

PROPOSAL 138

5 AAC 09.365. South Unimak and Shumagin Islands June Salmon Management Plan.

Amend the *South Unimak and Shumagin Islands June Salmon Management Plan* to require the department to place observers onboard commercial salmon fishing vessels, as follows:

ONC would like to address necessary changes in the South Unimak and Shumagin Islands June Salmon Management Plan, 5 AAC 09.365. Specifically, ONC proposes to enhance the accountability of harvest data collected and facilitate information gathering by incorporating an onboard observer component into the management plan.

ONC firmly believes in 5 AAC 39.141, the Onboard Observer Program, and supports the findings in 5 AAC 39.141(a), where, “the Board of Fisheries finds that ... observers on board fishing vessels would greatly enhance management, primarily by facilitating information gathering and by improving regulatory compliance.” Additionally, 5 AAC 39.141 (e) states that, “onboard observers shall carry out such scientific and other duties as deemed necessary or appropriate to manage, protect, maintain, improve and extend the fish and aquatic plant resources of the State” which may be in direct support of the recently introduced Alaska Salmon Research Task Force Act.

To further consider this proposal, one must take into account the drastic difference of harvest between the South Unimak and Shumagin Islands June salmon commercial fishery and subsistence fishery on the Kuskokwim River in 2021. This, and the expected low returns of chum salmon in 2022, will likely increase tensions between users, and subsistence users will expect higher accountability of commercial fisheries.

As stated the Regulations for the Board of Fisheries, Sec. 16.05.251 (a)(13), the Board of Fisheries may adopt regulations it considers advisable in accordance with AS 44.62 for “regulating, in a fishery, observers on board fishing vessels as defined in AS 16.05.475(d), that are registered under the laws of the state, as defined in AS 16.05.475(c)...”

The recommended changes include the insertion of a clause to incorporate onboard observers and amend subsequent order of stipulations. Amend 5 AAC 09.365 to read:

Regulation of 5 AAC 09.365 South Unimak and Shumagin Islands June Salmon Management Plan:

(a) The South Unimak and Shumagin Islands June fisheries harvest both sockeye salmon and chum salmon in a mixed stock fishery during the month of June. The sockeye salmon are predominantly Bristol Bay and Alaska Peninsula origin. The chum salmon are bound for a number of areas, including Japan, Russia, the Arctic-Yukon-Kuskokwim, Bristol Bay, the Alaska Peninsula, and southcentral Alaska. These salmon stocks have historically been harvested along the south Alaska Peninsula during the month of June. This management plan is intended to be consistent with the Policy for the Management of Sustainable Salmon Fisheries (5 AAC 39.222) and the Policy for the Management of Mixed Stock Salmon Fisheries (5 AAC 39.220).

(b) The South Unimak fishery takes place in the Unimak District, the Southwestern

District, the East Pavlof Bay and the West Pavlof Bay Sections of the South Central District, and the Bechevin Bay Section of the Northwestern District.

(c) The Shumagin Islands fishery takes place in the Shumagin Islands Section.

(d) In the South Unimak and Shumagin Islands fisheries, the commissioner may establish, by emergency order, commercial fishing periods as follows:

(1) for set gillnet gear,

(A) beginning June 6, commercial fishing periods will begin at 6:00 a.m. and run 64 hours until 10:00 p.m. two days later; beginning June 10, commercial fishing periods will begin at 6:00 a.m. and run 88 hours until 10:00 p.m. three days later; commercial fishing will then close for 32 hours and reopen at 6:00 a.m. two days later;

(B) notwithstanding (A) of this paragraph, the final commercial fishing period will end at 10:00 p.m. on June 28;

(2) for seine and drift gillnet gear,

(A) beginning June 10, commercial fishing periods will begin at 6:00 a.m. and run 88 hours until 10:00 p.m. three days later; commercial fishing will then close for 32 hours and reopen at 6:00 a.m. two days later;

(B) notwithstanding (A) of this paragraph, the final commercial fishing period will end at 10:00 p.m. on June 28.

(e) Certified observers will be onboard commercial fishing vessels to collect first-hand harvest data to assure effective monitoring, compliance, control and enforcement.

(f) [(e)] All salmon caught by a CFEC permit holder must be retained, and each CFEC permit holder must report the number of salmon caught, including those taken but not sold, on an ADF&G fish ticket. For the purposes of this subsection, "caught" means brought on board the vessel.

(g) [(f)] Notwithstanding (d) of this section, commercial salmon fishing will close in the waters of the Volcano Bay Section of the Southwestern District south and east of a line from Arch Point Light at 55_ 12.30' N. lat., 161_ 54.30' W. long. to a point on Belkofski Peninsula at 55_ 09.50' N. lat., 161_ 57.80' W. long. and in the portion of the West Pavlof Bay Section south of Black Point (55_ 24.48' N. lat.), if the harvest of sockeye salmon from the South Central District, the Volcano Bay Section of the Southwestern District, and the Belkofski Bay Section, excluding those waters inside of a line between Vodapoini Point and Bold Cape, reaches 191,000 sockeye salmon based on fish ticket information.

(h) [(g)] Notwithstanding (d) of this section, commercial salmon fishing is closed to purse seine gear in the waters of the Volcano Bay Section of the Southwestern District, the Belkofski Bay Section of the Southwestern District, excluding those waters inside of a line between Vodapoini Point at 55_ 01.88' N. lat., 162_ 24.80' W. long., and Bold Cape at 55_ 01.24' N. lat., 162_ 16.40' W. long., and the South Central District.

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What is the issue you would like the board to address and why? The Orutsararmiut Native Council (ONC) is the federally recognized Tribal governing body for the Native Village of Bethel, Alaska. Bethel is located along the delta of the Kuskokwim River, approximately 90 miles inland from the Bering Sea and approximately 398 miles northwest of Anchorage. ONC serves approximately 4,500 Alaska Native residents from all villages throughout Yukon-Kuskokwim Delta (YK Delta), over 3,800 of which are enrolled as Tribal members.

The south Alaska Peninsula fishery consists of a mixed stock fishery during the month of June; the sockeye salmon (*Oncorhynchus nerka*) are predominantly Bristol Bay and Alaska Peninsula origin and the chum salmon (*O. keta*), however, are bound for a number of areas, including the Arctic-Yukon-Kuskokwim (AYK) region. In 2021, the South Unimak and Shumagin Islands June salmon commercial fishery experienced an abundant harvest of approximately 1,168,601 chum salmon¹, while subsistence users on the Kuskokwim and Yukon River approximately harvested 9,621² and 1,253³ chum salmon, respectively. The disparity in harvest between fisheries further divides users and creates animosity due to lack of trust.

Low returns of chum salmon are expected again this season, thus further decreasing food security and increasing the risk of community instability in our region. The alarming declines of salmon across the state, together with the research findings communicated through the roundtable discussions led by U.S. Senators Dan Sullivan and Lisa Murkowski, have increased our concern for the health, safety, and general welfare of the people of our Tribe and the YK Delta Region.

After experiencing the lowest chum salmon return on record on the Kuskokwim River, ONC firmly believes it is of utmost importance to have the most reliable harvest information possible. For this reason, ONC would like to address necessary changes in the South Unimak and Shumagin Islands June Salmon Management Plan, 5 AAC 09.365. Specifically, ONC proposes to enhance the accountability of harvest data collected and facilitate information gathering by incorporating an onboard observer component into the management plan. We find the need to protect our livelihood and allow future generations to continue harvesting salmon..

PROPOSED BY: Orutsararmiut Traditional Native Council (HQ-F22-020)
