

PROPOSAL 230 - 5 AAC 61.XXX. Deshka River King Salmon Management Plan. Create a Deshka River King Salmon Management Plan, as follows:

Adopt a Deshka River King Salmon Management plan as follows:

The purpose of this plan is to direct the Department to manage the Deshka River sport king salmon fishery to attain spawning escapements within the SEG range of 13,000 - 28,000 fish, while encouraging adaptive management to attain the escapement objective in a manner which avoids inseason closures and restrictions when possible, and thereby maximizes benefit as much as practical. If the Department's annual Deshka River king salmon outlook calls for a total return of less than 21,000 king salmon, then effective starting May 16, the Department may use, in preferential order, one or more of the following tools to precautionarily increase king salmon escapement through the sport fishery: restrict anglers to use of one single hook only, restrict the fishery to use of artificial lures only, restrict harvest to one bag limit per day (either personal or proxy, but not both), reduce the number of days per week king salmon may be harvested.

Once the Department can project a king salmon escapement of 17,000 king salmon past the Deshka River Weir or when 13,000 king salmon have swum past the weir (whichever comes first), the Department may return the fishery to normal fishing regulations the following day.

The commissioner may depart from the provisions of the management plan under this section as provided in 5AAC 21.363(e).

What is the issue you would like the board to address and why? For 5 consecutive years (starting in 2012) the Deshka River sport king salmon fishery has been managed by preseason emergency orders setting the regulations to be used at the start of each season. From discussions the Commission has scheduled with the Alaska Department of Fish & Game it has come to our attention the Department seems to have no clear plan as to when and what emergency regulations may be appropriate at specific projected king salmon return levels. This creates several additional problems, a significant one of which is for the past 5 years regulations published in the Southcentral Alaska Sport Fishing Regulations Summary have been inconsistent with preseason emergency regulations issued by the Department. Every time this occurs the Department must spend considerable time and money (consequentially) to publicize these changes. We believe sport anglers may be better served with a Deshka River king salmon management plan printed in the regulations book, and clarifying what anglers might expect under specific king salmon outlook and return levels. This is even more appropriate during these times of state financial downturn.

In addition, when the fishery is managed by emergency regulation there is no clear way for the public to weigh in on an ineffective emergency regulation or propose a regulation change, since all emergency orders expire after 90 days. For example for the past two years ADF&G has been implementing emergency Little Susitna River and Susitna River drainage king salmon regulations starting May 1, but since there is no significant king salmon harvest until after May 15, the primary result of implementation on May 1 is to minimize benefit for hardly any, and in some years, zero biological gain.

Another dubious emergency regulation is the reduction in annual king salmon limit from 5 to 2 fish throughout the Susitna River drainage and Little Susitna River combined. On the Deshka River and Little Susitna River, in particular, there is enough angling effort that a reduction in annual bag limit likely has little positive affect on king salmon escapement — especially considering that many Alaskans simply take up proxy fishing to sidestep a decreased annual limit. In these times of state economic hardship wouldn't it be more cost effective if the Department simply kept the annual limit at 5 king salmon and, thereby, reduced the need for proxy permits and proxy fishing? During times of king salmon shortage, wouldn't king salmon escapements be more positively increased by restricting daily harvest to one bag limit (either personal or proxy, but not both)?

PROPOSED BY: Mat-Su Borough Fish and Wildlife Commission (EF-F16-032)
