

PROPOSAL 162

5 AAC 30.310. Fishing seasons and periods for net gear.

Open additional fishing area in the remainder of the Yakutat District as mitigation for king salmon conservation closures around the Situk and Lost Rivers, as follows:

We recommend that before any further restrictions in the estuary be implemented, proper consideration of the repercussions on both the economy of Yakutat, and even the health of the Situk itself be considered. Too many Sockeye in the system is in itself unhealthy.

Therefore, we ask that if the estuary is to be closed from the confluence of the Lost River to the mouth of the estuary, and thereby displacing a large portion of the commercial sockeye gillnet fleet, another area be opened, so that harvest of Sockeye can continue.

Our recommendation for this would be to expand the fishery in the area known as the "remainder of the district" currently limited to a 15 fathom net. Expansion would increase the legal net length from 15 fathoms to 75 fathoms. The area would be limited from Ocean Cape Eastward to a one mile limit from the mouth of estuary, and up to one mile offshore. Currently, 75 fathom nets are allowed for a sockeye season that coincides with openings in the estuary inside Yakutat bay, limited to a line from Ocean Cape to point Mamby. This action would allow these nets to proceed around the corner, and down the beach.

What is the issue you would like the board to address and why? The Situk River Chinook count has fallen below minimum escapement for 4 of the last 5 years. The forecasted 2017 run looks to be below minimum too, which will make 3 years in a row. Efforts have been made to increase the number of spawners by the Department. Sport retention has been closed. A no fishing corridor for commercial gillnetting around where the Situk flows into the Situk/Ahklen estuary has been increased. All have failed to have the desired affect.

The Lost River Sockeye count has fallen below minimum escapement for 6 years in a row. A no commercial gillnetting corridor around where the Lost flows into the Situk/Ahklen estuary has also been increased. It also, has failed to have the desired affect.

In 2015 a banner run of sockeye moved thru the Situk weir. Over and above the upper level escapement goal. Sport bag limit was doubled from 3 fish to 6 per day, and still they kept coming. Typically, the commercial setnet opening posted as 2.5 days per week would be extended to absorb the influx, but the estuary and Yakutat bay net fisheries received no extensions, because we were concerned about the chronically low Chinook count. This amounted to an approximate ex-vessel loss in excess of 500,000 dollars in a community that is in dire straits economically.

A cost analysis from Yakutat's only processor indicates that without a commercial sockeye fishery, they won't be able to remain in business to purchase other species. Without a processor, Yakutat will not survive economically. Even entities unaffiliated with commercial fishing will be impacted by the domino affect of losing the processor. Without production from the processor, it is questionable whether daily jet service would be warranted. This would impact lodges and sport anglers tremendously.

No one blames the Department for taking the steps it has to date, but it is felt that much more serious closures to the current commercial fishery structure, above, and below, the confluences of both the Situk and Lost rivers into the estuary are imminent. A plan needs to be in place to allow for a viable commercial Sockeye setnet fishery to take place that can harvest Situk bound Sockeye, while having a minimal effect on Situk bound Chinook, and Lost River bound Sockeye.

Catch records indicate an extremely low harvest of Chinook in the nets that fish near Ocean Cape. There are higher numbers of Chinook harvested in the waters of Monti Bay, but has everything to do with proximity to the bottom and the beach. Nets on Ocean Cape, and if allowed, down the beach as described, have to be outside of the surf line to be accessible, and therefore are well off of the bottom. It is our belief that this fishery would have a much lower impact on migrating Chinook. We also feel that if closing commercial gillnetting from the confluence of the Lost river all the way down the estuary and in the ocean in a one mile radius around the mouth is warranted, than the proposed fishery would have less of an impact on this stock by way of reducing proximity.

The weir on the Situk would still be in place, and management of the commercial openings length would still be regulated by the Department as needed.

Other solutions we considered- The current Yakutat Bay setnet fishery openings for Sockeye is managed in accordance to Situk estuary openings. The basis for this is genetic tissue sampling that indicates as much as 70% of the catch was destined for the Situk River. As stated, the fishery inside Monti Bay has a fairly substantial harvest of Chinook. Though there is no genetic data to make determination from, we felt it fair to assume a high percentage of local Chinook are harvested, given the 70% Situk Sockeye data from the same harvest time. Retention of Chinook for sale is forbidden in the estuary, but is allowed in Yakutat Bay. We considered asking for retention to be closed, but given the fairly high mortality rate of salmon released from a net, we decided this would do little good. We considered closing the areas of high abundance, (namely Monti Bay), but decided that though this would likely aid in increasing numbers of Chinook reaching the Situk, what we as the Yakutat Advisory Committee are charged with is the overall health of the Yakutat area. We decided that this action would do nothing to help the chronically low numbers of Lost River Sockeye, that will inevitably cause the displacement of a large amount of commercial fishermen. We decided to focus on more places for fishermen to fish, rather than less.

Another solution we considered that was deemed too hard to put into proposal form, but does need to be said is, we would like the Department to consider changing the hands off policy towards helping nature out with chronically failing stocks. We are facing the economic ruin of our community and ways of life that has been handed down for generations do a couple of stocks that never were that strong to begin with. The Lost river Sockeye numbers are so low, it is doubtful they would ever recover no matter what you close. Why is it that determination can't be made, and then a recovery program implemented? The lake they spawn in has become so overgrown you can walk on most of it. It's more muskeg than lake. A habitat restoration that allows fish to reach gravel would help. Incubator boxes and egg guns to allow for eggs to hatch without

predation would help. Some of our runs our endangered, make some of us endangered too, is not the solution to this. Fixing the runs is.

PROPOSED BY: Yakutat Fish and Game Advisory Committee

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