

PROPOSAL 91

5 AAC 21.360. Kenai River Late-Run Sockeye Salmon Management Plan.

Lower the Kenai River late-run sockeye salmon sustainable escapement goal, as follows:

First off, I would recommend that the goal for successful management of our fisheries should be based on harvest numbers, not on how high we can make the escapement levels. I believe that escapement should be set on a running average over time. If we know that an average escapement level of 874,276 sockeye produces a harvest 5.2 million, then each year's escapement goal should be set to achieve a 10-year average of 874,276 fish. If we go over that amount in one year, then we have to go under by an equal amount the next year, so to speak. Exceeding the appropriate escapement level year after year has led to greatly reduced harvests.

Secondly, managers must have the flexibility to allow fishing time and area to make sure the harvest goals are achieved. Time and area cannot be micro-managed ahead of time by the BOF and then expect harvest and escapement goals to be met in season.

What is the issue you would like the board to address and why? Kenai River sockeye escapement and escapement goals are by far the biggest driver for managing Cook Inlet commercial fisheries and in recent years escapement levels have become so high that the fishing has suffered tremendously. Harvest capability for all salmon in Cook Inlet are dependent on management for Kenai River sockeye.

Looking back to when Cook Inlet was managed for high production, we see that escapement was much lower. The 10-year period of 1979-1988 saw an average actual escapement of 874,276 sockeye. The resulting harvest for the years 1984-1993 was 5.2 million sockeye. The most recent 10-year harvest averaged 2.6 million sockeye, exactly half what it was with lower escapement levels. By contrast, the parent years of 2004-2013 averaged 1,499,051 sockeye escapement to the Kenai River, nearly double the amount that it used to be.

At the very minimum, it can be said that higher escapement into the Kenai River has not helped the harvest levels and that lower escapement levels did not harm the run sizes. The only result of increasing the escapement has been to stifle the commercial fishing industry.

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(EF-F19-007)
