

Submitted by Stephanie Quinn-Davidson at the request of member Orville Huntington.

January 18, 2019

**Alaska Board of Fisheries Statement Acknowledgement of the Religious and Ceremonial Use of King Salmon by Alaska Native Peoples of the Yukon River**

At its 2019 Arctic-Yukon-Kuskokwim meeting, the Alaska Board of Fisheries (board) heard testimony on Proposal 94, which sought to allow the taking of the first king salmon entering the Yukon River for religious and ceremonial uses by Alaska Native peoples. In particular, the proponent sought to create an exemption for Alaska Native peoples to harvest king salmon for religious and ceremonial use during times of king salmon conservation when closures may be in place. The proponent noted that this was not an allocation proposal, but a rather a necessary recognition of the unique spiritual relationship all Alaska Native peoples along the Yukon River hold with king salmon. With Alaska Native people citing the ceremonial and religious use of king salmon since time immemorial, public testimony revealed unanimous support from fishermen throughout the Yukon River. The proponent stated in his written public testimony that these “First Salmon Ceremonies” celebrate “determination, renewal, prosperity, and most importantly, honor the creator... there are fish dances and songs that honor king salmon.” The board heard testimony that king salmon are *family* – relatives who are honored and revered by Alaska Native peoples along the Yukon River, their connection to king salmon is at the core of who they are as Alaska Native peoples, and essential to their spiritual, cultural, and physical well-being.

The board recognizes that Alaska Native peoples’ spiritual relationship with Yukon River king salmon is challenging to recognize within the western legal framework and regulatory structure. Therefore, the board would like to formally acknowledge the importance of ceremonial and religious uses of king salmon for many Alaska Native people along the Yukon River and supports efforts by the Alaska Department of Fish and Game to provide fishing opportunity on the first king salmon returning to the river, when run sizes allow, and honor the taking of king salmon so that “First Salmon Ceremonies” may be practiced, taught, and handed down as they have been since time immemorial.