

**PROPOSAL 155 – 5 AAC 09.310. Fishing seasons; 5 AAC 09.320. Fishing periods; 5 AAC 09.330 Gear; 5 AAC 09.350. Closed waters; and 5 AAC 09.369. Northern District Salmon Fisheries Management Plan.** Close the Outer Port Heiden Section of the Northern District to commercial salmon fishing, as follows:

Close the Outer Port Heiden Section to commercial fishing for sockeye salmon by amending the following:

5 AAC 09.310 Fishing Seasons.

(a) In the Northern District, salmon may be taken as follows: (2) Port Heiden Sections:

...

(B) Outer Port Heiden Section: **no open season** [FROM JUNE 20 TO JULY 31];

5 AAC 09.320.Fishing Periods.

(a) In the Northern District, salmon may be taken only during weekly fishing periods from 6:00 a.m. Monday until 6:00 p.m. Thursday, unless modified by emergency order, except as follows:

(4) In the [OUTER PORT HEIDEN,] Inner Port Heiden[,] and Ilnick Sections, salmon may be taken from 6:00 a.m. Monday through 6:00 p.m. Wednesday, except...

5 AAC 09.330. Gear.

...

[(10) OUTER PORT HEIDEN SECTION: WITH DRIFT GILLNETS ONLY]

5 AAC 09.350. Closed waters.

Salmon may not be taken in the following locations.

(3) Outer Port Heiden: waters of Outer Port Heiden Section

[(A) BETWEEN THE THREE-MILE SEAWARD BOUNDARY LINE, DESCRIBED IN 5 AAC 09.301, AND A LINE THAT IS ONE AND ONE-HALF MILES SHOREWARD OF THE THREE-MILE BOUNDARY LINE;]

5 AAC 09.369. Northern District Salmon Fisheries Management Plan.

(a) The purpose of this management plan is to....

[(1) THE OUTER PORT HEIDEN SECTION IS OPEN FROM JUNE 20 TO JULY 31 TO COMMERCIAL FISHING IN THOSE WATERS WEST OF A LINE FROM 57° 05.52' N. LAT., 158° 34.45' W. LONG. TO 57° 08.85' N. LAT., 158° 37.50' W. LONG. BASED ON THE ABUNDANCE OF MESHIK RIVER SOCKEYE SALMON. IF THE COMMISSIONER CLOSES THE PORTION OF THE EGEGIK DISTRICT, AS SPECIFIED IN 5 AAC 06.359 FOR THE CONSERVATION OF UGASHIK RIVER SOCKEYE SALMON STOCKS, THE COMMISSIONER MAY, BY EMERGENCY ORDER, CLOSE THE OUTER PORT HEIDEN SECTION, AND IMMEDIATELY REOPEN THE OUTER PORT HEIDEN SECTION, WITH ADDITIONAL FISHING RESTRICTIONS THAT THE COMMISSIONER DETERMINES NECESSARY.]

**What is the issue you would like the board to address and why?** The Outer Port Heiden fishery is an intercept salmon fishery primarily targeting Bristol Bay sockeye salmon stocks. The

stated management objective for the Outer Port Heiden fishery, harvesting Meshik River-bound sockeye salmon, appears to be an excuse for allowing this fishery to be prosecuted since relatively few Meshik River sockeye salmon are harvested. Additionally, the number of salmon in excess of established SEGs has been dramatically reduced because of increases in the escapement goal range since 2006. Further, we believe that the Outer Port Heiden fishery does not effectively target Meshik River-bound sockeye salmon. We also find that the establishment of a new and expanding Outer Port Heiden fishery is contrary to the Alaska Board of Fisheries (BOF) Mixed Stock Policy 5 AAC 39.220 (d). We seek to have the BOF close the waters of the Outer Port Heiden Section to the harvest of salmon. We also would like to encourage the BOF and ADF&G to effectively target Meshik River-bound sockeye salmon through prosecution of an Inner Port Heiden commercial fishery.

The Outer Port Heiden Section of the Northern District of the Alaska Peninsula Area was closed to commercial fishing for salmon from 1990 through 2006. However, prior to 1990, only one commercial harvest of sockeye salmon was recorded during the period 1962–1989. This harvest consisted of 686 sockeye salmon in 1986. Therefore, this section was effectively closed until it was open to commercial fishing in 2007. Beginning in 2007 through the 2014 fishing season, the commercial sockeye salmon harvest from the Outer Port Heiden fishery has ranged from 254,916 salmon in 2013 to 786,025 in 2010. Not surprising, this new and expanding fishery accounted for 0.0% of the North Peninsula total sockeye salmon harvest prior to 2007 but up to 41.5% (2011) since it was opened in 2007. The dramatic shift in the percent of the total North Peninsula sockeye salmon harvest in this fishery has no doubt increased the proportion and number of Bristol Bay salmon stocks in the North Peninsula salmon harvest, and particularly, those fish bound for the Ugashik River.

At the February 2007 Alaska Peninsula/Aleutian Island Areas BOF meeting, a proposal (Proposal 210) to limit the fishery area in the Port Heiden, Three Hills, and Ilnik Fishing sections for sockeye salmon to within one mile of land from May 1 to June 30 was amended to open the Outer Port Heiden Section to commercial fishing from June 20 to July 31. This amended proposal was passed by the BOF. Accordingly, commercial fishing in the Outer Port Heiden Section commenced in 2007. The BOF specified that the Outer Port Heiden Section was specifically opened to harvest sockeye salmon bound for the Meshik River.

Prior to 2007, the Sustainable Escapement Goal (SEG) range for the Meshik River was from 10,000 to 20,000 sockeye salmon. However, escapements to the Meshik River regularly exceeded 80,000 sockeye salmon. At that time, it appeared that there was a very large surplus of sockeye salmon that could be harvested. However, in 2007, ADF&G increased the Meshik River sockeye salmon SEG to 20,000 to 60,000 sockeye salmon, reducing the number of salmon that were in excess of the SEG. Further, in 2010, ADF&G again changed this goal to 25,000 to 100,000, effectively substantially reducing or eliminating the excess salmon above the SEG that was perceived in 2006.

In 2007 and 2008 the Outer Port Heiden commercial sockeye and chum salmon harvest was sampled under WASSIP. During these two years, this section accounted for 11.5% and 16.4% of the total Northern Peninsula sockeye salmon harvest. Genetic Stock Identification (GSI) analysis indicated that the vast majority of the sockeye salmon harvested in the Outer Port Heiden Section

were destined to Bristol Bay, particularly the Ugashik River. Bristol Bay sockeye salmon comprised approximately 72.7% (282,061 salmon) in 2007 and 81.6% (262,543 salmon) in 2008 of the Outer Port Heiden section sockeye salmon harvest. The Ugashik River stock alone contributed approximately 43% to this harvest in both 2007 and 2008. Interestingly, North Peninsula sockeye salmon stocks contributed only 23.7% (91,991 salmon) in 2007 and 17.9% (57,591 salmon) in 2008. This means that vast majority of the sockeye salmon harvested in the Outer Port Heiden fishery, 76.3% in 2007 and 82.1% in 2008, were destined to non-North Peninsula Rivers of origin. These fish were intercepted in this fishery. More interestingly is that the harvest rate on sockeye salmon destined to the Meshik River was only 11.5% (26,140 salmon) in 2007 and 13.3% (44,872 salmon) in 2008.

Since the WASSIP sampling years, both the number and the contribution (percent) of the Outer Port Heiden fishery harvest to the Northern Peninsula total harvest has dramatically increased. The average Outer Port Heiden harvest during the WASSIP sampling years was 354,322 sockeye salmon and accounted for an average of 14.0% of the total Northern Peninsula sockeye salmon harvest. Since then, however, during the most recent 6-year period, 2009-2014, the average number of fish harvested in the Outer Port Heiden section has risen to 479,458 sockeye salmon and has accounted for an average of 34.4% of the total Northern Peninsula sockeye salmon harvest. We believe that this new fishery has expanded since inception and we also believe that there is a potential for further expansion. We also believe that most if not all of the increased harvest in this fishery is comprised of Bristol Bay-origin salmon, and most likely Ugashik River-bound sockeye salmon.

At the February 2010 BOF meeting, no substantial changes were made to the Outer Port Heiden Section fishery. However, ADF&G increased the SEG for the Meshik River sockeye salmon stock to an SEG range of 25,000 to 100,000, further decreasing the excess Meshik River sockeye salmon available for harvest.

At the February 2013 BOF meeting, the BOF recognized the primary intercept nature of this fishery and, in an attempt to shift the intercept harvest of sockeye salmon to more local North Peninsula stocks, particularly, the Meshik River sockeye salmon stock, closed the waters of the Outer Port Heiden section from a line 1.5 miles from the shore to the 3.0 mile line boundary line. This closure was to provide protection to the migrating Bristol Bay sockeye salmon stocks, which were thought to be migrating farther offshore than local North Peninsula sockeye salmon stocks.

Based on the above information, we conclude that the Outer Port Heiden fishery is an intercept salmon fishery, primarily targeting Bristol Bay sockeye salmon stocks. Accordingly, the stated management objective for the Outer Port Heiden fishery, harvesting Meshik River-bound sockeye salmon, appears to be an excuse for allowing this fishery to be prosecuted since relatively few Meshik River sockeye salmon are harvested and the number of salmon in excess of established SEGs has been dramatically reduced because of increases in the escapement goal range. We suggest that a viable alternative to prosecuting this fishery for the stated objective of harvesting Meshik River-origin salmon would be to prosecute a commercial fishery within the Inner Port Heiden section. We also find that the establishment of a new and expanding Outer Port Heiden fishery is contrary to the Alaska BOF Mixed Stock Policy 5 AAC 39.220 (d). Bristol Bay sockeye salmon stocks were fully allocated prior to the establishment of this fishery. The

continued prosecution of this expanding fishery has shifted the allocation scheme of Bristol Bay sockeye salmon and particularly Ugashik River-origin sockeye salmon more toward the North Peninsula.

A GSI study conducted on the salmon present during the prosecution of the Outer Port Heiden fishery was conducted during the 2014 and will be conducted during the 2015 season. Results of this investigation will be provided to the BOF as an on-time comment prior to the February 2016 Alaska Peninsula BOF meeting. Because of the increased sockeye salmon harvest by the Outer Port Heiden along with the increased contribution of this harvest to the total North Peninsula sockeye salmon harvest, we anticipate an even higher contribution of Bristol Bay salmon to the Outer Port Heiden harvest with an even greater contribution of Ugashik River bound fish.

Who does this proposal benefit: The commercial fisherman of Bristol Bay will benefit from the acceptance of this proposal.

**PROPOSED BY:** Mitch Seybert

(EF-C15-079)

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