

Presentation – Board of Fisheries, Ketchikan, Alaska

By: Ron Somerville

February 2-7, 2025

My name is Ron Somerville and I was supposed to represent the Territorial Sportsmen, Inc. (TSI) at this meeting. Due to medical issues, I cannot attend. I live in Juneau and am a lifelong Alaskan. I have over 25 years as a Game Biologist for ADF&G in Alaska. My stints also include Director of Wildlife Conservation and Deputy Commissioner of the Department. I represented TSI at the last meeting on this subject in Anchorage.

I wish to focus on the management of king salmon in Southeast Alaska. Needless to say, I have spent many hours at Board of Fisheries and Board of Game meetings. I have always been proud to proclaim the Board and Advisory system as adopted in Alaska as the best regulatory process in our country. Clearly, the public has been treated with respect and they had a meaningful degree of input into our regulatory process. However, I am taking my limited time here to say that is no longer the case.

At the last Anchorage meeting dealing with SE king salmon management plan, a major regulatory error was committed. The conflicts created between the charter fleet, the resident sportsmen and the trolling fleet concerning king salmon management in SE were serious and had permanent implications. The charter fleet wanted a minimum of 3 fish per day and no in season management restrictions. The troll fleet wanted the 80% - 20% allocation of treaty fish to be retained and enforced. The resident fishermen asked that king salmon not be entirely closed for residents and the growing non-resident fishery be controlled. We strongly supported the closures to protect the Taku stocks. We also strongly supported continuing the 80% – 20% quota between sport and troll fisheries.

All negotiating parties agreed that the resident king salmon fishery should not be subjected to a closure but remain open the entire season. The agreement

was signed by all three parties. The agreement was adopted unanimously by the Board.

Surprisingly and contrary to the signed agreement, our season was totally closed in August by emergency order. The Department decided to close the king salmon harvest for all users including the troll fleet because we appeared to have exceeded our quotas.

It was almost a year later we discovered that the Department had modified the agreement we all signed without ever notifying at least the troll fleet and resident fishermen. The agreement referred to the need to provide adequate management to assure the sport fishery quota was not exceeded. The Department dropped the two words "sport fishery" which allowed the Department to only consider the total king salmon quota. The purpose was apparently to provide an option for the Department to close the season without having to apply in-season management for the only portion of the harvest which was essentially unregulated ----the charter fleet.

If the subject of allocation between users is brought up, the Department staff all say they cannot participate in allocation decisions. However, that is precisely what happened here. I have never seen the Department change an allocation agreement before ---never. I have never seen the disrespect like this shown to the public. The Department leadership apparently wanted easy options available to avoid having to apply traditional in-season management to the run-away non-resident harvest. I cannot believe the Department would allow the non-resident harvest at the 75% level to go relatively unregulated while penalizing resident fishermen.

Last but not least, this attack on the troll fleet to steal some of their quota was also disgusting. Why could the Department not have asked the Board to change the quota. No, that would have been an honest and straight forward approach. We have at times had specific disagreements with the troll fleet but we have never asked that the 80% allocation be changed. After the Board decides on a quota, it seems reasonable that the Department would do everything within its power to see that we strive for and abide by that quota.

Unless, the Board quits delegating total management to the Commissioner to exercise his or her fantasies, things are only going to get worse. If resident fishing deserves some protection, say so in the regulations. Last but not least, apply appropriate bag limits to guarantee the non-resident harvest is guaranteed to not force a shutdown of the resident fishery. There is only one way that can be done and that is to apply strict in-season monitoring and management. The only option residents have is to search for remedies from the legislature. It is impossible to believe that the Department refuses to apply in-season management to a Board established nonresident harvest level. We respectfully request that action be taken at this meeting to fix this situation.

After two straight seasons where the non-resident harvest negatively affected both the troll and resident sport fishery all we ask is to apply a nonresident bag limit which assures that the quota will not be jeopardized. Initially, we recommend a 2 fish bag limit with early June 1 king salmon closures for nonresidents. This should guarantee that their continued harvest of 75% of the kings in SE is not allowed.

If the sportfishing quota is in jeopardy, we request a requirement be applied that forces the immediate closure of the non-resident king salmon fishery. The purpose of these requirements is to make sure all segments of this harvest strategy are informed of how management will be applied before negative allocation action is taken by the Department.

If what we propose here is rejected, the only alternative we have is to propose legislation stating that the nonresident harvest of king salmon in SE will not exceed 50%. It should also require management action to make sure that the management of king salmon in SE be primarily for the benefit of residents as required by the Alaska Constitution.

Thank You for your time. Ron Somerville