<u>**PROPOSAL 63**</u>
5 AAC 77.591. Copper River Personal Use Dip Net Salmon Fishery Management Plan.
Amend the opening date of the Chitina Subdistrict personal use fishery, as follows:

5 AAC 77.591 (b) Salmon may be taken from June **21** [7] or **2 weeks after a daily management of fish passage is met at Miles Lake sonar** through September 30. The commissioner shall establish a preseason schedule, including fishing times, for the period June **21** [7] through August 31 based on daily projected sonar counts at the sonar counter located near Miles Lake. This abundance-based preseason schedule will distribute the harvest throughout the season. The commissioner **must** [MAY] close, by an emergency order effective June **21** [7], the Chitina Subdistrict personal use salmon fishing season and shall reopen the season, by emergency order, on or before June **21** [15] depending on the run strength and timing of the sockeye salmon run. Adjustments shall be made to the preseason schedule based on actual sonar counts compared to projected counts. If the actual sonar count at Miles Lake is more than the projected sonar count, the commissioner shall close, by emergency order, the season and immediately reopen it during which additional fishing times will be allowed. If the actual sonar count at Miles Lake is less than the projected sonar count, the commissioner shall close, by emergency order, the season and immediately reopen it during which fishing times will be reduced by a corresponding amount of time.

What is the issue you would like the board to address and why? Protecting genetic diversity of salmon in the Copper River Watershed.

Currently, the Personal Use (PU) fishery in the Chitina Subdistrict (CSD) may begin as early as June 7. Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK) of Tribal citizens and accounts from local residents indicate the run timing of Copper River salmon has been delayed by two to three weeks in recent years, most likely due to changing environmental conditions i.e. late ice-out. Data from the Miles Lake Sonar and harvest analysis quantify and validate these accounts. The first fish to enter the river are typically Chinook and sockeye stocks that travel furthest upriver. With the PU fishery catching approximately 9.6% of the total sockeye and 4.4% of the Chinook run (most recent 5-year average), which is equivalent to approximately 164,000 total salmon reported (3-year average), the fishery disproportionately impacts Chinook and upriver sockeye stocks in the beginning of the season. Chinook have failed to meet escapement goals four of the past 10 years, even despite lowing the escapement goal from 24,000 to a range of 21,000-31,000 in 2021. Protecting Chinook and the genetic diversity of Copper River sockeye is a proactive step to ensure robust populations.

While PU participants are only allowed one Chinook per household, there are approximately 6,000 permits issued annually. In addition to high participation, there is also undocumented en route mortality as a result of fish handling during catch and release while dipnetting.

Based on radio telemetry studies, it is understood that salmon migrating past the Miles Lake Sonar take between 7 and 14 days (based on environmental factors i.e. streamflow) to reach the CSD where the PU fisheries occurs. By delaying the fishery by two weeks, or until 2 weeks after a daily management objective for fish passage is met at the Miles Lake Sonar (which is met on average

between June 1 and 4), we will protect the diversity of Copper River salmon by not disproportionately impacting early returning genetic stocks.

Did you develop your proposal in coordination with others, or with your local Fish and Game Advisory Committee? Explain. Ahtna Intertribal Fish and Wildlife Committee and Ahtna Tene Nene' jointly recommended this change to address Tribal concerns of the sustainability of Chinook and upper Copper River sockeye stocks. This change in management will help prevent future restrictions and closures.

PROPOSED BY: AITRC Fish and Wildlife Committee   (HQ-F24-104)
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