

Central District Drift Gillnet Fishery Management Plan (13 proposals)

**PROPOSAL 123**

**5 AAC 21.353. Central District Drift Gillnet Fishery Management Plan.**

Rename Drift Gillnet Area 2 to the "Conservation and Northern District Allocation Sanctuary Area", as follows:

Under the Central District Drift Gillnet Fishery Management Plan part (g) item (2) rename the "Drift Gillnet Area 2" to the "Conservation and Northern District Allocation Sanctuary Area"

**What is the issue you would like the board to address and why?** The northern district sockeye and coho commercial set net and sport fisheries have been highly restricted since 2012. Northern district user groups in recent years have had restricted fishing for all Northern Cook Inlet species that have escapement goals.

The Department is not taking the direction of the preamble of the Central District Drift Gillnet Management Plan. "The department shall manage the commercial drift gillnet fishery to minimize the harvest of Northern District and Kenai Coho in order to provide sport and guided sport fishermen a reasonable opportunity to harvest these salmon stocks over the entire run, as measured by the frequency of inriver restrictions."

Cook Inlet is being exclusively managed for the Kenai River sockeye, as evidenced in area wide emergency orders for the drift fishery, which have frequently been implemented, at times when northern district streams are being restricted, due to low Coho and Sockeye abundance.

Attaining the optimum escapement goal for Kenai River sockeye, should not take priority over attaining minimum escapement goals of Northern District stocks. If no board action is taken, northern stocks will continue to suffer. The Coho sport fishery on the Little Susitna and Jim Creek (2 of the most participated in fisheries in the Matsu Valley) have largely been restricted since 2012. The Cook Inlet commercial fishery is a mix stock fishery; northern bound fish need more protection. Reasonable opportunity to harvest Coho Salmon on Jim Creek and the Little Susitna River for the duration of the run has not existed consistently in the last 11 years.

Establishing Area 2 as a sanctuary / corridor for northern bound fish, allows for the protection of northern stocks and does not restrict commercial fishing time for the drifters.

**PROPOSED BY:** Ben Allen

(EF-F19-056)

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**PROPOSAL 124**

**5 AAC 21.353. Central District Drift Gillnet Fishery Management Plan.**

Amend the purpose of the *Central District Drift Gillnet Fishery Management Plan* to include inriver users, as follows:

(a) The purpose of this management plan is to ensure adequate escapement and harvestable surplus of salmon into the Northern District drainages and to provide management guidelines to

the department. The department shall manage the commercial drift gillnet fishery to minimize the harvest of

- (1) Northern District bound salmon in order to provide all inriver users
- (2) and Kenai River coho salmon in order to provide sport and guided sport fishermen
- (3) a reasonable opportunity to harvest these salmon stocks over the entire run, as measured by the frequency of inriver restrictions. The department shall manage the Central District commercial drift gillnet fishery as described in this section.

**What is the issue you would like the board to address and why?** Inadequate allocation of harvestable salmon for sport, personal use, and guided sport in the Susitna River drainage. The population of inriver anglers in the Mat-Su Borough has grown along with the census figure of over 100,000 local residents. The increased demand for harvestable salmon is not currently being met.

**PROPOSED BY:** Alaska Outdoor Council

(EF-F19-073)

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**PROPOSAL 125**

**5 AAC 21.353. Central District Drift Gillnet Fishery Management Plan.**

Amend the *Central District Drift Gillnet Fishery Management Plan* and include inseason assessments, as follows:

Re-write: c) From June 19th until July 19th there will be two regular Monday and Thursday fishing periods from 7:00 until 7:00pm. There will be two (2) restricted openers for drift fishing to Area 1. Between July 6th and July 15th, the Department shall use the restrictions to the best of their ability during this time frame to pass Sockeye Salmon into the Northern District. If actual Kenai run data warrants closing the sockeye salmon drift fishery due to extra low escapements in the Kenai River, the fishery may be closed after the 15th of July by EO. No additional fishing during this time frame, except for possible over escapement concerns which would allow Expanded or Corridor Openings only

d) Starting on July 20th, and ending on August 3rd, the drift fleet will be limited to one Area 1 opening per week and one Expanded Kenai or Kasilof section per week, every Monday and Thursday from 7:00am until 7:00pm, and until the season is closed by EO. This does not apply to Chinitna Bay. If minimum sockeye escapement, is not physically counted at RM 19, within 200,000 fish of the minimum escapement by the end of the day on July 22nd, Management will close the drift fleet and other commercial and sport fisheries as well, until the minimum escapement for sockeye salmon in the Kenai River is met. Once the minimum escapement has been met, the drift and all other fisheries will re-open on a normal basis. If sockeye escapements on the Kenai have exceeded the maximum escapement before the 1st of August. The fishery will be opened to Area 1 once per week, and at least 3 Expanded Kenai and/or Kasilof section openers, including the Anchor Point expanded section fishery. Management can issue any additional closures or opening by EO during this specified period, if needed at any time to prevent under or over escapements, just never more than two (2) Area 1 openings in any week.

f) From August 3rd until closed by EO, the drift fishery will be open every Thursday from 7:00am until 7:00pm in Areas 1, 3 or 4. Mondays the drift fishery will only be open in Areas 3 and 4. Chinitna Bay will remain closed unless opened by EO.

**What is the issue you would like the board to address and why?** After many years of drift fishing in Upper Cook Inlet the runs have become smaller in actual size, as well as run strength over the last 30 years. Many factors are involved, but the biggest is problem is completely managing a run based on forecasts, and not knowing how many spawners there actually are. The regulations are beyond cumbersome and ineffective at lending good management in Upper Cook Inlet. Some of the politics must come out of Cook Inlet for it to survive. The Kenai and its ecosystem are being destroyed. Best decisions are made in real time with real data in front of you. Forecasts are great, but as we have seen repeatedly they are rarely as accurate as we would hope. We need fair date parameters to start with, and then let management do their job as the run materializes. Forecasting and then managing on projected run strengths is not a good management practice and in my opinion has led to the weaknesses we are currently experiencing.

**PROPOSED BY:** Mark & Elbridge Walker (EF-F19-110)

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### **PROPOSAL 126**

#### **5 AAC 21.353. Central District Drift Gillnet Fishery Management Plan.**

Close the Central District drift gillnet fishery corridor, as follows:

Close the corridor to commercial fishing for Northbound fish to Upper Cook Inlet.

**What is the issue you would like the board to address and why?** With the corridor being closed to commercial fishing the take of the fish headed to the Susitna River system will be minimized. This will allow more fish into the Susitna River and streams up the river system so more people that lived in the Mat-Su Valley are able to fish in their backyards again. This will also rear more fish and in the long run put more fish in the whole of Cook Inlet for all user groups. This is an allocative proposal but it will help all users in the long run.

**PROPOSED BY:** Neil DeWitt (EF-F19-044)

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### **PROPOSAL 127**

#### **5 AAC 21.353. Central District Drift Gillnet Fishery Management Plan.**

Amend the *Central District Drift Gillnet Fishery Management Plan* to allocate 60-80% of northern-bound sockeye and coho salmon harvests to Northern Cook Inlet fisheries, as follows:

5 AAC 21.353. Central District Drift Gillnet Fishery Management Plan. (a) The purpose of this management plan is to ensure adequate escapement of salmon into the Northern District drainages and to provide management guidelines to the department. The department shall manage the commercial drift gillnet fishery to minimize the harvest of Northern District and Kenai River coho salmon in order to provide sport and guided sport fishermen a reasonable opportunity to harvest these salmon stocks over the entire run, as measured by the frequency of inriver restrictions, **and**

**to provide Northern Cook Inlet user groups an allocation of 60-80% of Northern bound Upper Cook Inlet sockeye and coho salmon harvests. Consistent with providing this harvest allocation,** the department shall manage the Central District commercial drift gillnet fishery as follows:

**What is the issue you would like the board to address and why?** The Central District Drift Gillet Fishery Management Plan, after providing for escapement needs, has provided inadequate passage of Northern sockeye and coho salmon to provide reasonable harvest opportunity for Northern Cook Inlet User Groups. Northern sport, commercial, and personal use fisheries have been restricted and/ or closed and subsistence fisheries have experienced low harvests when the largest share of Northern bound sockeye and coho salmon has been harvested by the Central District drift gill net fishery. Matanuska Valley Advisory Committee, therefore respectfully requests a harvest allocation of Northern bound sockeye and coho salmon to provide shared reasonable harvest opportunity for Northern Cook Inlet user groups.

When considering the proposed allocation, or a board revised allocation level, the committee encourages the board to compare salmon harvests levels of all Upper Cook Inlet user groups.

When determining reasonable harvest opportunity for Northern Cook Inlet users, the advisory committee requests utilization of the Board adopted approach listed in Management Guidelines for Allocating Southeast Alaska Pink, Chum, and Sockeye Salmon Between Commercial Net Fisheries. - From 5 AAC 33.363:

(c) As a general matter, the harvest of fish stocks will be managed primarily for the benefit of the user groups within the district to which those stocks are bound. The board recognizes that biological, social, and economic factors and the current regulatory structure may result in the need to harvest such stocks outside the district for which they are bound.

The committee encourages managers and user groups to provide suggestions how to structure the drift gill net fishery to allow reasonable harvests of Northern sockeye and coho stocks in Northern District waters while maintaining drift harvest levels of Central District sockeye.

**PROPOSED BY:** Matanuska Valley Fish and Game Advisory Committee (HQ-F19-039)  
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**PROPOSAL 128**

**5 AAC 21.353. Central District Drift Gillnet Fishery Management Plan.**

Amend the *Central District Drift Gillnet Fishery Management Plan* to remove the provision to minimize the commercial harvest of Northern District and Kenai River coho salmon and add a provision for reasonable opportunity for common property fishery harvest, as follows:

5 AAC 21.353. Central District Drift Gillnet Fishery Management Plan. (a) The purpose of this management plan is to ensure adequate escapement of salmon into the Northern District drainages and to provide management guidelines to the department. [THE DEPARTMENT SHALL MANAGE THE COMMERCIAL DRIFT GILLNET FISHERY TO MINIMIZE THE HARVEST OF NORTHERN DISTRICT AND KENAI RIVER COHO SALMON IN ORDER TO PROVIDE

SPORT AND GUIDED SPORT FISHERMEN A REASONABLE OPPORTUNITY TO HARVEST THESE SALMON STOCKS OVER THE ENTIRE RUN, AS MEASURED BY THE FREQUENCY OF INRIVER RESTRICTIONS. **The department shall also manage the common property fisheries with a reasonable opportunity to harvest salmon resources.** The department shall manage the Central District commercial drift gillnet fishery as described in this section.

**What is the issue you would like the board to address and why?** Delete unnecessary language in the Cook Inlet salmon management plans that restricts the flexibility for the managers to manage on a real time basis based on in season abundance to harvest the surplus salmon. This language has resulted in tens of millions of harvestable salmon going unharvested and negatively affects the commercial fishing industry, communities, national food source, economies and also decreases future salmon production resulting from the effects of over escapement. The sports fishery has a reasonable opportunity for the fact that salmon run in the thousands of streams in the Cook Inlet drainage from May to October and most all are open to sports fishing. If one system is not open for escapement reasons a sports fisherman has many other system they can fish. In comparison the commercial fisherman, when restricted or closed down, has no other area to fish because they are restricted to the areas and their gear type by their limited entry permit they own. There is unfair and has no parity in reasonable opportunity between commercial and recreational fisheries under the current management plans. There are no conservation concerns on coho and most coho runs are harvested well below acceptable harvest rates, with many harvest being less than 10%.

**PROPOSED BY:** Central Peninsula Fish and Game Advisory Committee (HQ-F19-098)  
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**PROPOSAL 129**

**5 AAC 21.353. Central District Drift Gillnet Fishery Management Plan.**

Allow the commissioner to limit Central District drift gillnets to less than 150 and 200 fathoms in length and 29 meshes in depth, as follows:

Amend the regulation to provide management authority to ADF&G to limit net length to less than 150 and 200 fathoms and net depth to 29 rather than 45 inches.

**What is the issue you would like the board to address and why?** By regulation, a commercial drift gillnet in the Central District commercial fishery may not be more than 150 fathoms in length and 45 meshes in depth. The sole exception as specified in 5 AAC 21.333 which allows two Cook Inlet drift gillnet CFEC permit holders to fish concurrently from the same vessel and jointly operate 200 fathoms of drift gillnet gear, and a person holding two permits may operate 200 fathoms of gear. Current regulations do not allow for ADF&G to limit drift gillnets to shorter lengths or depths. This limits the management flexibility to provide for additional fishing opportunities under conditions when a full drift net fishery risks overharvest of specific salmon stocks, particularly during periods of low abundance.

**PROPOSED BY:** Kenai River Sportfishing Association (HQ-F19-126)  
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**PROPOSAL 130**

**5 AAC 21.353. Central District Drift Gillnet Fishery Management Plan.**

Allow commercial fishing with drift gillnets in the Chinitna Bay subdistrict starting August 15, as follows:

Set an opening date of August 15th for drift fishing in the Chinitna Bay Subdistrict. There is very little directed effort on the chum run before that and by August 15th a majority of the chum run has gone by.

**What is the issue you would like the board to address and why?** In recent years, the Chinitna Bay subdistrict has been opened to drift gillnetting only after the department gets an aerial survey of the streams to verify chum escapement. The problem with this approach is that weather has hindered these surveys and the surveys have to be coordinated with lower Inlet surveys. Also, experienced biologists have stated that aerial surveys are the least accurate tool possible for management purposes. This has led to Chinitna Bay remaining closed only because of lack of information. Last year, the department waited so long that there was only a single day of decent fishing as the run had already passed. A large number of very high value coho went unharvested because the fishery wasn't open yet.

**PROPOSED BY:** Teague Vanek (EF-F19-009)  
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**PROPOSAL 131**

**5 AAC 21.353. Central District Drift Gillnet Fishery Management Plan.**

Remove restrictions to the drift gillnet fishery so that the fishery would occur during two inlet-wide fishing periods per week, as follows:

Remove all restrictions that prohibit Inlet-wide regular openings two days per week throughout the season for drift gillnetting in Cook Inlet. Emergency Order Authority would still be available for the department, should there be conservation concerns in years of low abundance.

**What is the issue you would like the board to address and why?** The restrictions imposed on the drift fleet, especially for the second half of July, have ruined the orderly harvest of fish and have taken away the opportunity to harvest and profit from abundant salmon stocks. Our primary money fish, Kenai and Kasilof sockeye, have been grossly over-escaped, and many other healthy stocks of all species go practically unharvested or grossly underutilized. That our state, which really needs raw fish taxes and has high unemployment, would allow this resource to go so desperately underutilized is unconscionable.

**PROPOSED BY:** Teague Vanek (EF-F19-010)  
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**PROPOSAL 132**

**5 AAC 21.353. Central District Drift Gillnet Fishery Management Plan.**

Remove restrictions to the drift gillnet fishery so that the fishery would occur during two inlet-wide fishing periods per week, as follows:

Two twelve-hour openings inlet-wide.

Restricted areas, short notification have added expense and cut production. Drifters ice their fish now. Processors, drifters, and consumers will benefit.

**What is the issue you would like the board to address and why?** Drift fleet time and area.

If this problem is not solved, there will be cost to fleet, processors, unharvested surplus of multiple species.

**PROPOSED BY:** John McCombs (HQ-F19-031)  
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**PROPOSAL 133**

**5 AAC 21.353. Central District Drift Gillnet Fishery Management Plan.**

Amend the *Central District Drift Gillnet Fishery Management Plan* with additional mandatory area restrictions to regular fishing periods, as follows:

The Changes to the existing plan are as follows:

(A)(iv) Drift Gillnet Area 1; [NOTWITHSTANDING THE PROVISIONS OF SUBPARAGRAPH (d)(2)(A) OF THIS SECTION, ONE REGULAR 12-HOUR FISHING PERIOD FROM JULY 16 THROUGH JULY 31 MAY OCCUR IN THE CENTRAL DISTRICT INSTEAD OF IN DRIFT GILLNET AREA 1;]

(e) From August 1 through August 15, [THERE ARE NO MANDATORY AREA RESTRICTIONS TO REGULAR FISHING PERIODS]

**(1) fishing during both regular 12 hour fishing periods per week will be restricted to one or more of the following sections and areas: (A) Expanded Kenai Section: (B) Expanded Kasilof Section (C) Anchor Point Section (D) Drift Gillnet Area 1,** except that if the Upper Subdistrict set gillnet fishery is closed under 5 AAC 21.310(b)(2)(C)9iii), or the department determines that less than one percent of the seasons total drift gillnet sockeye salmon harvest has been taken per fishing period for two consecutive fishing periods in the drift gillnet fishery, regular fishing periods will be restricted to Drift Gillnet Area 3 and 4. [IN THIS SUBSECTION "FISHING PERIOD" MEANS A TIME PERIOD OPEN TO COMMERCIAL FISHING AS MEASURED BY A 24-HOUR CALENDAR DAY FROM 12:01 AM UNTIL 11:59 P.M.]

**(2) additional fishing time under this subsection is allowed only in one or more of the following sections: (A) Expanded Kenai Section: (B) Expanded Kasilof Section: (C) Anchor Point Section.**

(f) From August 16 until closed by emergency order, Drift Gillnet Areas 3 and 4 are open for fishing during regular fishing periods.

**What is the issue you would like the board to address and why?** Amend the *Central District Drift Gillnet Fishery Management Plan* in order to increase passage of salmon into the Northern District. This proposal would eliminate the option for a District wide opening during the July 16

through July 31 period and would further replace District wide openings from August 1 through August 15 with more restricted fishing opportunities.

**PROPOSED BY:** Mat-Su Borough Fish and Wildlife Commission/Mike Wood (HQ-F19-046)  
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**PROPOSAL 134**

**5 AAC 21.353. Central District Drift Gillnet Fishery Management Plan.**

Add Drift Gillnet Area 1 to the list of sections that are allowed to be fished during additional fishing time July 16–31 in the *Central District Drift Gillnet Fishery Management Plan*, as follows:

5 AAC 21.353.(d)(4) additional fishing time under this subsection is allowed only in one or more of the following sections:

- (A) Expanded Kenai Section **and Area 1**;
- (B) Expanded Kasilof Section **and Area 1**;
- (C) Anchor Point Section **or Area 1**.

**What is the issue you would like the board to address and why?** This proposed change would add Area 1 to the Expanded Kenai, Kasilof and Anchor Point sections. This provides some additional areas to harvest salmon. At this time of the year, there are harvestable surpluses of sockeye, chum and pink salmon.

**PROPOSED BY:** United Cook Inlet Drift Association (HQ-F19-076)  
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**PROPOSAL 135**

**5 AAC 21.353. Central District Drift Gillnet Fishery Management Plan.**

Allow one additional regular fishing period in the Central District drift gillnet fishery July 24–31, as follows:

5 AAC 21.353 (d)(2)(A)(iv) Drift Gillnet Area 1; notwithstanding the provisions of subparagraph (d)(2)(A) of this section, **two** [ONE] regular 12-hour fishing periods from July **24** [16] through July 31 may occur in the Central District instead of Drift Gillnet Area 1.

**What is the issue you would like the board to address and why?** In recent years, the drift gillnet fleet has been restricted to two regular opening in Drift Gillnet Area 1 during the July 16-31 time frame. This proposal would provide for one additional, inlet-wide opening per week.

By late July, the northern-bound sockeye and coho are north of the Central District. There are harvestable sockeye, chum and pink salmon stocks available.

In even years, by July 20-22 the pink salmon stocks are entering the Kenai River. There are harvestable surpluses of chum and pink salmon available in the Central District.

**PROPOSED BY:** United Cook Inlet Drift Association (HQ-F19-077)  
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