

PROPOSAL 132

5 AAC 29.140 Size limits, possession, and landing requirements.

Establish a minimum size limit for Chinook salmon of 26 1/2 inches from snout to fork of tail in the spring troll fisheries.

5 AAC 29.140 (f) Not withstanding (a) of this section, in the spring troll fisheries, the minimum size limit for Chinook shall be 26-1/2" from snout to fork of tail.

(Note that if ADF&G data shows a different fork length to be the equivalent of 28" overall for immature kings, I would support using that length, but my observations indicate that an immature 28" king is about 26-1/2" in fork-length).

What is the issue you would like the board to address and why? It can be difficult to precisely determine if a close-to-long-enough king salmon meets the current minimum size limit of 28" as measured from snout to tip of the tail. Sometimes the fish flex or point their tails as they are being measured, thereby changing their length by up to half an inch. While trollers try to compensate for this distortion, we have to take the measurement quickly in order that the fish can be released unharmed if it is too short. As king salmon have gotten smaller over the years, there are more fish that need to be measured every year, and a corresponding increase in the likelihood that a fish caught by well-intended fishermen is considered too short by enforcement personnel. Changing from an overall length measurement to a fork-length measurement would make it much easier to quickly obtain an accurate and consistent measurement since the fork-length doesn't change when the fish's tail changes posture. This will reduce stress on the released fish and cut down on disagreement with enforcement personnel when a fish goes into rigor mortis with their tail in a different position than when it was initially measured.

Utilizing a fork-length measurement during the spring season when the troll fishery is targeting Alaska hatchery kings would be particularly beneficial. Mature kings tend to be slightly larger than immature kings of the same age. This difference is the reason that the 28" minimum length was adopted decades ago. It protects immature king salmon that should be released to grow bigger, while allowing the harvest of precocious "jack" spawners- fish that while small, will nonetheless soon spawn and die. However, using a fork-length measurement is a better way to distinguish between maturing Chinook and immature kings than an overall length.

As salmon mature, their tails become less forked, so while an immature king that has a fork-length of 26-1/2" is about 28" overall, a mature king with the same fork-length is about an inch shorter in overall length. Under the current regulations, the immature fish is borderline-legal to keep, but the mature king is not. By changing the measurement method from 28" overall to 26-1/2" fork-length during the spring season when trollers are targeting mature Alaska hatchery fish the spring troll catch of Alaska hatchery Chinook will increase without measurably increasing the catch of Treaty Chinook since the Treaty kings in the region are predominately immature during the spring troll season. This is an unmitigated benefit since the Alaska hatchery kings do not count against the quota imposed by the Treaty.

While this change might mean that very occasionally a mature "jack" SE wild Chinook would be caught and retained rather than released, the BoF should keep in mind that such a fish would be a "medium", not "large" size fish. Thus, even if it reached the river, it would not have counted towards escapement goals. These "jack" kings are typically surplus to reproductive needs, hence ADFG has long encouraged their harvest dating back to the work of pioneering SE Chinook

ADF&G researcher Paul Kissner in the 1970's at a time when local wild runs were at even lower levels than they are now.

Did you develop your proposal in coordination with others, or with your local Fish and Game Advisory Committee? Explain. The Sitka AC has previously endorsed the concept of changing the minimum size limit in some spring fisheries to a fork length measurement multiple times in the past 4 years, and has submitted a Sitka-area-only proposal to do so in this board cycle. This proposal is similar but would apply to all spring troll fisheries instead of just the Sitka area.

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