

Edward A Schmitt MD, Chairman Kenai Area Fishermen's Coalition, Soldotna, AK

Proposal 157 is a measure aimed at conserving the Kenai River early run of king salmon. Each fisherman would be only allowed one of their two Kenai kings to be harvested before June 30. This proposal would limit each fisherman to only one fish from the early run on the Kenai. There has not been any commercial harvest of this run for years. We feel that the demise of this run is based on in river exploitation of these fish.

Many citizens of Alaska live here because of the fishing opportunities. After our long winters, the first fishing opportunity of the year is in May and June. We feel that this can place a tremendous burden on the early run king salmon on the Kenai River. Limiting take to one fish during this run would be a good conservation measure.

Since I have been fishing the Kenai River in the late 1980's, I have seen the near total demise of the king salmon run that had recently produced the world's record king salmon.

Looking at the run data for each successive year the trend is clear, fewer and smaller fish. It has been years since we have seen a king salmon over 55 inches in the Kenai River.

As I look out my window upon the Kenai River I am saddened by the thought that in my lifetime, on my watch, the most famous king salmon run in the world has been so decimated. I wonder what it will take for us to restrain from killing the remaining few fish so that future generations can experience what I was once able to see?

I live on the Kenai because I was drawn by the huge salmon. I would love to once again be able to fish off my property for those wonderful fish. As a responsible sport fisherman, I can only fish when a run is in good shape and there is a true surplus of fish to harvest. Until we change our management priorities and first re-establish the early king run, I will never be able to, in good conscience, fish the river that has represented the best fishing in the world.

We must do a better job of conserving the early run of king salmon. This proposal is another plea to try to limit harvest of a run in clear jeopardy of extirpation.

Proposal 179 asks for a drift boat only day on Thursdays on the Kenai River below the Sterling Highway bridge in Soldotna. I want to clarify that the proposal as published suggests that this would be downstream of Cunningham Park. That is misleading, the proposal would only allow fishing from only a non-motorized boat below the Sterling Highway bridge. It would allow for motor usage in the tidal area below Cunningham Park once fishing has stopped for the day.

This proposal touches at the very heart of why we fish. For some it is simply to obtain fish for the freezer. For many it is because we choose this as a preferred means of recreation. As such other considerations of the experience are very important. The aesthetics of the situation have a considerable influence on the enjoyment of the sport.

At the Homer Board of Fish meeting, there was a discussion about why kids aren't fishing and what we could be doing to get younger people more interested in this sport seemingly dominated by old men.

To me an obvious answer is to make it more appealing to spend a day on the water. Feeling that we are caught up in a noisy traffic jam is disagreeable.

When my children, now grown, return to Soldotna during the summer they shake their heads in amazement that I ask them to fish on the lower Kenai as we did while they were growing up. "Dad", they ask, "how can you consider this to be any fun? There is constant noise and boat wakes and so many people are zooming up and down the river, that it isn't even pleasant to be out here."

For years people in the community of Soldotna have asked for one more day of relative peace and quiet on the river. Our backyard that is overwhelmed with boat traffic, boat wakes, and motor noise.

We surpassed a half million user days on the Kenai river for the first time ever. If we do not make some changes in how we experience the river we will lose an important aspect of fishing. We have got to acknowledge that times have changed and that what we did thirty years ago may no longer be best for right now.

We suspect that if enacted, another drift only day would be very popular and could serve as an indication of what fishermen value.