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Proposal 153: Prohibit fishing for king salmon from markers 300 yards below Slikok Creek upstream to Skilak Lake.

Current Regulation: With the exception of limited closed areas adjacent to the confluence of streams supporting spawning populations of king salmon the entire Kenai River is open to the taking of king salmon upstream to Skilak Lake (nearly 50 river-miles).

In recent years, restrictions to both the Early and Late runs of Kenai River King Salmon have been implemented for conservation purposes. Over the past 40 years this fishery has deteriorated from a predictable "World Class" trophy king salmon fishery from which the world record was taken to a fishery in which neither seasons or the chances of catching a large salmon are predictable.

This proposal would create a true pass through fishery protecting staging and spawning Early Run king salmon stocks. It would contribute to a more stable and predictable fishery benefiting not only the resource but the financial well-being of many local businesses.

Many of us in this room have been following this fishery for the past several decades. We have watched it rapidly grow beginning in the late 70's and particularly following the world record fish taken from the Early Run fishery in May of 1985. Whether as local fishermen, guides, fishery managers, Board of Fish members, fishing organizations or business owners offering support services to the fishing industry we have all played a role in the growth and the changes. Every three years we follow a similar process trying to squeeze as much opportunity out of this resource as possible whether it be angler days of fishing opportunity by the Department of Fish and Game, financial opportunity by guides and other business owners, or simply days of fishing with the opportunity to harvest a king salmon by Alaskan anglers.

Much of the energy over the years and particularly during each Board cycle is focused on pointing fingers at each other; trying to hold onto our individual small level of opportunity in a time of growing demand as the resource suffers. Proposals submitted this year by professional guides, the angling public the Department of Fish and Game and various fishing organizations reflect the growing concern for this resource.

Perhaps the most pertinent question to ask is: if we were to go back 50 years knowing then what we know now from both a social perspective (that the fishery would grow at the rate it did) as well as from a biological perspective, what would we have done differently? The first thing I suggest we would have done would have been to create a pass-through fishery and protect the spawning grounds much like we did, for instance, in the Anchor River which has an escapement goal not all that much larger than the Early Run Kenai. In the Anchor River stocks are targeted for 20 days a year with fishing allowed in the lower two miles of river. Early Run Kenai stocks are targeted for over 60 days in almost 50 miles of river.

The second thing I suggest we would have done would have been to have protected all of the numerous individual populations that make up the Early Run of king salmon. I would like to reference the article: *"Population diversity and the portfolio effect in an exploited species"* published by several well known salmon biologists. The authors support the need to manage a biological system as most successful financial portfolio's are managed, with diversity. You protect all populations of the system much like you have multiple layers and types of investments. The small spawning populations can become extremely critical when larger population segments are weak. *"Our results demonstrate the critical importance of maintaining population diversity for stabilizing ecosystem services and securing the economies and livelihoods that depend on them."* (1)

Many in this room remember when dozens of vehicles a day would park along Kalifornsky Beach Road or along College Road to observe king salmon make their way up Slikok Creek to spawn. Those days are gone. **Slikok Creek is the most glaring example of a population that current management practices have sacrificed. We have given up on Slikok Creek, a small yet important population of Early Run king salmon.** And, today, Beaver Creek is rarely mentioned. There are folks on the Kenai who can speak of harvesting king salmon from that easily accessible stream in which spawning populations were documented long ago but there is no long term historical data base.

While the Killey River, Funny River and the mainstem Kenai support the primary populations of Early Run king salmon others have been genetically identified including Grant Creek, Juneau Creek, Quartz Creek and Slikok Creek. Other streams within the system have been documented with spawning populations of king salmon as well. Yet, we subject those stocks to fishing pressure for at times more than 60 days including targeting them in staging and spawning areas. **Proposal 153 was submitted in an effort to protect spawning Kenai River king salmon. Upstream of the Slikok Creek closure is where the two major tributaries for Early run kings are located. Mainstem spawning locations have been well documented throughout this area. Why do we continue to fish on staging and spawning fish?**

If we are to consider sustainably protecting Kenai River stocks in a stable and predictable manner from both biological and financial perspectives we would focus on all spawning populations and not just the major stocks.

When sanctuary areas were first proposed around tributary streams there was much public outcry. They have been in place for several life-cycles yet the resource continues on a downhill slide. Many would consider entirely closing king salmon fishing upstream of Soldotna a far too drastic measure. In 30 years our great grandchildren may well say even that was not enough. If we are to sustainably manage this resource we must limit the time these stocks and protect them in their spawning and staging areas.

- (1) Schindler, D. E., R. Hilborn, B. Chasco, C. P. Boatright, T. P. Quinn, L. A. Rogers, and M. S. Webster. 2010. Population diversity and the portfolio effect in an exploited species. *Nature* 465:609-U102.