Cook Inlet Recreational Fishermen 025

c/o Pete Zimmerman, spokesman • PO Box 3411 • Homer, AK • 99603 <u>CIRF@twc.com</u>

October 18, 2016

RC 025

ALASKA BOARD OF FISHERIES ALASKA DEPARTMENT OF FISH AND GAME C/O BOARD SUPPORT SECTION PO BOX 115526 JUNEAU, AK 99811-5526

Subject: Proposals Nos. 15 and 19-27, regarding Lower Cook Inlet Finfish

Dear Glenn Haight, Executive Director and Board of Fisheries Members,

Cook Inlet Recreational Fishermen (CIRF) is a grass-roots sportfishing association formed to provide Alaska anglers a unified voice in management actions that affect the saltwater Chinook (king) salmon sport fishery in Lower Cook Inlet.

CIRF is comprised of Alaska residents who strongly believe in responsible management for sustainable fisheries. We share fishing knowledge and techniques. We responsibly process, prepare, and consume the fish we harvest.

As a result, we present you with the following information and comments concerning Proposals Numbered 15 and 19-27 in advance of the Board's meeting scheduled for November 30 to December 3, 2016. Each of these Proposals pertains to Saltwater King Salmon and is of great concern.

PROPOSAL 15:

Modify the king salmon bag and possession limit north of the latitude of Bluff Point, the Cook Inlet harvest record requirement, and the Winter King Salmon Management Plan to include all Cook Inlet salt waters from September 1 through March 31, and review the guideline harvest level.

This Proposal should be rejected as it contains multiple issues and is confusingly vague and indefinite. It is believed that additional and undisclosed regulations would be effected. The Proposal requests changing a fishery management boundary to comply with Statewide Harvest Survey boundaries, yet SWHS zones are dictated by ADF&G for statistical convenience rather than reflecting natural habitat zones, traditional fishery practices, and easily recognizable geographic features that would promote regulatory compliance and efficacy of management actions.

CIRF IS OPPOSED TO THIS PROPOSAL, with TWO EXCEPTIONS, below.

- This Proposal requests the month of <u>September</u> be added to the Winter King Salmon Management Plan, as it <u>would not impact spawning migration</u> of Cook Inlet king salmon stocks. CIRF AGREES WITH AND SUPPORTS INCLUDING SEPTEMBER, as years of escapement monitoring data support additional extension of the Winter Fishery.
- 2. CIRF AGREES WITH AND SUPPORTS CLARIFICATION AND/OR REMOVAL OF THE GUIDELINE HARVEST LEVEL as set forth in Proposals 25-27, *below*. AS TO THE REMAINDER OF THIS PROPOSAL, CIRF DOES NOT AGREE AND IS OPPOSED.

PROPOSAL 19:

Amend Lower Cook Inlet Winter Salt Water King Salmon Sport Fishery Management Plan by starting the season August 10.

This Proposal reflects that the vast majority of spawning king salmon are in the rivers by the 1st week of August. The weirs in Anchor River, Deep Creek and Ninilchik River are generally removed by August 7th. The Kenai Sonar located 14 miles up river (prior to 2015, 8.6 miles upriver) is shut down about August 19th. Furthermore the conservation zones surrounding the Ninilchik River, Anchor River and Stariski Creek are open to saltwater fishing on July 1. Opening the winter king fishery South of Anchor Pt. on August 10th would have no impact on returning fish.

Fishermen recognize, and ADF&G records confirm the fact that virtually all (but a few stragglers) of the king salmon returning to the Anchor River, Deep Creek, and Ninilchik River have entered the river by early August. As a result, ADF&G removes the weirs from these rivers by August 7th. Similarly, ADF&G shuts down the Kenai River sonar (located 14 miles up-river; prior to 2015, over 8 miles up-river) around mid-August, verifying that substantially all (but a few stragglers) of the returning king salmon are already well up-river. Furthermore the conservation zones surrounding the Ninilchik River, Anchor River, and Stariski Creek are opened to saltwater fishing on July 1. Opening the winter king fishery South of Anchor Pt. on August 10th would have no impact on king salmon returning to their Cook Inlet spawning grounds.

ADF&G has confirmed that adding the month of September to the Winter King Management Plan would have no negative effort on returning Cook Inlet king salmon. This admission is overdue and incomplete. The Agency's own data and publications provide ample data to support this Proposal's request to change the Plan's designated start of "winter" from October 1st to August 10th. The October 1st date set forth in the Management Plan arbitrarily and unnecessarily restricts sport fishing opportunities while subjecting recreational fishermen to greater risks and hazards of midwinter fishing.

Marine weather conditions in Lower Cook Inlet are a significant factor for these recreational anglers; many of whom fish from small vessels and a good number of whom will fish alone on occasion. The marine weather after October 1st is significantly more variable and dangerous than the period from August 10th through September. This Proposal requests a sound and well-justified amendment that would increase the boating safety of recreational anglers while maintaining the effectiveness and conservation objectives of management measures.

CIRF AGREES WITH AND SUPPORTS THIS PROPOSAL.

PROPOSAL 20:

Amend Lower Cook Inlet Winter Salt Water King Salmon Sport Fishery Management Plan by extending season to April 30.

Conservation zones surrounding The Anchor River, Ninilchik River, and Stariski Creek are in place starting April 1st in order to protect king salmon returning to their spawning grounds. However the earliest the Anchor River weir has been installed during the past 5 years was May 3rd, Crooked Creek May 29th, Ninilchik River June 1st and the Kenai River sonar, May 16th. ADF&G data confirm the rarity of significant numbers of fish entering the rivers before the 3rd week of May. Combined with the extremely low numbers of Cook Inlet king salmon intercepted by the saltwater recreational fishery South of the Anchor Point light, this Proposal's request to extend the "winter" fishery to April 30th is well-supported by the ample scientific data and years of fishery assessments.

CIRF AGREES WITH AND SUPPORTS THIS PROPOSAL.

PROPOSAL 21: Eliminate king salmon annual limit for Lower Cook Inlet marine fishery south of Anchor Point Light.

The 5 king salmon seasonal harvest limit was put in place decades ago. At the time the Board had little scientific evidence as to percent or number of wild Cook Inlet king salmon were present in the mixed-stock harvested by the Lower Cook Inlet saltwater recreational fishery. ADF&G has extensively and repeatedly studied the origin, abundance, migration patterns, growth, survival rates and distribution of Cook Inlet king salmon. Years of collected scientific data confirm the insignificant percentage of Cook Inlet king salmon in the mixed-stock harvest by the Lower Cook Inlet saltwater recreational fishery. Since 1975, ADF&G has released 7.5 million king salmon with Coded-Wire Tags in Cook Inlet. From 1998 to 2010, ADF&G released roughly 4,400,000 CWT king salmon in Cook Inlet. The numbers of CWT'd Cook Inlet king salmon recovered in the Lower Cook Inlet saltwater recreational fishery are consistently insignificant, while vast numbers have been recovered in-river.

Extensive review of the accumulated scientific data on CWT releases and recoveries establishes that the Lower Cook Inlet saltwater recreational fishery south Bluff Point has an insignificant impact on wild Cook Inlet king salmon stocks. Preliminary results from genetic studies confirm the CWT findings, as ADF&G has stated:

"Nonlocal feeding Chinook salmon from many stocks dominate both summer and winter harvests south of Bluff Point; therefore, the fishery does not pose a threat to conservation of Cook Inlet stocks or visiting nonlocal stocks."

Common-sense reasoning indicates that a mixed stock fishery, for which one or more specific stocks (e.g., wild Cook Inlet stocks) contributes only a small portion of the total harvest, may have little relative effect on the stock. While this agrees with intuition, scientific calculations provide objective modeling to support management action.

ADF&G recognizes that the prevalence of feeder kings in the sport fish harvest, combined with a lack of information pertaining to species specific angler effort preclude accurate evaluations of these fisheries. Especially when one considers that the Kachemak Bay Area Chinook Salmon Enhancement program's primary purpose is to provide Chinook salmon fishing opportunities in Kachemak Bay and provide an alternative to heavily fished wild-stocks. This Proposal seeks to remove the 5 king salmon seasonal limit for the Lower Cook Inlet saltwater recreational fishery and allow saltwater fisherman fishing south of Anchor Pt. a harvest limit of 2 kings per day, with no seasonal limit and no harvest card. The same regulation is in place for the vast majority of Alaska's saltwater recreational fishing zones. Southeast, residents 3 kings/day no seasonal limit. Prince William Sound, 2 kings/day no seasonal limit. Resurrection Bay, 2 kings/day May 1-Aug. 31, no seasonal limit. Alaska Peninsula, Aleutian Islands, and Kodiak Island, 2 kings/day no seasonal limit (except Bristol Bay Drainage) Northern Alaska, 3 kings/day no seasonal limit (except NW drainages).

CIRF AGREES WITH AND SUPPORTS THIS PROPOSAL.

PROPOSAL 22: Eliminate harvest record requirement for Alaska residents for king salmon in Lower Cook Inlet marine fishery south of Anchor Point Light.

This Proposal would be applicable to Alaska residents only. ADF&G in Southeast Alaska has provided Alaska residents with preferential regulations. Residents are allowed to harvest and possess more king salmon, sablefish, lingcod, non-pelagic rockfish, crab, shrimp, clams, scallops, and abalone than non-residents. The Board may instead wish to limit charter boat fisherman to 5 kings per season following the current established halibut regulations.

CIRF AGREES WITH AND SUPPORTS THIS PROPOSAL.

PROPOSAL 23:

Eliminate harvest record requirement for Alaska residents and Non-residents for king salmon in Lower Cook Inlet marine fishery south of Anchor Point Light.

CIRF AGREES WITH AND SUPPORTS THIS PROPOSAL.

PROPOSAL 24:

Eliminate harvest limit for king salmon harvested in Lower Cook Inlet marine fishery south of Anchor Point Light.

See comments for Proposal 21.

CIRF AGREES WITH AND SUPPORTS THIS PROPOSAL.

PROPOSAL 25:

Amend Lower Cook Inlet Winter Salt Water King Salmon Sport Fishery Management Plan to specify that the plan applies to king salmon of Cook Inlet spawning origin.

The stated purpose of the management plan under 5 AAC 58.060 is "to meet the Board of Fisheries' goal of slowing the growth in the sport harvest of king salmon in the salt waters of Lower Cook Inlet during the winter..." The purpose and stated goal of the management plan are vague and indefinite.

Currently, the management plan unnecessarily regulates a sport fishery harvest consisting primarily of non-spawning "feeder" kings that do not originate from Cook Inlet spawning aggregations. In fact, this mixed-stock fishery consists primarily of non-Cook Inlet feeder kings from vast hatchery releases outside Alaska.

This Proposal seeks to clarify the purpose and goal of the management plan in light of the best available scientific information. When the management plan was first implemented, the Board understandably adopted a precautionary approach, taking into account the then-existing uncertainties. In the ensuing years, those uncertainties have been greatly reduced by extensive scientific study. ADF&G recognizes that consistently small harvests of Cook Inlet hatchery releases in a mixed-stock fishery provide the best indication of the lack of importance of a fishery in influencing production of king salmon bound for Cook Inlet.

CIRF AGREES WITH AND SUPPORTS THIS PROPOSAL.

PROPOSAL 26:

Amend Lower Cook Inlet Winter Salt Water King Salmon Sport Fishery Management Plan to specify that the plan applies to king salmon of Cook Inlet spawning origin.

This Proposal would clarify the purpose and goal of the management plan. The current plan's Guideline Harvest Limit is unwarranted and inappropriate, particularly in light of the years of accumulated data demonstrating that this mixed-stock fishery has only insignificant catch of Cook Inlet stocks. As ADF&G has stated:

"Nonlocal feeding Chinook salmon from many stocks dominate both summer and winter harvests south of Bluff Point; therefore, the fishery does not pose a threat to conservation of Cook Inlet stocks or visiting nonlocal stocks."

ADF&G recognizes that consistently small harvests of Cook Inlet hatchery releases in a mixed-stock fishery provide the best indication of the lack of importance of this fishery in influencing production of king salmon bound for Cook Inlet. Extensive review of the accumulated scientific data on CWT releases and recoveries establishes that the Lower Cook Inlet saltwater recreational fishery south of Bluff Point has an insignificant impact on wild Cook Inlet king salmon stocks. Common-sense reasoning indicates that a mixed stock fishery, for which one or more specific stocks (e.g., wild Cook Inlet stocks) contributes only a small portion of the total harvest, may have little relative effect on the stock. While this agrees with intuition, scientific calculations provide objective modeling to support management action.

CIRF AGREES WITH AND SUPPORTS THIS PROPOSAL.

PROPOSAL 27: Amend Lower Cook Inlet Winter Salt Water King Salmon Sport Fishery Management Plan by removing the guideline harvest level.

This Proposal seeks to remove the guideline harvest level (GHL) of 3,000 king salmon from the management plan. The GHL is outdated, unnecessary, overly broad, and not proportionally related to advancement of conservation standards for mixed-stock salmon fisheries.

As ADF&G has stated:

"Nonlocal feeding Chinook salmon from many stocks dominate both summer and winter harvests south of Bluff Point; therefore, the fishery does not pose a threat to conservation of Cook Inlet stocks or visiting nonlocal stocks."

ADF&G recognizes that consistently small harvests of Cook Inlet hatchery releases in a mixed-stock fishery provide the best indication of the lack of importance of this fishery in influencing production of king salmon bound for Cook Inlet. Extensive review of the accumulated scientific data on CWT releases and recoveries establishes that the Lower Cook Inlet saltwater recreational fishery south of Bluff Point has an insignificant impact on wild Cook Inlet king salmon stocks.

Common-sense reasoning indicates that a mixed stock fishery, for which one or more specific stocks (e.g., wild Cook Inlet stocks) contributes only a small portion of the total harvest, may have little relative effect on the stock. While this agrees with intuition, scientific calculations provide objective modeling to support management action.

In similarly situated mixed-stock fisheries, ADF&G has considered the consistently low number of CWTs recovered and subsequently low estimated levels of exploitation, and concluded there is no recommendation for further studies. This recreational fishery warrants similar action.

CIRF AGREES WITH AND SUPPORTS THIS PROPOSAL.

CIRF appreciates the Board members' considerable time and effort in addressing the difficult decisions before them. CIRF members look forward to meeting and discussing these proposals with members of the Board of Fisheries at the upcoming meeting in Homer.

Peter Zimmerman CIRF spokesperson

Cook Inlet Recreational Fishermen

C/O PETE ZIMMERMAN, SPOKESMAN • PO BOX 3411 • HOMER, AK • 99603

<u>CIRF@TWC.com</u>

CIRF Associates, Advisors & Supporters

Cook Inlet Recreational Fishermen (CIRF) is a grass-roots sportfishing association formed to provide Alaskan anglers a unified voice in management actions that affect the saltwater king salmon sport fishery in Lower Cook Inlet.

CIRF is comprised of Alaska residents who strongly believe in responsible management for sustainable fisheries. We share fishing knowledge and techniques. We responsibly process, prepare, and consume the fish we harvest.

Feeder king salmon are an abundant resource in Lower Cook Inlet throughout the year. The vast majority of these fish are from hatchery enhancement projects in SE Alaska, British Columbia, Washington & Oregon. These fish are opportunistic feeders thriving in the bait-rich marine waters of Lower Cook Inlet. Anglers greatly value this natural, healthy, high protein salmon resource and the year-round small boat sport fishing opportunities made available by extensive and successful king salmon enhancement projects.

CIRF looks forward to providing significant comments and supporting authority to facilitate the Board in its tasks, and respectfully requests your careful review and consideration.

CIRF Associates, Advisors & Supporters:

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	NAME	PHONE / EMAIL	years fishing Alaska
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7)	HER MISHETT	3993566P03 1571 Hans	30
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CIRF Associates, Advisors & Supporters

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	NAME	PHONE / EMAIL	fishing	
108)	LAMRY CATZANIA	3993520 POB3395 Hom	Alaska	7
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Table 1.-Estimated harvest below and above river mile 9 (RM 9) for Kenai River late-run Chinook salmon, 1986-2012.

				nortality							
	Below KM 9							Above RM 9			
Year	Deep Creek marine sport	Comm setnet	Comm driftnet	Personal use	Subsistence	Sport	Total	Sport	Hook relative, mortality	Total	CV
1986	378	13.619	1.109				15,097	9,872	316	10.188	0.05
1987	731	14,536	2,731				17.998	13,100	123	13.223	(1 () <u>(</u>)
1988	892	8,834	1.330				11.056	19,595	176	19,871	0.05
1680	821	7,498	1)		22		8,341	9,49}	88	9,779	tern.
1990	963	2.843	373	91	13		4.283	6,897	(,0	0,906	(+ () ⁻
1661	1.023	3,361	145	130	288		4.94=	7,903	10	7,019	0.05
1992	1.269	7.30.3	325	50	402		9,410	7,556	234	7.790	ti gr
1993	1.700	9,672	451	129	27		11,979	17,775	478	18,253	11114
Jaidt	1.121	10,700	270	13	392		12.502	17.837	572	18,409	0.(4
1995	1,241	8.291	314	30	546		10.528	12,509	472	13.081	0.05
Juag	1.223	7,944	219	45	294		9,725	8.112	337	8,449	0.00
ųų~	1.759	7,780	293	339	21.		10,197	12,755	57(1	13.325	0.06
998	1.070	3,405	100	271	2		5.037	7.515	595	8.110	0.07
999	(902	6.591	345	488	4	1.170	9.110	12.425	682	13.107	0.08
H(E)	631	2.531	162	410	64	831	4.571	14,391	400	14.890	0.05
2001	552	4,128	371	638	8	1,336	7.034	15.144	825	15.969	0.07
2002	250	0.511	249	(s; tr)	t.	1,020	9.558	10.578	665	11.343	0.07
903	120	10,174	7.14	1.016	11	823	12,888	16,120	1.803	17,923	0.09
1004	996	14.897	Site	702	14)	2.386	19,997	14.988	1,019	16,007	0.07
005	624	15.183	1.103	775	13	2.287	19,984	15.927	1.267	17,194	0.08
ORS	563	6,840	631	1.034	11	3.322	12.400	12,490	830	13,320	0.08
th)	478	8.445	547	1.569	t,	1.750	12.735	9,590	670	10,360	0.07
9008	310	5,203	392	1.362	15	1.011	8.293	10,128	370	10,498	0.08
(1()9	154	3.839	515	1.189	4	1.132	6,833	7.904	626	8.530	0.0
010	335	4,567	323	865	21	445	6,556	6,762	264	7.026	0.06
011	528	5,596	356	1.243	5	458	8.186	6,894	479	7,373	0.0
012	30	484	115	!)	()	2	630	101	95	190	1) ()()

Assumes 60% of Deep Creek marine sport harvest is of Kenni-origin fish

Harvest Breakdown Provided by CIRF Source Above ADF&G Fishery Manuscript No. 13-02 Kenai king salmon harvest 2002-2011, average percentage of total harvest by user group 10 Year Average 23,643 Kings

	Deep Creek Marine Sport Anchor Pt. North	Driftnet	Personal Use	Setnet	Kenai River Sport Anglers	Mortality	
<i>j</i>	436 (1.8%)	577 (2.4° o)	1,039 (4.4°°)	8,125 (34,4%)	12.667 (53.6%)	799 (3.4%)	

Kenai River fish only, based on 2010–2011 genetic sampling of commercial setnet fishery (Appendix B).

Assumes 60% of commercial driftnet harvest is of Kenai-origin fish.