

PROPOSAL 153 - 5 AAC 57.120. General provisions for seasons, bag, possession, annual, and size limits, and methods and means for the Kenai River Drainage Area. Prohibit fishing for king salmon from markers 300 yards below Slikok Creek upstream to Skilak Lake, as follows:

Add to “Lower Kenai River Mainstem and Skilak Lake” seasons and bag limits for King Salmon; **300 yards below Slikok Creek upstream to Skilak Lake: Closed to king salmon fishing** [300 YARDS BELOW SLIKOK CREEK UPSTREAM TO SKILAK LAKE: JANUARY 1 – JULY 14: 1 PER DAY, 1 IN POSSESSION, MUST BE LESS THAN 42 INCHES IN LENGTH OR LONGER THAN 55 INCHES. JULY 15 – JULY 31: 1 PER DAY 1 IN POSSESSION.]

What is the issue you would like the board to address and why? On the Kenai Peninsula for many decades fishing for Chinook salmon has only been allowed in the lower reaches of most streams open to fishing for Chinook salmon. The Kenai River is the one exception to that protective management practice. In the Kenai River fishing for Chinook salmon is open for fifty river miles. This area includes major spawning areas for both early run and late run fish. While there are closed areas around stream mouths to protect some components of early run fish those protected areas do not protect mainstem spawners. We propose limiting fishing for Chinook salmon to downstream from 300 yards below Slikok Creek.

In recent years we have seen a troubling pattern of near record low returns of both early and late run Kenai River Chinook salmon to the Kenai River. We believe the recent declines in statewide Chinook fisheries are largely due to marine survival issues, however, we also feel that part of our Kenai River decline can be linked to in-river harvest patterns; fishing on middle river mainstem spawning fish throughout the entire King salmon season, insufficient spawning area protections and multiple years of over-harvest of the population due to biased high sonar counts. We are also concerned that the procedure in place that counts all Chinook harvest after July 1st against the Late Run has resulted in less Early Run escapement than reported.

History seems pretty clear that factors such as population growth, increased use, commercialization and development make it almost impossible for us to sustain indigenous wild Chinook salmon populations. Unless we alter our behavior we will join the long list of streams dependent on hatchery-produced fish. We will not be able to sustain the high-density sport fishery that has developed on the Kenai River unless we consider a more conservative approach of protecting production to secure future run strength sustainability.

We believe this type of conservation measure is both prudent and necessary as we face a future of population growth and increased demands on our Kenai River King salmon resources. This regulation change would be consistent with the closures prescribed by the Department over the last several years to insure adequate Early Run escapement. It would also provide spawning area protection for mainstem Late Run fish as well. This measure would provide all spawning and staging King salmon an area where they can spawn in certain age class diversity free of selective harvest practices, catch and release mortality and spawning disruption.

The 2013 AYK Chinook Salmon Research Plan suggests that years of selective harvest of the largest fish can result in increasingly male based sex ratios, decreased size of spawners and a general decline in the return of the largest age classes. It will also result in lower than expected

returns because of fecundity and egg quality of smaller females in the return. It goes on to say, that without efforts to counteract size selectivity and exploitation rates, improvements would be slow to materialize, requiring multiple generations. If we continue with the current management plan of allowing harvest all the way to Skilak Lake all season long we will severely hamper our opportunity to rectify our Kenai King salmon issues.

We believe this type of pro-active conservation measure would provide spawning certainty for insured long term sustainability of these valuable stocks while still providing for a vibrant sport fishery and harvest opportunity in the lower 18 miles of the Kenai River.

PROPOSED BY: Kenai Area Fisherman's Coalition

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