

Committee 4 Drift Plan / Northern Considerations for All Users

The Drift plan as currently configured and (managed for) allows too much drift exploitation of Northern bound stocks during early August.

The vast majority of drift salmon harvests occurs during the month of July (a time where the plan now provides adequate protection for Northern bound stocks). The drifters still harvest greater numbers of salmon than all other Upper Cook Inlet commercial users combined.

To avoid 1% for the Drift fleet the manager now consistently fishes both regular drift periods districtwide in early August (in terms of area fished — this is much more liberal area opportunity than at any other time during the season). More districtwide drift fishing can occur in early August than during the entire rest of the season. To further avoid 1% the department has “Interpreted” board intent that all extra time periods (when not fished districtwide) is not considered when calculating 1%.) Board members Payton and Cain attended a meeting this last fall in the Mat-Su Valley when the commercial manager made this information public.

The negative impact of two (or more) districtwide drift periods per week in early August severely reduces the flow of coho salmon into the Northern District. Yet the intent of the plan is to provide adequate escapements of Northern District salmon stocks. Even when sport fish restrictions or closures on Northern salmon stocks occur — the manager rarely Northern coho conservation concerns by reducing districtwide drift fishing in August (the manager’s flexibility is rarely used in August for the intents identified in the plan). Sport harvest are much lower than commercial harvests on a daily basis, therefore reasonable opportunity for sport fisheries is much more reliant on having a consistent opportunity to harvest coho throughout the entire season. This consistent sport opportunity is greatly impacted when a large proportion of drift harvest occurs during August.

In 2015 sport managers, seeing a large early return of Northern coho salmon, liberalized the sport fishery through emergency orders — but excessive districtwide drift fishing during August greatly truncated the return of coho to Northern streams and the sport harvest was truncated as well. 2016 was even much worse for the sport fishery — although statewide harvest data is not yet available to show this.

Compromise Solution:

Drifter would still have more early August area opportunity — to harvest all salmon stocks regardless of run size — than afforded during the month of July if:

If the Board adopted Proposal 92 — also adjusted the 1% rule to the drift fleet as it did to the set netters (or eliminate 1%): Drifters and processors would have a consistent end of the season with significant August opportunity to harvest all salmon stocks on an annual basis. The probability of attaining adequate Northern escapements would increase, and all Northern users (subsistence, commercial, sport, guided sport, personal use) would see a more consistent flow of salmon North during August. There would be some benefit for all users.

Andy Couch

Andy Couch for Matanuska Valley AC Note: AC members were not able to vote on this compromise suggestion — however I do believe they would support it.