

RC 200

Submitted by John Gilcrist

PO Box 4256
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Alaska Board of Fish

RE: Opposition to proposals 209,211,212,213,214,215,216.

Dear Chair and Honorable members of the Board:

My name is John Gilcrist and I am a Northern District setnetter. My wife Betty and I set net at Point Possession on the northern tip of the Kenai Peninsula. I have fished there for 40 years and my wife has fished there her entire life with her mother, brothers, uncles, and myself. My wife and I were both born in the territory of Alaska. My wife was born in Anchorage. She went to school in Anchorage and fished the summers at Point Possession. Her mother was born there in 1921 but the government made her go to school in Anchorage. Captain Cook's journal speaks of trading for salmon there in 1778. Her family has a very long history there.

I was born in Anchorage but raised in Fairbanks until I was ten years old; we then moved to Anderson before there was a highway bridge across the Tanana at Nenana and before the road to Healy was put in. I was an angler long before I was a setnetter. I was on the creeks summer and winter. I started my own trap line when I was ten. I have fallen through the ice more times than I care to remember. I built my own cold smokehouse when I was fourteen.

When I was a preteen and early teen I would flag the southbound train down at Old Clear and take my younger brother down by Ferry and fish all day for grayling and dollies, then catch the northbound train home in the evening.

In July of 1963, when I was twelve, a friend of my dad's named Tex took me to Talkeetna on the train. There was no road to Talkeetna then.

Don Sheldon flew us out to the confluence of Clear Creek and the Talkeetna River. Tex setup camp and fished for a few days then went back to Talkeetna and got lost in the hotel. Another boy about fourteen came out and he and I stayed there for a month fishing everyday rain or shine. Periodically Don Sheldon or Cliff Hudson would come and check on us. Sometimes they would bring Tex but eventually he had to go back to work at Clear. I felt like Huckleberry Finn.

One day the sun disappeared in the middle of the day and the stars came out. A few minutes later the sun came out and there was a big albino bull moose in the middle of Clear Creek. It was another memorable experience in the wild, almost magical.

We caught a lot of fish in Fish Creek but not in Clear Creek, that never was. Don or Cliff would take our fish back to town and a woman they knew was smoking them for us. Of course, when we got to town, a grizzly had gotten in her smokehouse; I guess.

I very well understand the joy of boys and girls catching a fish. I think every kid should go fishing no matter what fishery. They need to get out of the house, breathe good air, and it keeps them out of trouble. Some of us are still boys and girls.

I have also caught a lot of fish at Chitna in the personal use fishery in years gone by. I use a guide when I fish for halibut. Like many people have, I have been connected to fish my entire life.

I feel extremely offended that I have to come back and try to defend what little we have in the Northern District. This may be good for the Anchorage economy but not John's. So, here goes. First of all, the Kings grubstake us for the summer. In the last board cycle we talked about paired restrictions. Something I thought was lawyer trickery and open to interpretation. So, I was confused but I am old and slow.

If we used paired restrictions this year with proposals 211-216 we still fish, you can't. Not a pair. Proposal 209 says we don't like you, beat it. Not a pair. So we don't hear about paired restrictions just the echo of adios.

Myself, only having data for the last 3 years from 2013 to 2015, the department estimates the Susitna run strength averaging 118,415 for Kings. East of the Susitna, I do not have data for an estimate of run strength but something could be extracted from harvest data in comparison to west side harvest. And I understand the Department cannot study every stream. Never the less there appears to be a run strength well in excess of 100,000 Kings in the Northern District. Our average annual harvest is less than 2,000 kings.

I see terms in proposal 209 like extra harvest and liberal harvest in proposal 213 and 216. Terms that defy definition.

If we had a liberalized fishery we would fish seven, twelve hour periods per week where all things being equal, we would harvest 14,000 Kings, but that would exceed our cap of 12,500 in the Northern District King Salmon management plan. So asking for two, twelve hour periods per week should seem reasonable. We would catch 4,000 kings, well below our 12,500 cap.

If I were intent on changing the Northern District management plan, I would modify number two that states: periods are from 7:00am to 7:00pm on Mondays, to include Thursdays. I would also remove number ten in the management plan that states "if the Deshka River is closed to sportfishing, the commissioner shall close, by emergency order, the commercial king salmon fishery throughout the Northern District for the remainder of the fishing periods provided for under this section." Genetic sampling indicates east side fish are not Deshka fish. I didn't come here to ask for more but I might as well now that I am here.

A few years ago, I asked the area manager if he thought I was endangering the King run. His answer was no. I told him I did not want to fish if I were.

Proposal 209 states we could open after June 24th for Kings but it is well known by the authors and setnetters the Kings are gone and the targeted sockeye fishery begins. This proposal would manage exclusively for two user groups in the harvest of Kings, completely disenfranchising two other groups; The setnetters and consumers. King Salmon are some of the first fresh fish in Cook Inlet. They are highly valued by diners in restaurants and people that cook or smoke fish. These are people that do not have time or the ability to catch their own. Or they just don't look good in hip boots. Plus, they know it's much cheaper.

The Matsu had a massive influx of people in the last 20 years. And, with more people comes more problems. Over use is hard to describe to people in a free society. I have heard time and again about the Little Su being so restricted, as it should be. I'm by myself in a stream with a set escapement goal and a harvest of 100 fish and I am happy. When my neighbor shows up, my share goes from 100 to 50. This is not a hard concept to grasp. Barring divine intervention the Little Su will always have restrictions.

Before we can solve a problem, we have to first identify the root cause. I have identified the root cause of these restrictions. In proposal 216 the three words most heavily used glare out at me. The Northern District setnet fishery has not grown. Our harvest is still around 2,000 Kings. There is an in-river problem and you can't fix it with superficial measures. You don't change the rear tire because the engine is low on oil.

Everyone has to take responsibility for their own impact on the fishery. If it is unknown ADF&G has a lot of professional people willing to help. You could take every gillnet out of the water all the way to Kodiak and you could still kill the river. Gimme more, Gimme more.

Maybe nature is just throwing some curve balls.

No one can say exactly what impact boat traffic has in a small river of confined space. I own a large jet boat and I've sucked up gravel more than once (not in spawning beds). I've run props and just dug channels. One boat travelling on a stream probably won't have a lasting impact. A thousand boats have to have an impact. Stressed fish from noise and other factors are probably evolving into nocturnal spawners. We don't kill ducks, moose, or caribou when they are having their babies. The Northern District setnetters draw their fish from many streams not just one.

If proposal 209 were adopted that would put 2,000 more Kings in the streams. It's difficult to say how many more angler opportunities would be afforded since these Kings would be dispersed among various streams. Some, with very limited access.

Proposal 209 mentions removing commercial opportunities. It may be prudent to remove commercial opportunities in the Little Su which would at least afford resident anglers more chance to catch a fish. There is a small special interest commercial entity within the river that catches a definitive amount of Kings. Having a sport designation does not make them non commercial. However, they are just trying to make a living and I would not wish it on anyone to go broke. They have families and lives also.

For the life of me, I cannot understand why a guide would support proposal 209. It will only put a few amount of fish in any one stream which will be quickly gobbled up. The demand for more will sound and then we can't say "it's those setnetters" the slogan I have heard on the Kenai for 25 years. So, we'll have to consume ourselves like those pike. Voracious!

Some have said the recreational fishery is more valuable monetarily. If it is, is it sustainable? It does not appear that way on the Kenai. And when it becomes unsustainable the users want more fish from the gillnet fishery. The gillnet fishery must be the nonpermanent fund.

Someday we may have to look at drawing permits for Kings on heavily used streams. Hatchery fish may be an option. The Little Su is a small river but it may be a good candidate for a sanctuary river untouched by humans. I have always believed, that every major drainage should have at least one sanctuary stream of moderate size. Maybe alternating years may be workable.

I honestly do not have much knowledge about the Little Su and I don't wish to study it. But I will if it is going to dictate my life. And maybe I will be able to float some ideas to help that river. But it will take courage to save it.

On a lighter note I commend from the bottom of my heart the effort the Matsu borough and the Matsu community has put into the fish and the streams in the valley. They have also put a lot of effort into youth education and that is ultimately where the future of the fish and healthy streams lie.

I only hope innuendos and slogans aren't used. Only unbiased facts. All of us are just people trying to hack out a living. There are good people in every group. And the Lady whose father, drowned trying to put food on his table for his children. And she is still fishing trying to put food on the table for her children. It tells us there is a story behind every face.

There is one family that fishes within the one mile of the Little Su. Closing them would be disgraceful in my opinion. After living on the peninsula for 25 years, I see how vital the commercial fishery is to the peninsula. Every time you whack the commercial fishery I hear the doors at the processors closing. They may or may not be too big to fail but they are economically important and they keep people working and off the streets. I also applaud the board member that ventured out to look at the other side of the coin so he could make honest decisions in this process.

Thanks for listening,

John Gilcrist