

PROPOSAL 65

5 AAC 06.391. Nushagak District King Salmon Stock of Concern Management Plan.

5 AAC 06.367, and Nushagak District Commercial Set and Drift Gillnet Sockeye Salmon Fisheries Management and Allocation Plan.

Remove Wood River Special Harvest Area from Nushagak District allocation calculations, and amend *Nushagak District King Salmon Stock of Concern Management Plan* to include set gillnet specific provisions, as follows:

A multifaceted solution is needed to remedy this set gillnet hardship.

1. Include specific language to current regulated allocation in 5 AAC 06.367 to specify that the Wood River Special Harvest District catch is not included within Nushagak Section allocation.
2. Establish a lower threshold of the three independent triggers for set gillnet fleet different than the drift gillnet fleet, such as:
 - i. Change date to June 26th at 9am for set gillnet only
 - ii. Trigger of 5% of run added to SEG for OEG for Wood River
 - iii. Trigger of 3% of run added to SEG for OEG for Nushagak River
3. Eliminate set gillnet window closures after 75% of historic Chinook passage from district (starting July 2nd as there is travel time from the district to sonar, ~2-2.5 day difference for salmon entering the district and passing the sonar)

Suggested language:

5 AAC 06.367

(C) Wood River Special Harvest Area does not count within the Nushagak District allocation plan.

5 AAC 06.391

(d) Before 9:00 a.m. June 28, if the Nushagak king salmon inriver run size is projected to be less than 95,000 fish, the commissioner shall close, by emergency order, the sockeye salmon commercial drift gillnet fishery in the Nushagak District, and **before 9:00 a.m. June 26, if the Nushagak king salmon inriver run size is projected to be less than 95,000 fish, the commissioner shall close, by emergency order, the sockeye salmon commercial set gillnet [net] fishery in the Nushagak Section of the Nushagak District to allow for management of allocation**

- (1) the sockeye salmon sonar estimate in the Nushagak River is projected to exceed six percent of the Nushagak River sockeye salmon run based on the Nushagak River sockeye salmon preseason forecast and inseason assessment of run size **for the drift gillnet fleet and three percent for the set gillnet fleet**; or
- (2) the sockeye salmon count past the Wood River counting tower is projected to exceed 10 percent of the Wood River sockeye salmon run size based on the Wood River

sockeye salmon preseason forecast and inseason assessment of run size **for the drift gillnet fleet and five percent for the set gillnet fleet;** and

- (3) after 75% of projected Chinook passage have passed from the district, window closures shall be discontinued and Sockeye will be managed for escapement and allocation.**

What is the issue you would like the board to address and why? The Nushagak District set gillnet harvesters, in the Ekuk Village set gillnet statistical area, have experienced a disproportionate economic burden as an unintended consequence of the Nushagak Chinook Conservation Management Plan. Hundreds of set gillnet harvesters, fishing over 70 sites, on Ekuk Beach in the Nushagak District have seen significant harvest share decline as a result of recent management actions and reduced critical early season fishing time. In season loss of harvest share has declined by approximately 37% in 2023 and 2024, compared to the 10-year prior average, and this is compounded with the later start date. This puts the future of the fishermen and the processing facility at risk.

The management strategy, as implemented, has resulted in the set gillnet fleet harvesting 15% of the Nushagak Section sockeye salmon, instead of the designated 20%. ADF&G has historically managed the set gillnet fleet differently than the drift gillnet fleet, but now the gear groups are managed relatively the same, and much is based on foregone harvest emergencies. The set gillnet fleet in the Nushagak Section starts on the same day as the drift gillnet fleet and there is a much larger utilization of windowed closures for set gillnet. This results in ~75% of all drift gillnet gear emphasizing more toward a “southline” district boundary, which prevents sockeye from moving to stationary gear.

Set gillnet fishermen, need additional regulatory guidance to protect their multigenerational heritage, and the historic Ekuk Village fishery should be protected and preserved. In many ways, Ekuk represents the epitome of Alaska’s Seafood Task Force’s vision for the future: providing access, opportunity, economic sustainability, and helping to maximize the value of some of the highest quality salmon produced in Bristol Bay.

Additional fishing time over the drift gillnet fleet and adherence to the traditional share of harvest volume are imperative for Ekuk operations and processor to be sustainable. Small or even average historical sockeye returns in the future would be devastating.

Did you develop your proposal in coordination with others, or with your local Fish and Game Advisory Committee? Explain. Proposal was created with coordination with fishermen, consultants, and frequent communication for information with ADF&G.

PROPOSED BY: Alaska’s Best Seafood

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