

(1)(A) in all freshwater drainages crossed by the Copper River Highway from and including Eyak River to the Million Dollar Bridge, including Clear Creek at mile 42 [DOWNSTREAM OF THE CARBON MOUNTAIN ROAD BRIDGE], the bag and possession limit is three fish; a coho salmon removed from the water shall be retained and becomes part of the bag limit of the person originally hooking it; a person may not remove a coho salmon from the water before releasing the fish;

...

(8)(A) [CLEAR CREEK UPSTREAM OF THE CARBON MOUNTAIN ROAD BRIDGE LOCATED AT MILE 42 OF THE COPPER RIVER HIGHWAY];

What is the issue you would like the board to address and why? Removal of the restriction prohibiting salmon fishing year-round upstream of the Carbon Mountain Road Bridge on Clear Creek. I believe the restriction was put in place as a proactive measure to protect a portion of Clear Creek from projected increased use resulting from construction of the Carbon Mountain Road. The Carbon Mountain Road was not built and there are no current plans for its construction. Additionally, use of and access to Clear Creek has been substantially reduced due to the washout, and no plans for its repair, of the Copper River Highway at Bridge 339. In years past Clear Creek was clear upstream and downstream of the location of the Carbon Mountain Road Bridge. Clear Creek is now heavily silt laden and unfishable from about the 1st of June through early part of October from a point 1/2 mile upstream of the Carbon Mountain Road Bridge down the rest of its length. This is due to a tributary of the Copper River flowing into Clear Creek a half mile upstream of the Carbon Mountain Road Bridge.

PROPOSED BY: Lucas Borer (EF-F17-070)

PROPOSAL 28

5 AAC 24.361. Copper River King Salmon Management Plan.

Repeal mandatory inside waters commercial salmon fishery closures in the *Copper River King Salmon Management Plan*, as follows:

(b) Repeal mandatory inside waters closure in the *Copper River King Salmon Management Plan*. Repeal mandatory inside commercial closures for any statistical week from regulation.

What is the issue you would like the board to address and why? Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ADFG) has the authority to manage fisheries and has demonstrated its ability to do so effectively; therefore, mandatory closures are unnecessary. ADFG has opposed mandatory closures on sport fisheries as these closures are mandated even when the circumstances of a current year's run strength and timing do not require them. This proposal does not suggest eliminating the inside closure tool as it is warranted, but rather suggests the elimination of this mandatory language.

PROPOSED BY: Cordova District Fishermen United, Gillnet Division (HQ-F17-034)

PROPOSAL 29

5 AAC 24.350. Closed waters.

Extend inside closure area to 1/4 mile off the southern shores of all barrier islands in the Copper River commercial drift gillnet salmon fishery, as follows:

- (1) Extend the inside closure area to 1/4 mile off the southern shores of all barrier islands.

What is the issue you would like the board to address and why? Rolling up Kings in gillnets close to the barrier islands. Incidental commercial harvest of Kings in 2016 and 2017 has eliminated all opportunity for upriver users and plunged Kings into stock of concern status.

Inside closures have proven only mildly effective at reducing incidental King harvest. Gillnetters continue to target Kings by placing nets in shallow water close to the island shore and dragging their nets across the bottom, catching large Kings by rolling them up in the small mesh.

In 2017, the Department has closed all upriver sport and P/U harvest opportunity, but has announced a goal not to exceed 3,5000 harvest in the commercial fishery. They will never achieve this goal and have proven unable or unwilling to use tools already in their toolbox to reduce or eliminate incidental harvest of Kings. The Board needs to impose meaningful restrictions, and the department will agree that dragging gillnets across the ocean floor within 1/4 mile of the barrier islands is an effective method of harvesting Kings in the Copper River Flats.

PROPOSED BY: Fairbanks Fish and Game Advisory Committee (HQ-F17-043)

PROPOSAL 30

5 AAC 24.350. Closed waters.

Repeal certain closed waters provisions in the Copper River District commercial drift gillnet salmon fishery, as follows:

The gillnet fishery of the Copper River shall take place from the Grass banks of the Copper River Delta to the seaward boundary.

What is the issue you would like the board to address and why? Traditional inside water fishing grounds which gillnetters have fished for decades have been virtually eliminated. Gillnetters have been increasingly forced into an ocean fishery. A fishery which increases the risks of interception of stocks not bound for the Copper River. Additionally the expenses and dangers associated with an ocean fishery are far higher. In order to ensure that interception of non-Copper River stocks be reduced, the fishery should take place up to the grass banks of the Copper River Delta.

PROPOSED BY: Warren Chappell (HQ-F17-084)

PROPOSAL 31

5 AAC 24.331. Gillnet specifications and operations.

Reduce the maximum depth of drift gill nets in the Copper River District commercial drift gillnet salmon fishery to 29 meshes through the start of Statistical Week 24, as follows:

Reduce the maximum depth of gill nets fished through the start of Week 24 (end of May) to 29 meshes.

What is the issue you would like the board to address and why? Deep nets harvest too many Kings in the May Gillnet fishery.

The board has to look to the commercial King harvest in May of 2014, 2016, and 2017 to understand the reason why the escapement goal was not met. It needs to do something (or many things) to restrict the King Harvest in the May sockeye fishery. The area biologists may have the tools in their toolbox, but they refuse to use them to affect any meaningful conservation of Kings. This proposal was written before the 2017 season, but how many Kings were harvested in Cordova by 500 gillnetters in the combined commercial harvest, educational, and subsistence fisheries? How many Kings did 15,000 dipnetters and sport fishers upriver get to harvest? Was the escapement goal met? Did the department come anywhere close to its goal of restriction the commercial harvest to 3,500?

These answers are predictable before the season even starts. Dipnetters and sport anglers will not even get to fish, and the escapement goal will not be met, and the department will have failed miserably to keep the commercial harvest below its 3,500 goal.

Business as usual in Cordova has driven Copper River Kings to stock of concern status, and the board needs to do something that has been proven to reduce King Harvest in a sockeye fishery, reduce the depth of the nets during the May fishery, if you must prosecute a May fishery at all.

PROPOSED BY: Fairbanks Fish and Game Advisory Committee (HQ-F17-042)

PROPOSAL 32

5 AAC 24.361. Copper River King Salmon Management Plan.

Prohibit commercial salmon fishing in the Copper River District, during the month of May, if the preseason forecast for Copper River king salmon is below the 20-year average, or 35,000 king salmon, as follows:

If the preseason run forecast is below the 20-year average (or 35,000 Kings if a firm number is preferred), no commercial salmon fishing will occur in May (through start of Week 24). Commercial fishing may not open until Week 25 (first week of June).

What is the issue you would like the board to address and why? Conservation of King Salmon when projected run is below 20-year average.

King Salmon, particularly the most vulnerable upper river stocks, are heavily exploited in May, often before a single fish is counted in river. Historically the May fishery opens during statistical week 20. In 2017, that falls on May 14. A large number of Kings will be caught that week despite the expected closure inside the barrier islands.

By the time the Board reviews this proposal it will have 2017 harvest and escapement numbers. Those numbers will almost certainly show that more than 3,500 Kings were harvested in May (exceeding the maximum preseason commercial harvest only three weeks into the season). No Kings will have been harvested in the sport or p/u fishery, despite those fisheries being "equal" on the allocation scale with the commercial fishery. The escapement goal will very likely not have been met three of the past five years, plunging the Copper River King into stock of concern status.

This is all very predictable and inevitable based on current commercial management philosophy which is to fish at least twice a week in May, no matter what, to ensure valuable sockeye do not escape. In 2016, we learned that inside closures are not enough to protect a weak King run. The commercial fleet in Cordova harvested 13,075 Kings, killed 83 Kings in educational fisheries, and likely harvested hundreds more Kings with subsistence gillnets between openers.

Upriver sport and P/U users were subject to total closures, and upriver subsistence fishers had to release Kings caught in closely attended wheels.

If the 2017 season is business as usual in Cordova, the board will have to take strong action to protect this new stock of concern because local managers have proven incapable of doing so. In 2016, knowing Kings were in trouble, the commercial fish managers approved 24 and 48 hour openers in the middle of May, harvesting more Kings in the first two weeks of 2016 than they predict harvesting in all of 2017. May restrictions will have the most positive effect on conserving Kings while not unnecessarily restricting Sockeye harvest in June and July when Sockeye are most abundant.

If the preseason forecast is below the 20-year average, there is no biological justification for the inevitable incidental harvest of thousands of Kings in May.

PROPOSED BY: Fairbanks Fish and Game Advisory Committee (HQ-F17-044)

PROPOSAL 33

5 AAC 24.361. Copper River King Salmon Management Plan.

Prohibit sale of commercially caught king salmon in the Copper River District if restrictions on Copper River drainage subsistence fisheries have been implemented, as follows:

Prohibit the sale of commercially caught king salmon if there are any subsistence restrictions on the stock, as follows:

Despite inside closures and other efforts to restrict King Salmon harvest in 2016, the commercial fleet managed to kill 13,005 Kings. More than the spawning escapement of 12,831. But for the

incidental commercial harvest, the escapement goal would have been met in 2016. We believe that when Kings are worth more than \$5 a pound, it will be impossible for managers to keep incidental King harvest in 2017 to their goal of less than 3,500 and that 2017 will once again fail to meet the escapement, plunging Copper River Kings into stock of concern status.

The Board should adopt regulations prohibiting the sale of commercially caught Kings if there are any subsistence restrictions on the fish stock, as it did on the Yukon years ago. With no economic incentive to target a stock of concern, the commercial fleet would seek to avoid Kings and the incidental catch could be donated to upriver users, as occurred on the Yukon, when the upriver users were denied any harvest opportunity.

What is the issue you would like the board to address and why? Remove the economic incentive to harvest Kings in the Sockeye fishery.

PROPOSED BY: Fairbanks Fish and Game Advisory Committee (HQ-F17-046)

PROPOSAL 34

5 AAC 24.310. Fishing seasons.

Prohibit commercial salmon fishing in the Copper River District until a salmon is recorded at the Copper River sonar, as follows:

Amend 5 AAC 24.310(a) to add " ... the first commercial salmon opening of any year may only be announced after the department has verified by sonar that a single salmon has escaped into the river."

What is the issue you would like the board to address and why?

Kings in the Copper River have been the subject of numerous upriver harvest restrictions in recent years. Escapement goals (even lowered goals) have not been consistently met. Genetic studies have identified three runs of kings. The upper river stocks enter the mouth in May, and these stocks have been subject to the most restrictions including complete restrictions on harvest in the Gulkana River, and significantly restricted harvests in the Chitina fishery. Although the commercial fleet has recently been fishing outside the barrier islands more than regulations require, they are still harvesting thousands of kings from this imperiled upriver stock. In 2016, the department opened the first three fishing periods for 12, 24, and then 48 hours, eventually killing more Kings (13,075) than the escapement (12,831). When runs were healthy, the Alaska Department of Fish and Game always announced the first mid-May opener several days or weeks in advance, historically declaring a 12-hour opening inside the barrier islands. While advance notice is helpful for the fishers and processors to plan, it can be devastating to the early kings, especially when there is a late spring and the Copper River is full of ice and low water, preventing the kings from entering the river and causing them to mill longer in the mouth, where they are easily harvested by getting rolled up in loose hanging mesh dragging along the bottom of the river channels, or outside the islands in the same loosely hung mesh. If the sonar is not deployed by May 17 it is because the river is full of ice and the fish are not there anyway.

With the decimated king runs in the upper Copper River, especially the Gulkana, it is biologically indefensible to allow such a high rate of exploitation on these early returning fish by having commercial opener(s) before even a single fish has been counted inriver.

PROPOSED BY: Fairbanks Fish and Game Advisory Committee (HQ-F17-047)

PROPOSAL 35

5 AAC 24.310. Fishing seasons.

Open commercial salmon fishing with drift gillnet gear in the Copper River District on the Monday or Thursday closest to May 1, as follows:

Commercial gillnet fishing shall be open on the Copper River on the Monday or Thursday which is closest to May 1st.

What is the issue you would like the board to address and why? Consistently warmer spring thaws, harvest of fish under educational permits and reports of early harvests at fish wheels indicate that fish may be migrating upstream prior to the installation of the sonar counter. The commercial fleet over time is the most reliable indicator of run strength. The ADFG is currently unable to assess this indicator to assess early run strength.

PROPOSED BY: Robert A. Smith (HQ-F17-063)

PROPOSAL 36

5 AAC 24.320. Weekly fishing periods.

Open the Copper River District commercial salmon fishery for a minimum of two twelve-hour periods per week, as follows:

(a) From the commencement of the fishing season the Copper River shall be open for a minimum of two twelve hour openers per week.

What is the issue you would like the board to address and why? Escapement goals have consistently been met or greatly exceeded on the Copper River for the last 30 years. Extended closures of the gillnet fisheries are extremely deleterious to local economies. There are 168 hours in a week. Two twelve hour openers would still allow 144 hours in a week or 85% of total time for escapement. A fishery which allows 85% of time for escapement cannot damage fish stocks over the long term.

PROPOSED BY: Robert A. Smith (HQ-F17-061)

PROPOSAL 37

5 AAC 24.350. Closed waters.

Repeal commercial salmon fishery closed waters near Kayak Island and allow commercial salmon fishing with drift gillnet gear near Kayak Island with the same boundaries in effect in 1980, as follows: