

PROPOSAL 86

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

Prohibit bait in the Kenai River through Oct 31 if the king salmon sport fishery is closed by EO as follows:

(d) If the projected late-run king salmon escapement is less than 15,000 king salmon 75 cm mid eye to tail fork and longer, the department shall

(1) close the sport fisheries in the Kenai River and in the salt waters of Cook Inlet north of the latitude of Bluff Point to the taking of king salmon;

(2) close the commercial drift gillnet fishery in the Central District within one mile of the Kenai Peninsula shoreline north of the Kenai River and within one and one-half miles of the Kenai Peninsula shoreline south of the Kenai River; and

(3) close the commercial set gillnet fishery in the Upper Subdistrict of the Central District.

(4) from the time of emergency order closure to October 31 the use of bait is prohibited in the Coho fishery.

What is the issue you would like the board to address and why? Set netters are experiencing incredible hardships to protect Late Run Kenai King salmon, yet all that sacrifice is nullified by Coho fishermen catching Kings when they're at their weakest as they prepare to spawn. In the name of conservation, set netters have experienced mandatory closures, despite an exploration rate on late run Kenai River Kings of less than 1%, while all other user groups see their fisheries liberalized. Rather than share the burden of conservation, in-river users have received relaxed regulations pertaining to habitat and salmon conservation:

1) Outboards were increased from 35hp to 50hp rather than mandating smaller, more efficient vessels be used, or going to a drift only river. Larger horsepower engines emit higher decibel readings, which increases overall noise pollution directed at king salmon spawning beds.

2) Fresh water log books are no longer required from commercial guides. Because of this the department is willfully ignorant to the number of kings "inadvertently" caught in the coho fishery.

Per Alaska Department of Fish and Game, returning chinook spend 30-60 days in river before they spawn and die. If the morbidity rate on unintended king catch is just one a day (on spawning kings counted with the chinook sonar project), then the impact to the king run is greater than the entire ESSN king harvest on average over the last five years.

In order to share the burden of conservation and help offset the above mentioned relaxed regulations, bait should be completely banned from the coho fishery in order to avoid any incidental king catch. Artificial lures, i.e. twitching for silvers, throwing spinners, etc, are very effective and efficient means of harvesting silvers with minimal impact on spawning king salmon. These methods are proven to avoid incidental king catch while still providing an effective means of harvesting coho salmon.

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