

PROPOSAL 128

5 AAC 09.365. South Unimak and Shumagin Islands June Salmon Management Plan.

Adopt chum, coho and king salmon catch thresholds that trigger time and area closures to conserve Koyukuk River salmon, as follows:

1. Implement Time Closures and Fleet Movement in Area M: Introduce time closures for Area M and mandate the fleet movement when bycatch of Chinook, chum, and coho salmon reaches a predetermined threshold. Trigger action when Area M starts catching bycatch.
2. Prioritize Koyukuk River Salmon: Recognize the specific vulnerability of Koyukuk River salmon populations and prioritize their protection in management decisions. Any bycatch limits set should consider the needs of these subsistence-dependent communities.

What is the issue you would like the board to address and why? This proposal addresses the urgent need to protect Pacific salmon populations migrating to the Arctic/Yukon/Kuskokwim (AYK) region by reducing bycatch in the Area M fishery. AYK salmon (Chinook, chum, and coho) are crucial for the ecological, cultural, and economic well-being of Western Alaska communities, particularly for subsistence. Salmon play a critical role in nutrient cycling, transferring marine-derived nutrients to freshwater ecosystems when they die after spawning, which supports the entire food web. The Area M fishery has been identified as a source of significant bycatch of AYK-bound salmon. This bycatch directly reduces salmon returns to the Yukon and Kuskokwim rivers, impacting subsistence harvests and ecosystem health. This proposal outlines specific, actionable steps to minimize bycatch in Area M and protect these vital salmon populations.

Salmon populations in the AYK region are facing significant challenges, including bycatch in commercial fisheries, particularly in Area M. Bycatch of chinook, chum, and coho salmon in Area M negatively impacts the already stressed salmon runs returning to the Yukon and Kuskokwim rivers. The large-scale removal of salmon flesh and associated nutrients from the ecosystem disrupts the natural nutrient cycle, negatively impacting local ecosystems.

Specific concerns exist regarding the declining salmon runs in the Koyukuk River, a major tributary of the Yukon River. Communities along the Koyukuk River rely heavily on salmon for subsistence. Recent years have seen drastic reductions in salmon returns, leading to severe impacts on food security and cultural practices. These declines exacerbate the hardships faced by residents who depend on salmon for their livelihood. Any further reduction in salmon numbers due to bycatch in Area M directly affects the ability of Koyukuk River communities to meet their subsistence needs.

These proposed changes aim to directly address the issue of salmon bycatch in Area M and its broader impacts on AYK salmon populations and ecosystems, with particular attention to the Koyukuk River. Time closures during critical migration periods will significantly reduce bycatch of AYK bound salmon. Recognizing the specific needs of Koyukuk River communities is vital for ensuring their food security and cultural survival.

Implementing these regulatory changes is essential for the sustainable management and conservation of salmon populations in the AYK region, especially for the Koyukuk River. These measures will help protect salmon during their migration, preserve the ecological balance of

freshwater ecosystems, and support the subsistence and cultural needs of communities that rely on these vital resources.

Did you develop your proposal in coordination with others, or with your local Fish and Game Advisory Committee? Explain. This proposal was developed by the Koyukuk River Fish & Game Advisory Committee and discussed during a April 9th, 2025 meeting. A motion to submit this proposal on behalf of the Koyukuk River AC was supported unanimously.

PROPOSED BY: Koyukuk River Fish & Game Advisory Committee Jack Reakoff, Chair
(EF-F26-134)
