

PROPOSAL 126 – 5 AAC 05.362. Yukon River Summer Chum Salmon Management Plan.

Add purse seine gear as an allowable commercial salmon fishing gear to target summer chum salmon in districts 1–3 of the Yukon River during times of king salmon conservation, as follows:

Specifically, we would like the BOF to approve the use of purse seines to harvest the abundant summer chum salmon during times of king salmon conservation 5 AAC 05.362 (k). We also seek that the BOF stipulate that all king salmon caught in a purse seine set must be released immediately and returned to the water unharmed.

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Add a new section (C)

(k)

...

(B) beach seine gear, with mesh size that does not exceed four inches stretched measure; [AND]

(C) **purse seine gear, with a mesh size that does not exceed three and one-half inches stretched measure and a total length not more than 150 fathoms; and**

...

(2) all king salmon caught in dip net, [AND] beach seine gear **and purse seine gear** must be released immediately and returned to the water unharmed.

What is the issue you would like the board to address and why? A huge commercially available harvestable surplus of summer chum salmon in the Yukon River cannot be harvested with the few gill net opening allowed during the extreme end of the summer chum salmon run (non-selective gear) because of the concern for the very low king salmon runs. Note that the kings and summer chum salmon runs tend to enter the mouth of the river together and migrate upriver concurrently. Previous regulations allowing dipnet and beach seine gear (selective gear) to be used in the Yukon River has allowed only a portion of the huge surplus to be harvested.

Declines in Yukon River king salmon runs have been noted in the Yukon River since 1998. However, the Yukon River king salmon runs have declined to a point that during 2014, ADF&G requested that subsistence fishers reduce their normal king salmon subsistence harvest dramatically and also took action to effectively eliminate the king salmon subsistence harvests within the Alaskan portion of the drainage. During the 2014 season, extremely severe subsistence restrictions were employed throughout the drainage to bolster king salmon escapements and to attempt to meet the agreed upon the minimum escapement of 42,500 king salmon in Canada plus the Canadian share of the TAC. The king salmon subsistence harvest in 2014 was approximately only 4,000 fish in the Alaskan portion of the drainage. The historic average subsistence harvest before the decline in Yukon River king salmon was approximately 45,000 fish.

In contrast, recent Yukon River summer chum salmon runs have been above average in run size. During the past few years, millions of commercially-harvestable summer chum salmon have passed through the Lower Yukon Area with very few being harvested because of the concern for the king salmon escapement. This foregone summer chum salmon harvest has been substantial in

recent years, more than 1.0M fish in both 2011 and 2012. Despite new selective commercial fishing gear allowed in the lower Yukon River in 2013 and 2014 by the BOF, which included the use of dipnets, beach seines and shallower and smaller mesh size gillnets (5.5 stretch measure, 30 meshes deep), preliminary estimates indicate that more than 1.8M and 800,000 commercially-available summer chum were passed onto the spawning grounds in 2013 and 2014, respectively. Foregone harvest have translated into a possible loss to the fishermen of over \$22M during the past four years. The actual value of the Yukon Area summer chum salmon harvest was approximately \$6M for the same 4-year period. In contrast, the value of the commercial harvests in the mid-1990s, when king salmon were commercially harvested, was approximately \$15M annually.

The Lower Yukon Area is one of the most impoverished areas in the state of Alaska and the country. Off the road system and located in remote Alaska, fuel can often cost over \$6 a gallon. With little economic opportunity available in the region, fishermen's income has been severely reduced with the closure of the Chinook salmon commercial fishery and we are now struggling against restrictions and conservation concerns to make the commercial summer chum salmon fishery viable. There is an urgent need to find new and innovative ways to commercially harvest the surplus of summer chum salmon in the river while minimizing the impact to king salmon. We believe that the use of purse seines in the Lower Yukon Area would serve that dual purpose.

We believe that the lower Yukon River commercial fishers will benefit because they will be able to harvest more of the available summer chum salmon without any harm to any king salmon caught and released.

We also believe that all Yukon River summer chum salmon subsistence and commercial users will benefit because the summer chum salmon escapements will be reduced below the level that may be detrimental to the stock. Drainage-wide summer chum salmon escapements above 2.0M have reduced productivity and may result in smaller runs.

We foresee no harm to any fishers upriver. This is not an allocative issue.

PROPOSED BY: Kwik'pak Fisheries

(EF-C15-053)
