

PROPOSAL 40

5 AAC 01.130. Subsistence fishing permits.

Establish a subsistence sheefish permit in the Kotzebue Area, as follows:

5 AAC 01.130 Subsistence fishing permits. (a) Except as provided in this section, fish may be taken for subsistence purposes without a subsistence fishing permit.

(b) a subsistence sheefish fishing permit is required when fishing through the ice.

If adopted, this proposal would require subsistence fishers who are ice-fishing in the Kotzebue fishing district (Figure 1) to carry free ADF&G-issued harvest records (permits) while fishing and record harvests on this permit in ink before leaving the fishing site. Similar permits are found in subsistence and personal-use fisheries throughout the state.

What is the issue you would like the board to address and why?

Sheefish harvests under ice (hooking through the ice, and nets set under ice, intended for catch of sheefish) during fall/winter/spring near Kotzebue.

Sheefish have long been an important subsistence resource to Kotzebue Sound area residents. In the dog-team days, the return of brighter sun in February often marked a time of dwindling food—and extra reliance on these large fat fish for people and for dogs.

Nowadays, a large and growing subsistence fishery for sheefish occurs through the ice in Hotham Inlet close to Kotzebue. A new user-group growing the fastest is non-local fishers who fly to Kotzebue, trade for snowmobile use, or hire a local guide or an outfitter, and then ship out boxes of fish on Alaska Air, NAC and other carriers. (NOTE: People using under-ice nets also ship out fish to sell or trade to dog mushers and others for dog food and for people food.)

The amount of sheefish harvested is poorly documented. Basically, catches are not reported, nor required to be reported, and there has been no stock assessment of sheefish spawning populations in the Kobuk or Selawik River by ADFG since 2018, and no subsistence catch survey since 2015.

Overharvest of sheefish is a growing concern, particularly as chum salmon runs decline and fishers focus more on non-salmon species. At the very least, we should attempt to gather reliable harvest data to understand this fishery better, and do our best to protect this important species. A required, free paper or online reported permit would be a start at documenting harvest pressure of this important local species.

Did you develop your proposal in coordination with others, or with your local Fish and Game Advisory Committee? Explain. Yes, we spoke to the Advisory Committee about our concerns about lack of numerical data on subsistence and sport harvests of sheefish, and to guides, and Trooper Steve Cantine, and we were assisted by Brendan Scanlon at ADFG with administrative coding and understanding of subsistence permitting, values, uses, requirements, and past surveys.

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