

Eva Burk Personal BOF Testimony

Feb 2023

My name is Eva Dawn Burk. I grew up commercial and subsistence fishing with my family on the Tanana River near Manley Hot Springs and Nenana. My family has been fishing in the same place for 5 generations now. What we are witnessing today began many years ago. In the late 80s, commercial fishing began to collapse and my family was forced to move into the village and find other employment, largely abandoning our fish camp. Now, here we are and not only is commercial fishing obsolete but so is subsistence fishing. For the amount of time and resources it takes to go to fish camp, we are essentially paying for an expensive camping trip. We returned home for the past few years with very little to share. In fact, for three years now I have driven over a thousand miles to obtain sockeye salmon from commercial fishermen from Kenai and Bristol Bay, as well as from friends along the Copper River. It takes a lot of resources to do that, not all of our people can. We're not the only rural Alaskans suffering from overfishing and mismanagement. Salmon are getting smaller and fewer across a lot of Alaskan waters.

My family and community's subsistence needs are not being met. Subsistence fishing is supposed to be prioritized over all other uses. For many years now, we have had a chronic inability, despite the use of specific management measures, to meet our subsistence needs. For many decades now, we have known that the AYK salmon migrate through Area M. If you look at the physical oceanography, there are major currents that run through Area M carrying nutrients and fish with them. All of the genetic studies done to date show significant presence of CWAK chum. We do not have the time and resources to conduct more studies. We know most salmon, with the exception of Bristol Bay sockeye for now, are experiencing negative health impacts and population declines. The state of Alaska, BOF, has statutory obligations, under AS 16.05.258 Subsistence Use and Allocation of Fish and Game, to manage sustainable salmon and mixed stock fisheries. We need to take management actions to preserve our wild stocks of Alaskan salmon.

I support Proposal 140 to reduce commercial fishing time in Area M. I oppose all proposals that wish to seek increased fishing time.

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Although I commend the fishermen for standing down in 2022 to allow chum to pass. I would remind us that they had that option in 2021 but instead we saw record catches of chum in Area M. This area is one of high value to ADFG and fisheries is the second largest industry in Alaska next to oil and gas. This amount of economic pressure is very intense and I'm sure it influences decision-making. I will again emphasize the legal obligation to adopt regulations eliminating consumptive uses, other than subsistence uses. Like my family and many others, we have learned to adapt to the lack of commercial fishing and I hope others can learn to as well.

My son asked me why we can't go to our fish camp? I tried to explain that it was illegal to fish in our eddy anymore. That we have to fly fish in now even though we're right next to a river that used to be full of fish.

When we take king salmon out of the cupboard or freezer, it is a few years old now. We don't want to waste it and we want to be sure we share with others, especially Elders. In the summer, some of our kids ask, "Why can't we have fresh salmon for dinner?" Instead I reach into the freezer, grab a fish that comes from over six hundred miles away, and say, "Let's try to be grateful for what we have and pray things change soon."