres of lake habitat in 43 separate water sheds. The 3 types of structures are 1) blasted step pools, 2) concrete weirs, and 3) aluminum steep passes. Commitment to ongoing evaluation, improvement and annual maintenance of the 41 fish pass structures demonstrates the dedication to the program and their long-term success. There have been 13 structures removed due to lack of success, unforeseen environmental conditions, or deterioration. The Forest Service plans to make inspection reports available to public access through an online dashboard. An example of Forest Service work, in 2011, Ketchikan Misty Fjords Ranger District and SSRAA completed a collaboration project where approximately 3 million juvenile coho salmon were released into Bakewell Lake to increase returns for commercial, sport, and subsistence users.

In 1979, the first Tongass Land Management Plan was drafted with its first revision occurring in 1997. In 2016, public hearings were held for an amendment to the plan. Currently, the plan is going through its second revision. In January 2025, the draft assessment report should be available for public review. There is opportunity to get involved the land management plan revision process by going to TongassPlanRevision@usda.gov.

Tongass National Forest Cooperative Fisheries Planning Status Report (ANILCA (P.L. 96-487) Sec. 507-B). In 1981, a memo of understanding between regional aquaculture associations (Prince William Sound, Cook Inlet, NSRAA, and SSRAA), ADF&G, and Forest Service was signed. In 1993, a process for planning cooperative enhancement efforts on the Tongass National Forest was signed by Forest Service, ADF&G, NSRAA and SSRAA. In 1997, the cooperative fisheries planning status report was completed, with the conclusion that current laws and regulations adequately provide for the programs summarized in the report, and requested Congress appropriate \$5 million per year to complete potential fish projects, and monitor, maintain, and evaluate those projects. In 2025, it is anticipated that an updated enhancement planning status report will be completed. ANILCA directs that each subsequent revision of the National Forest management plan shall contain a report on the status of the planning process undertaken, including, but not limited to, a description of current hatchery and aquaculture projects, an analysis of the success of these projects, and a prioritized list of projects anticipated for the duration of the management plan. In the last plan, projects were taken from the 2004 Comprehensive Salmon Plan, Phase III. Fisheries data, current enhancement project descriptions, and plans for future enhancement will need to be updated

in the new status report. The request of this RPT; “*a description of current hatchery and aquaculture projects, an analysis of the success of these projects (what you want credit for accomplishing), and a prioritized list of projects anticipated for the duration of the management plan (projects planned for the foreseeable future).*” As well as seeking points of contact from each relevant entity involved in the fisheries status report.”

Discussion: The presentation mentioned a fertilization and enhancement project on Redoubt Lake. Eric Jordan requested clarification on the Forest Service considering cutting funding for the Redoubt Lake weir, and fertilization enhancement efforts, which have rebuilt that run from less than 10,000 sockeye salmon to over 200,000 sockeye salmon returning this year, which makes it the “golden goose” of Forest Service enhancement projects. Eric Castro responded that other entities have shown interest in operating the weir and the large returns are fertilizing the system, particularly Lake Luna, which acts a nutrient sink that fertilizes Redoubt Lake. The resident time of Redoubt Lake is 3-5 years, so water sampling will be critical over the next several years to monitor productivity potential.

7.4 – Tax Assessment Update

Introduction: Scott Wagner (NSRAA, General Manager) Efforts to utilize tax assessments in terminal harvest areas continue to be a struggle due to the Department of Revenue statutes and regulations. Their regulations require notification of a proposed fishery by October 1st, which does not fit the board cycle or allow for proper data processing. They also require current year data, which they interpret to mean the year the tax will be implemented, not the previous fishing cycle. They have a willingness to adjust their regulations and are working with the Department of Law on how much input they can receive from outside sources. The Department of Revenue sets the rate, which has been too high to attract a fishery. The regional associations would like the regulation to read, “at a rate set by the department, or at a lower rate determined by the hatchery association”. NSRAA would like to add other sites to use tax assessments, which will require modification of ADF&G regulations, pending commissioner review of allocation effects. If allocation effects exist, proposed regulations would have to be reviewed by the Board of Fisheries.

Discussion: Utilizing tax assessments has been frustrating for the hatchery associations because tax assessment fisheries were prosecuted in the past without issue. Now, due to cuts with the Department of Revenue Fish Tax personnel, statutes are being interpreted differently, and tax assessment fisheries can no longer be practically prosecuted. The Department of Revenue has stated that previous employees did not follow statutes and regulations appropriately. Assessment fisheries are an effective tool to allow harvest on returning hatchery fish that needs to be reinstated.

Action: Peeler **MOVED**, and Guggenbickler **SECONDED** The Joint Regional Planning Team draft a letter to the Commissioner of ADF&G, Commissioner of Revenue and the Commissioner of Commerce, asking them to recognize this issue and work on a resolution **VOTE:** the motion **CARRIED** by a vote of 4-1, with 4 abstaining. The three department members abstained, noting that the RPT serves the Commissioner of ADF&G only. Peeler volunteered to start the draft letter. *Note: majority voting is defined as more than half of the votes cast, with abstaining defined as choosing not to vote (Roberts Rules of Order).*

7.5 – Chapter 40 Private Nonprofit Salmon and Shellfish Hatcheries.

Introduction: (Flip Pryor, ADF&G, Chair) In 2022, the Alaska Legislature passed shellfish enhancement statutes (AS 16.12.010 – 16.12.199). The department drafted regulations for shellfish enhancement, which got placed into Chapter 40 with PNP salmon hatchery regulations. The Department of Law spent a lot of time updating language in all of Chapter 40. The intent was to clarify and bring language up to date with current regulatory language. The regulations are out for public comment.

Discussion: People are encouraged to review the draft language and make public comments if they feel the proposed language changes how we do business.

8.0 Additional Business: This is Eric Jordan's last meeting as a representative of an aquaculture association, going back to 1977. Eric recognized several people who worked on developing the hatchery associations (Derick Coon, Dan Leach (National Fisheries Highliner), *I couldn't pick up all the names off the recording*). Eric maintains that the Southeast hatchery associations, who have produced over \$1 billion in revenue since inception, is one of the most successful endeavors he has ever been involved with. Eric thanked the directors of SSRAA, NSRAA, and DIPAC for their outstanding work, and thanked the chair for his long-term leadership of the regional planning team.

Taylor Scott (NSRAA, Assistant Research Manager) Wanted clarification on a fish transport permit to collect milt from Keta River stock Chinook salmon that was denied by the department and asked that the topic be added to the spring agenda.

9.0 Next meeting– The next Southeast Regional Planning Team meeting tentatively schedules for April 9th, in Ketchikan.

10.0 Adjourn: the meeting was adjourned at 12:46 pm.