

PROPOSAL 11

5 AAC 06.361. Nushagak-Mulchatna River King Salmon Management Plan and 5 AAC 67.022. Special provisions for season, bag, possession, and size limits, and methods and means in the Bristol Bay Area.

Make numerous amendments to the Nushagak-Mulchatna King Salmon Management Plan, as follows:

As part of a larger comprehensive solution to issues facing management of the king salmon fisheries in the Nushagak drainage, the committee recommends the following regulatory changes. The list below includes eight regulatory action items with consensus among the Nushagak King Salmon Committee, of about 15 considered. Actions listed below, in draft regulatory format, would fall under the Nushagak-Mulchatna River King Salmon Management Plan (5 AAC 06.361), except where noted under #6 which would fall under sport fishing Special Provisions (5 AAC 67.022).

- 1. Define specific management objectives for the Plan by adding the language below to, or following, section (a) of the Plan:**

The department shall manage the Nushagak fisheries for the following management objectives:

- 1) Provide consistent sport fishing opportunity within and among seasons. This includes a level of inriver abundance as a given year's run timing allows, and a predictably open season.**
 - 2) Provide a directed commercial king salmon fishery when surplus is available.**
 - 3) Provide for an uninterrupted commercial sockeye salmon fishery (i.e., minimize disruptions to the sockeye salmon fishery).**
 - 4) Provide for reasonable opportunity for subsistence harvest of king salmon.**
 - 5) The subsistence fishery is the last fishery to be closed.**
 - 6) Achieve escapement goals for all species in the district.**
 - 7) Maintain a representation of age classes in the escapement similar to the run.**
- 2. Manage large sockeye runs so that escapements fall in the upper portion of the escapement goal range, which would reduce incidental catch of king salmon, by adding new provisions to section (b) as follows:**

(X) Consistent with 5 AAC 06.367 Nushagak District Commercial Set and Drift Gillnet Sockeye Salmon Fisheries Management and Allocation Plan, the department in an attempt to conserve king salmon shall manage for sockeye escapements in the Nushagak District to fall within the

(1) lower half of the escapement goal range when the Wood River sockeye salmon run is 8 million or less and/or the Nushagak sockeye salmon run is 4 million or less, or the

(2) upper half of the escapement goal range when the Wood River sockeye salmon run is greater than 8 million and/or the Nushagak sockeye salmon run is greater than 4 million based on the pre-season forecast and in-season assessment of run size.

(X) On or after June 25, the department shall consider when evaluating total run of sockeye salmon to the Nushagak District all possible data sources including but not limited to: pre-

season forecast, Port Moller test fishery indices and stock and age composition, total C+E to date, age composition of C&E and district test fishing.

3. Use a Nushagak District Test Fishery to assess relative abundance of sockeye and king salmon by adding the following new provision to (b):

(X) From June 1 through June 30 the department in an attempt to conserve king salmon shall conduct a drift gillnet test fishery to assess the abundance of sockeye and king salmon prior to opening by emergency order a fishing period directed at sockeye salmon.

4. Modify the Wood River trigger and establish a Nushagak River trigger by adding the following new provisions to (b) and repealing (e)(1):

(X) close, by emergency order, the sockeye salmon commercial fishery in the Nushagak District until the projected sockeye salmon escapement past the Wood River tower exceeds 100,000 within the next 12 hours if the forecasted Wood River sockeye run is 8 million or less. If the Wood River sockeye run is forecasted to be more than 8 million the fishery shall close by emergency order until the projected sockeye salmon escapement past the Wood River tower exceeds 300,000 within the next 12 hours.

(X) (1) independent of whether the Wood River tower count exceeds 100,000 or 300,000, open, by emergency order, the sockeye salmon commercial fishery in the Nushagak District when the sockeye salmon escapement past the Nushagak River sonar counter exceeds XXXXXX when the forecasted Nushagak River sockeye run is XXXXXXX. If the Nushagak River sockeye run is forecasted to be more than XXXXXXX, the fishery shall open by emergency order when the projected sockeye salmon escapement past the Nushagak River sonar exceeds XXXXXX.

e) If the spawning escapement of king salmon in the Nushagak River is projected to be less than 55,000 fish, the commissioner

[(1) shall close, by emergency order, the sockeye salmon commercial fishery in the Nushagak District until the projected sockeye salmon escapement into the Wood River exceeds 100,000 fish;]

5. Provide a directed commercial fishery for king salmon when surplus clearly exists by modifying section (c) as follows:

(c) If the total inriver king salmon return in the Nushagak River is projected to exceed 95,000 fish, (1) the guideline harvest level described in (b)(1)(C) of this section does not apply[.], and (X) the department will consider a directed commercial king salmon fishery.

6. Modify the annual limit for king salmon by modifying 5 AAC 67.022 and section (c) of the Plan as follows:

5 AAC 67.022. Special provisions for season, bag, possession, and size limits, and methods and means in the Bristol Bay Area.

(g) In the Nushagak River drainage, excluding the Wood River drainage, and unless otherwise specified in [5 AAC 06.361](#) or [5 AAC 06.368](#), the following special provisions apply:

(1) the bag and possession limit for king salmon 20 inches or greater in length is two fish, of which only one fish may be 28 inches or greater in length; the annual limit for king salmon 20 inches or greater in length is four fish, **of which only one fish may be 28 inches or greater in length**; the bag and possession limit for king salmon less than 20 inches in length (jack salmon) is five fish; ...

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(c) If the total inriver king salmon return in the Nushagak River is projected to exceed 95,000 fish,

(1) the guideline harvest level described in (b)(1)(C) of this section does not apply[.], and (X) the commissioner may increase the annual limit for king salmon to 4 king salmon 20 inches or longer (no restriction to one fish over 28 inches).

7. Avoid complete closures of the sport fishery when possible by modifying section (e) as follows:

(2) shall [close]**restrict to catch and release**, by emergency order, the sport fishery **for king salmon** in the Nushagak River [to the taking of salmon] and prohibit the use of bait for fishing for all species of fish until the end of the king salmon season specified in 5 AAC 67.020 and 5 AAC 67.022(g); and

8. Provide the department with flexibility to restrict but not close the subsistence fishery in low inriver run scenarios and standardize subsistence fishing schedule and area under a restricted scenario by modifying section (e) as follows:

(3) [shall]**may** establish, by emergency order, fishing periods during which [the time or area is reduced for the inriver king salmon subsistence fishery in the Nushagak River]**the subsistence fishery is restricted to 3 days per week in the Nushagak District; and the waters above the district including Dillingham beaches, Wood River up to Red Bluff, and the Nushagak River drainage.**

What is the issue you would like the board to address and why? The Nushagak River fisheries that harvest king salmon have been managed under the direction of the Nushagak-Mulchatna King Salmon Plan (5 AAC 06.361) since 1992. Salmon fishery dynamics changed notably over the life of the Plan. King salmon runs declined to some of the lowest levels recorded and sockeye runs to the Wood and Nushagak Rivers increased in magnitude to some of the highest levels recorded. Commercial fishing directed at king salmon has remained closed since 2014, and sport fishing regulations have become increasingly conservative. At the same time, substantial uncertainties have expanded over the ability of the sonar to estimate inriver run abundance.

Restrictions to the sport fishery due to low early season inriver passage of king salmon combined with sometimes intense fishing for sockeye in the Nushagak District in the mid-2010's led to calls to enact paired restrictions in the commercial and sport fishery in 2018 (Proposals 41 and 42, 2018 Bristol Bay Board meeting). The Board, in response to the proposals, removed several triggers in the Plan that affect the sport fishery. The Board also established a committee to develop a

comprehensive solution to the Plan through RC 84 and a charge statement (2018-291-FB) and charged the committee with reporting back to the Board. At the 2018 Board meeting, the Bristol Bay Science and Research Institute (BBSRI) committed to supporting the committee's work through a stakeholder-led technical analysis of options the committee was expected to consider (RC 80).

The committee first met in Anchorage on October 21, 2019 (a meeting summary can be found on the Alaska Board of Fisheries website) and break-out groups met in December 2019 and February 2020. At the Upper Cook Inlet meeting in February 2020, the Board disbanded the formal committee but encouraged stakeholders on the committee to continue to work together in preparation for the next in-cycle Bristol Bay meeting. BBSRI reasserted its commitment to serving the committee and moving toward its original mission outlined in the charge statement: a comprehensive solution to the Plan. Committee makeup remained the same as selected by the Board initially in February 19, minus the two Board members. The committee met on a consensus basis 15 times from Fall 2019 through early April 2022; 9 times as a full committee and 6 partial committee meetings.

This regulatory proposal is one part of a larger, more comprehensive solution envisioned by the committee to address issues plaguing management of the Nushagak king salmon fisheries. Other components will include additional technical analyses, recommendations for improving stock assessment, and other non-regulatory actions or recommendations. As one example of a non-regulatory action, BBSRI has secured funding to field a district test boat program to better inform managers of sockeye and king salmon abundance in the Nushagak District and thereby reduce incidental harvest of king salmon and better target sockeye salmon in the district. A report will be made available in advance of the November 2022 Board meeting to summarize the committee process and work products and present the full scope of the comprehensive solution. Work products including the report will be posted on the BBSRI website as they become available.

PROPOSED BY: Nushagak-Mulchatna King Salmon Committee (HQ-F22-028)
