

PROPOSAL 54

5 AAC 06.368. Nushagak River Coho Salmon Management Plan.

Repeal the *Nushagak River Coho Salmon Management Plan*, as follows:

5 AAC 06.368 is repealed:

5 AAC 06.368. Nushagak River Coho Salmon Management Plan. Repealed.

[(A) THE PURPOSE OF THIS MANAGEMENT PLAN IS TO PROVIDE GUIDELINES TO ENSURE AN ADEQUATE SPAWNING ESCAPEMENT OF COHO SALMON INTO THE NUSHAGAK RIVER SYSTEM. IT IS THE INTENT OF THE BOARD OF FISHERIES (BOARD) THAT NUSHAGAK COHO SALMON BE HARVESTED BY THE FISHERIES THAT HAVE HISTORICALLY HARVESTED THEM. THE PLAN IN THIS SECTION PROVIDES MANAGEMENT GUIDELINES TO THE DEPARTMENT IN AN EFFORT TO PRECLUDE ALLOCATION CONFLICTS BETWEEN VARIOUS USERS OF THIS RESOURCE. THE DEPARTMENT SHALL MANAGE COHO SALMON STOCKS IN A CONSERVATIVE MANNER CONSISTENT WITH SUSTAINED YIELD PRINCIPLES AND THE SUBSISTENCE PRIORITY.

(B) THE DEPARTMENT SHALL MANAGE THE COMMERCIAL FISHERY IN THE NUSHAGAK DISTRICT TO ACHIEVE AN INRIVER RUN GOAL OF 70,000 - 130,000 COHO SALMON PRESENT IN THE NUSHAGAK RIVER UPSTREAM FROM THE DEPARTMENT SONAR COUNTER LOCATED NEAR THE VILLAGE OF PORTAGE CREEK BY AUGUST 25. THE INRIVER GOAL PROVIDES FOR

(1) THE DEPARTMENT'S SUSTAINABLE ESCAPEMENT GOAL OF 60,000 - 120,000 COHO SALMON UPSTREAM FROM THE SONAR COUNTER BY AUGUST 25;

(2) A REASONABLE OPPORTUNITY FOR SUBSISTENCE HARVEST OF COHO SALMON; AND

(3) A DAILY BAG AND POSSESSION LIMIT OF FIVE COHO SALMON, AND A GUIDELINE HARVEST LEVEL OF 2,000 FISH IN THE SPORT FISHERY; THE SPORT FISHERY GUIDELINE HARVEST LEVEL OF 2,000 FISH DOES NOT APPLY IF THE TOTAL INRIVER COHO SALMON RETURN IS PROJECTED TO BE GREATER THAN 120,000 FISH BY AUGUST 25; THE DEPARTMENT SHALL MANAGE THE SPORT FISHERY TO ENSURE THAT THE SUSTAINABLE ESCAPEMENT GOAL OF 60,000 - 120,000 COHO SALMON IS ACHIEVED.

(C) IF THE TOTAL INRIVER COHO SALMON RETURN IN THE NUSHAGAK RIVER IS PROJECTED BY THE DEPARTMENT TO BE LESS THAN 120,000 BUT AT LEAST 70,000 FISH BY AUGUST 25, THE COMMISSIONER SHALL CLOSE, BY EMERGENCY ORDER, THE DIRECTED COHO SALMON COMMERCIAL FISHERY IN THE NUSHAGAK DISTRICT BY AUGUST 1; AND

(1) REPEALED 4/16/2016;

(2) THE COMMISSIONER MAY RESTRICT, BY EMERGENCY ORDER, THE COHO SALMON SPORT FISHERY IN THE NUSHAGAK RIVER DRAINAGE UPSTREAM FROM THE DEPARTMENT SONAR COUNTER LOCATED NEAR THE

VILLAGE OF PORTAGE CREEK SO THAT THE HARVEST DOES NOT EXCEED 2,000 COHO SALMON BY ONE OR MORE OF THE FOLLOWING:

(A) REDUCE THE BAG AND POSSESSION LIMIT;

(B) PROHIBIT THE USE OF BAIT;

(C) RESTRICT FISHING TIMES AND AREAS;

(D) RESTRICT TERMINAL TACKLE TO SINGLE-HOOK ARTIFICIAL LURES; AND

(E) ALLOW CATCH-AND-RELEASE FISHING ONLY;

(3) IT IS THE INTENT OF THE BOARD THAT THE LOWER THE PROJECTED INRIVER COHO SALMON RETURN IS, THE MORE RESTRICTIVE THAT MANAGEMENT MEASURES WILL BE IN THE SPORT AND COMMERCIAL FISHERIES UNDER THIS SECTION.

(D) IF THE TOTAL INRIVER COHO SALMON RETURN IN THE NUSHAGAK RIVER IS PROJECTED BY THE DEPARTMENT TO BE LESS THAN 70,000 FISH AND THE NUMBER OF SPAWNERS IS PROJECTED TO BE MORE THAN 60,000 FISH ON AUGUST 25, THE COMMISSIONER SHALL

(1) CLOSE, BY EMERGENCY ORDER, THE DIRECTED COMMERCIAL FISHERY NO LATER THAN AUGUST 1;

(2) CLOSE, BY EMERGENCY ORDER, THE COHO SALMON SPORT FISHERY IN THE NUSHAGAK RIVER DRAINAGE; AND

(3) RESTRICT THE COHO SALMON SUBSISTENCE FISHERY IN THE NUSHAGAK RIVER DRAINAGE BY ESTABLISHING PERIODS BY EMERGENCY ORDER, DURING WHICH

(A) COHO SALMON MAY BE TAKEN ONLY FROM

(I) 9:00 A.M. MONDAY TO 9:00 A.M. TUESDAY;

(II) 9:00 A.M. WEDNESDAY TO 9:00 A.M. THURSDAY; AND

(III) 9:00 A.M. FRIDAY TO 9:00 A.M. SATURDAY; AND (B) SET GILLNETS MAY NOT BE MORE THAN 10 FATHOMS IN LENGTH.

(E) IF THE NUMBER OF COHO SALMON SPAWNERS IN THE NUSHAGAK RIVER IS PROJECTED BY THE DEPARTMENT TO BE LESS THAN 60,000 FISH BY AUGUST 25, THE DEPARTMENT SHALL CLOSE THE SUBSISTENCE, COMMERCIAL, AND SPORT FISHERIES.]

What is the issue you would like the board to address and why? In 2025, the Alaska Department of Fish and Game recommended discontinuing the Nushagak River coho salmon escapement goal due to a lack of coho salmon stock assessment. The *Nushagak River Coho Salmon Management Plan* (plan) was adopted in 1996 when the department was actively assessing the Nushagak River coho salmon stock. The plan is structured around coho salmon escapement level triggers that direct specific management actions. The department has not conducted enumeration for coho salmon on the Nushagak River since 2018 and has only enumerated coho salmon 4 times since 2004. Over the past

20 years, triggers in the plan have rarely been used to manage fisheries targeting Nushagak River coho salmon.

It is unlikely the department will be able to enumerate coho salmon escapement in the Nushagak River in the future or collect enough data to evaluate run timing and escapement goals. Anecdotal reports indicate that run timing has changed over the last 20 years, shifting later. If this is the case, it may render the dates defined in the plan impractical to implement even if coho salmon escapement data were to become available in the future.

Commercial interest in coho salmon has declined since the adoption of this plan. Most processors cease buying operations in the Nushagak District by the end of July, well before the August 10 historical midpoint of the coho salmon run. Without escapement data, the department will not provide directed commercial fishing opportunities on Nushagak River coho salmon. The subsistence and sport fisheries will continue to be managed per regulations established by the board.

Did you develop your proposal in coordination with others, or with your local Fish and Game Advisory Committee? Explain.

PROPOSED BY: Alaska Department of Fish and Game

(HQ-F26-023)
