

PROPOSAL 80

5 AAC 21.359. Kenai River Late-Run King Salmon Management Plan.

Modify the Kenai River Late-Run King Salmon Management Plan as follows:

Current regulation ties the closure of the in-river late king fishery to the closure of the set gillnet fishery. We recommend the BOF allows a small harvest of Kenai River late-run king salmon in the Upper Subdistrict set gillnet fishery during periods of low king salmon abundance in order to allow harvest of excess sockeye salmon bound for the Kenai and Kasilof Rivers. The relatively small number of king salmon that would be harvested will not have a detrimental effect on the long-term sustainability of this stock.

Regulatory Language:

If the department estimates the total escapement of Kenai River late-run king salmon to be less than 11,750 fish, the entire Upper Subdistrict set gillnet fishery **shall be closed**;

If the department estimates the total escapement of Kenai River late-run king salmon to **greater than 15,000 fish**, the Upper Subdistrict set gillnet fishery **shall be managed per 5 AAC 21.360 and 5 AAC 21.365**

If the department estimates the total escapement of Kenai River late-run king salmon to **be greater than 11,750 fish, but less than 15,000 fish**, the Upper Subdistrict set gillnet fishery will be **managed as follows**:

Kasilof Section: notwithstanding 5 AAC 21.310 Fishing Seasons, the Kasilof Section set gillnet fishery will be managed to meet the Kasilof River sockeye salmon BEG or OEG. The Kasilof Section set gillnet fishery will also be managed to not exceed a total harvest of more than 200 large Kenai River late-run king salmon. If this number is exceeded, the commissioner will immediately close the Kasilof Section set gillnet fishery.

Kenai/East Foreland Sections: notwithstanding 5 AAC 21.310 Seasons, the Kenai/East Foreland Sections set gillnet fishery will be managed to meet the Kenai River sockeye salmon inriver goal for the appropriate tier as determined by the department. The Kenai/East Foreland Sections set gillnet fishery will also be managed to not exceed a total harvest of more than 200 large Kenai River late-run king salmon. If this number is exceeded, the commissioner will immediately close the Kenai/East Foreland Sections set gillnet fishery.

The department may fish the **Kasilof and Kenai/East Foreland** Sections set gillnet fisheries **independently of each other**

The department may institute **gear limitations** as defined in 5 AAC 21.359(e)(G)(i) and (ii).

The department may limit set gillnet fishing to within **600 feet** from mean high tide or within one-half mile of mean high tide.

Other solutions considered and tried:

Restrictions to the setnet fishery have not improved the health of the late chinook run.

ADF&G recommended against adopting the OEG citing the lack of scientific justification.

No action by the BOF or ADF&G can impact the ocean factors that are impacting the size and age of returning late run Kenai Chinook.

The late-run chinook returning to the Kenai River are the late-run chinook. Large kings, as described by the OEG do not exist due to factors that are beyond the control of ADF&G and the BOF.

No amount of regulatory language can influence the size and age composition of the run.

Wishing for large fish and establishing a large king goal will not influence their size. Neither will imposing draconian restrictions on the East Side Setnet Fishery.

What is the issue you would like the board to address and why? What issue: The current Optimal Escapement for the late-run Kenai Chinook goal of 15,000 large late-run chinook salmon is unattainable and based on fantasy rather than science. If it is not removed or revised, the East Side Setnet Fishery will never fish again.

Why: When the projected late-run king salmon escapement is less than 15,000 king salmon, Drift, personal use, in-river sport fishing guides, and private sport fishermen have remained open to harvest Sockeye salmon while the East Side Set Gillnet Fishery has been the only user group closed to all fishing.

According to a study funded by the Cook Inlet Salmon Disaster Technical Committee and conducted by Alaska Department Fish and Game biologist Bert Lewis and other Pacific Northwest Scientists, King Salmon are declining in size across the Pacific Coast due to environmental changes, selective harvest of large fish, and natural mortality (See <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1111/faf.12272>) This study indicates that the actions taken by the Board of Fish to establish an **unattainable** Optimum Escapement Goal (OEG) against the Sustainable Escapement Goal (SEG) recommendation of the Alaska Department of Fish and Game, and limit Cook Inlet's East Side Setnet fishing time will not impact the health of the Large Kenai Kings. Meanwhile, both Kenai and Kasilof River sockeye salmon escapements continue to exceed escapement objectives. The board did not foresee that with the setnet fishery would be closed, both the Kenai and Kasilof rivers would suffer multiple years of massive and catastrophic sockeye over-escapements. In 2022, the Kasilof exceeded its escapement goal by over 200% with nearly a million fish escaping into the river. The Kenai and Kasilof Rivers have exceeded their sockeye escapement goals several times over the past few years while trying to achieve the unattainable Kenai River late-run king OEG, thus ensuring failed future sockeye runs.

PROPOSED BY: Kenai Peninsula Fishermen's Association (EF-F23-158)
