

*Testimony received at  
Meeting 1/15/2015*

January 15, 2015

To: Kuskokwim Subsistence Salmon Panel:

My name is Beverly Hoffman, a lifetime resident of the Kuskokwim I have been a member of the Kuskokwim River Salmon Management Working Group since 1999 and have been co-chair through some good years and bad.

I am 63 years, Growing up on the Kuskokwim, I knew the salmon returned and we would get our food for the summer and the winter. I have had a smoke house with my family all of my adult life.

Being on the working group my education of the cycles of salmon species, the importance of habitat, the importance of escapement grew, concerns of over fishing, acidity in the ocean affecting salmon population and more information started to accumulate in my computer files. Historical knowledge is important but understanding the biology is important for all of us who depend on the salmon.

The first year I was on the working group we were introduced to fishing on the window schedule. This was hard. It was the beginning of the end of commercial fishing targeting our Kings.

In 2012 the state and fed management used the working group to tell our people there would be restrictions. It was a very emotional time; we were very divided up and down the river. State and Federal Managers used our voices but didn't use our wisdom. The final decision was always up to federal and state managers. We didn't make escapement.

In 2013 we opened on the lower river with no restrictions and it was already to late for upriver subsistence and escapement when managers realized it was a bad decision. Many working group members questioned why would the Kuskokwim be the only river with a good forecast when the rest of the state predicted low numbers.

In 2014 another emotional year. Fish and politics became intertwined. How many meetings were there where people of the river were divided. Management was divided. While most people concentrated on other species there were those who used the 4 inch mesh to get their usual King numbers. There were almost two hundred white fish nets going 24/ 7 from Napakiak up to Tuluksak. I took pictures of at least 8 crossing the mouth of the Kwethluk. With our sacrifice some tributaries made escapement and some didn't. The Kwethluk was one that did not.

So as managers continue to have their differences, some of my people think tribal control is the answer, tier II proposals are in the works and you are here to listen then come up with hopefully a good plan.

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These are my thoughts:

We have to open up with restrictions until we are sure the Kings are returning in strong numbers.

Using 4 inch mesh set nets to give folks the opportunity to get fresh fish for dinner is good but they were also used to target Kings. A schedule needs to be implemented.

Continue to distribute test fish Kings to communities for sharing. Community feeds?

Continue to promote processing other species, many of us in the last three years processed mostly chum and reds in our smoke house successfully. Ban 8 inch mesh nets.

Implement a plan for fair allocation of Kings before a Tier II is implemented. Last year Father Alexander talked about at least 15 Kings per household. What would this look like village-to-village? Could it be less while we are rebuilding. Should there be subsistence permits? Who can come back to fish?

Work together. The working group has many tribal members. We have been working on salmon issues for almost 3 decades. We might not be all sanctioned by our tribal organization but at last count we had 19 members affiliated with a tribe. It's going to be a while before something else is in place. The working group should have all members approved by their tribe.

Restrictions need to be fair. If we are restricted in river, there should be the same restrictions in the bay. The Kings caught out on the coast are headed to spawning grounds on the Kuskokwim and on the Yukon. Continue to work on reducing by-catch on the high seas.

And like our state game biologists and our Federal Fish Managers, at least our head regional fish biologists should reside on the Kuskokwim. Thank you.

Beverly Hoffner