

PROPOSAL 92

5 AAC 01.220. Lawful gear and gear specifications; and 5 AAC 05.331. Gillnet specifications and operations.

Restrict gillnet mesh size to a maximum of 6 inches in Districts 4, 5, and 6 subsistence and commercial salmon fisheries, as follows:

Restrict gillnet mesh to a maximum of 6 inches in Districts 4, 5 and 6 for subsistence and commercial.

What is the issue you would like the board to address and why? ~6" mesh maximum: Large mesh net fishing has had a detrimental effect on the stock composition and quality of escapements for Yukon River Chinook salmon and targets the larger and female Chinook salmon. There continues to be poor returns of Yukon River salmon since 1998. This has led to conservation concerns on the spawning grounds. Many of these returns have not allowed subsistence users a reasonable opportunity to meet their subsistence salmon needs. The use of the larger gillnets has changed, and will continue to change the composition of the Chinook stocks harvested. Fishermen in Canada and the U.S. Yukon River have repeatedly noted that the returning Chinook salmon are getting smaller and conservation measures are needed to protect the larger fish that in turn protects the genetic variability and loss of the older age classes of the Yukon River Chinook salmon stocks. Despite some better numbers of Chinook salmon in the last few years there is little data at all able to indicate scientifically where our decline in the older age classes of Chinook has been heading. Ocean abundance of juvenile king salmon has been proving to be one of our best indicators and that is predicting lower runs for 2019 and 2020. The use of the current 7 ½" gillnets is targeting the largest Chinook left in any significant number in the Yukon River. These are the fish with the best potential to bring back the larger fish with the most eggs and therefore the run sizes of past years. 6" nets still catch some large fish but does not target them near to the same extent as 7 ½" does. The differences in catches in the two net sizes are readily apparent for all to see.

Some lower river District 1, 2 and 3 representatives have not expressed support for this proposal for themselves but have stated they would back the upper districts in getting this passed for themselves. Our AC has gotten support from most representatives of Districts 4, 5, and 6 talked to so far. Having it apply to all districts was rejected due to lack of support. Nets in the 7" range were considered in past Board cycles however a number of reasons were discovered why they were not suitable.

1. A USFWS study (An Investigation of the Potential Effects of Selective Exploitation on the Demography and Productivity of Yukon River Chinook Salmon, Bromaghin, Nielson, and Hard) showed 7.5" mesh to be ineffective at reversing declining size trends and can actually contribute to the problem.

2. Current ongoing mesh size studies by ADF&G and anecdotal info from fishermen river wide show nets of the 7" range actually catching more fish and more lbs of Chinook than the more normally used 8-9" nets and the smaller 6" range nets. Fishermen in the upper river commonly are reporting most Chinook going through the larger nets. This is clearly because of the lack of the larger fish at present. Targeting the next available largest Chinook age class with 7" range nets will only further damage the run.

PROPOSED BY: Tanana Rampart Manley and Fairbanks Fish and Game Advisory Committees
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