

PROPOSAL 92

5 AAC 06.310. Fishing Seasons.

Close the Naknek-Kvichak District to commercial fishing on July 25, as follows:

The commercial fishery in the Naknek/Kvichak district shall be closed July 25.

What is the issue you would like the board to address and why? Bristol Bay has seen a significant decrease in the number of silver salmon returning each year. This decline is most noticeable in the Naknek River, which has a remnant run of silvers from what it used to be. Fishermen in Bristol Bay can continue fishing as long as there are buyers to buy and process the fish, more or less. Sockeye runs have been large in recent years, and some buyers and fishermen stay later in the season to harvest the tail end of the sockeye runs. The problem with this is that there are other species which are dramatically affected that run later in the season – silvers, chums, pinks late run kings and dolly varden. The negative impact of this late season commercial fishing is especially significant for silver salmon, which typically start running during the last week of July and continue into mid August. Silver runs have always been a fraction of the size of the sockeye runs, and it does not take many commercial nets in the water to have a significant impact on these returning silvers. Silvers also run in the same places that the sockeyes do, along the shore, and are similar in size to sockeye, making them more prone to getting caught in sockeye gill nets.

Commercial fisherman have ample opportunity throughout late June and all of July to harvest sockeye from the largest wild sockeye fishery in the world. Nearly every river in Bristol Bay has seen significant declines in number of kings, silvers, chums and pinks. To help with the conservation of silver salmon, it would be beneficial to have a closure date of July 25 to all commercial fishing of sockeye in the Naknek/Kvichak district. Historical data shows that the majority of sockeye salmon have already run up the rivers by then, and that commercial fishermen have caught on average 99% or more of the yearly sockeye catch by the 25th. The silvers are just starting to run at this time, and ending commercial fishing would help with their escapement of the river. There is no monitoring for escapement of king and silver salmon in the Naknek River, yet it is universally agreed upon that there have been significant declines. Due to “lack of information on escapement and strength of the runs” we recommend a conservative approach to management by ending the commercial season on July 25th.

Did you develop your proposal in coordination with others, or with your local Fish and Game Advisory Committee? Explain. We both have lived in King Salmon our entire lives. We have hunted, fished and trapped our whole lives and have seen the changes in the area. We grew up on the Naknek River and have guided sport fishermen since we were kids. In addition, we both have commercially fished sockeye for many years as well, Graham having done so since he was 7 years old. Joey has been apart of the Naknek/Kvichak AC for at least 12 or 15 years.

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