

PROPOSAL 277

5 AAC 29.112. Management of chum salmon troll fishery.

Add the Crawfish Inlet Terminal Harvest Area and West Crawfish Inlet to waters that may be opened to a hatchery chum salmon troll fishery, as follows:

5 AAC 29.112(b)(3) and (4) are added to read:

(b)(3) in waters of the Crawfish Inlet Terminal Harvest Area south of 56°47.14' N. lat. in Cedar Pass, northeast of a line from 56°43.83' N. lat., 135°16.13' W. long. to 56°43.49' N. lat., 135°15.50' W. long. in Middle Channel, and north of a line from 56°43.01' N. lat., 135°12.93' W. long. to 56°43.25' N. lat., 135°12.18' W. long. in Walker Channel.

(b)(4) in the portions of West Crawfish Inlet, sub-district 113-32; as determined by the department for conservation management reasons.

What is the issue you would like the board to address and why? The Crawfish Inlet chum salmon program has a specific terminal harvest area defined in 5 AAC 33.380 (THA established January 2018) for troll which does not include West Crawfish Inlet (3 miles distant connected by Cedar Pass). The expectation in 2017 was the chum salmon would return to Crawfish Inlet through the islets and waterways leading into the inlet. In the summer of 2018, it was learned that most of the chum salmon entered Crawfish Inlet via West Crawfish Inlet. Furthermore, the chum salmon held in West Crawfish Inlet for days before migrating to their release location. This provided an outstanding opportunity for trollers in 2018 when they caught 250,000 chum salmon primarily in West Crawfish Inlet. In 2019, again the chum salmon flooded into West Crawfish Inlet in early August and trollers began harvesting chum salmon in good numbers for two days until the 'coho salmon closure' precluded them from fishing in West Crawfish Inlet.

Much like the Deep Inlet chum salmon fishery, the chum salmon hold in Sitka Sound and Eastern Channel during sunny dry periods where the trollers fish on large schools prior to the chum salmon moving into Deep Inlet. Similarly, Eastern Channel has a provision for troll harvest during the coho salmon troll closure. There is precedent for this request in 5 AAC 29.112.

The Northern Southeast Regional Aquaculture Association (NSRAA) designated the Crawfish Inlet chum salmon program to be managed for Troll priority from 2017-2025, in effect allowing six days of trolling and one day for purse seine gear mop-up fishery. Priority was given to trollers due to the significant troll imbalance, vis-à-vis the Southeast Allocation Plan (5 AAC 33.364). It was unforeseen that the chum salmon would not go directly to the terminal area, but rather stall in West Crawfish Inlet during their migration to their terminal release site. In 2019 a second unforeseen event was the department coho salmon troll closure coinciding with hundreds of thousands of chum salmon schooling in West Crawfish Inlet.

Trollers will lose fishing opportunity during troll coho salmon closures and the SE Enhanced Alaska Allocation imbalance will worsen, with trollers being even further below their allocation range. If there is no provision for trollers to harvest during the coho salmon closure, these chum salmon will eventually move to Crawfish Inlet and be caught by seine or troll. However, it is important to note that once the chum salmon enter the terminal area the trollers are less effective at harvesting them, and therefore more chum salmon will be caught by the seine fleet.

PROPOSED BY: Northern Southeast Regional Aquaculture Association (Formerly ACR 1)
