

Hello,

My name's Chad Lipse, I'm from Wasilla, and I own and operate a sport fishing guide service out of the Mat-Su Valley fishing predominantly the Susitna River drainages around Willow and Talkeetna. I've fished these areas for 20 years now, and I don't think there's any denying that we're having some issues with our salmon returns. The kings have been on the radar for a while now, and rightfully so, but as of late, my attention has turned to the Coho runs.

In the last 5 years, the Northern Management unit has seen a sport harvest decrease of 46% and Jim Creek has seen a decline in sport fish harvest of 76%. Now there's no denying that salmon are cyclic, but when you start to see a downward trend spanning more than a couple of years, it should raise some concern. The Northern Cook Inlet Coho have quite a journey to get to the Susitna drainages. There are a lot of obstacles that these fish have to navigate in order to reach their destination and a lot of opportunity for intercept. There are some proposals such as 92, 93, and 95 that all deal with restrictions for the Central District Drift Fleet during beginning to mid August to eliminate some of the areas where Northern bound Coho are susceptible to harvest and align more with the conservation corridor. I believe that these proposals would seek to align the management plan with it's stated purpose of minimizing the harvest of Northern District and Kenai River Coho in order to provide sport and guided sport fishermen a reasonable opportunity to harvest salmon stocks over the entire run. Another proposal, which I think would assist in recuperating Susitna Coho, is proposal 212, which proposes a closure for Northern District Gillnetters on August 15th. Looking at traditional run timing and harvest data this proposal would indicate that it would benefit Susitna drainages if implemented.

I feel privileged to have grown up in the valley and seen the abundance of salmon that we once had. And I understand that there's low cycles in salmon runs, but I can't remember one that's lasted this long. What I can remember is catching Coho when I was really young and I didn't have a clue as to what I was doing, but they were everywhere. Now, as a guide, I have days where I can cover a lot of water, on numerous rivers, and might only come across a single pod of fish. I used to say that Coho were the only species of salmon that I would leave fish to find fish, based on the fact that sometimes they just won't bite. But now, I'm really apprehensive about leaving a pod of Coho, because that might be the only ones that I see that day. A lot of people that I fish with and have fished with in the past feel the same way as well.

Now, what I don't want to do here is place blame solely on the shoulders of one user group, because I don't think that's how we go about fixing things. However, I think that with the restrictions that have been placed on sport fishing, and I view the lack of Coho as a restriction to the sport fishery, that there has to be some restrictions on the other user groups as well. And it's unfortunate that these fish are viewed in a way that any fish over a minimum escapement goal is detrimental and a burden to the fishery. I've even heard them referred to as "wasted" fish. The fact that we are viewing these fish as wasted, indicates we need a change of heart. Now I understand we expect some declines, but I don't think we can afford to continually lower our expectations in order to satisfy our escapement goals.

Thank you for your time,



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