

MATANUSKA-SUSITNA BOROUGH
MSB Fish and Wildlife Commission Agenda

Vern Halter, Mayor

Mike Wood – Chair
Howard Delo – Vice Chair
Tam Boeve
Andy Couch
Larry Engel
Tim Hale
Peter Probasco
Kendra Zamzow
Vacant – Ex officio member

Ted Eischeid - Staff



Michael Brown, Borough Manager

PLANNING & LAND USE DEPARTMENT
Alex Strawn, Planning & Land Use Director
Kim Sollien, Planning Services Manager
Jay Magers, Development Services Manager
Fred Wagner, Platting Officer

*Lower Level Conference Room
Dorothy Swanda Jones Building
350 E. Dahlia Avenue, Palmer*

April 15, 2021
REGULAR MEETING
4:00 p.m.

Ways to participate in MSB Fish and Wildlife Commission meetings:

IN PERSON: Lower Level Conference Room, DSJ Building, 350 E. Dahlia Ave, Palmer.
Should you wish to testify in person, please adhere to the 6-foot distance between yourself and others. It is required to wear a mask for anyone entering or attending meetings in MSB facilities.

REMOTE PARTICIPATION:

Microsoft Teams meeting

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- I. CALL TO ORDER
 - II. ROLL CALL – DETERMINATION OF QUORUM
 - III. APPROVAL OF AGENDA
 - IV. PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE
 - V. APPROVAL OF MIUTES
 - A. March 18, 2021, Regular Meeting Minutes

- VI. AUDIENCE PARTICIPATION (*three minutes per person, for items not scheduled for public hearing*)
- VII. STAFF/AGENCY REPORTS & PRESENTATIONS
- A. West Susitna Access Road Project Update
 - B. Brian Marston and Sam Ivey, ADFG- how emergency orders to expand the set net fishery for coho are developed and their impacts on the sport fishery.
 - C. Ted Eischeid – staff report
- VIII. UNFINISHED BUSINESS
- A. Report of FWC committee meeting with Mgr. Brown
 - B. West Susitna Access Road Project
- IX. NEW BUSINESS
- A. Consideration of adding a land acknowledgement to FWC meeting agendas
 - B. Consideration of a FWC letter to ADFG concerning UCI salmon commercial and sport fishery management
- X. MEMBER COMMENTS/FUTURE AGENDA ITEMS TO CONSIDER
- XI. NEXT MEETING DATE: May 20, 2021, 4 PM
- XII. ADJOURNMENT

Disabled persons needing reasonable accommodation in order to participate at a MSB Fish and Wildlife Commission Meeting should contact the borough ADA Coordinator at 861-8432 at least one week in advance of the meeting.

MSB Lower Level Conference Room //TEAMS Remote Participation Option

Minutes prepared by Ted Eischeid, Planner II

REGULAR MEETING 4 P.M. March 18, 2021

I. CALL TO ORDER; ROLL CALL; ESTABLISH QUORUM

Meeting called to order at 4:05 PM.

Roll Call:

Present: Howard Delo (HD), Tam Boeve (TB), Andy Couch (AC), Larry Engel (LE), Pete Probasco (PP), Kendra Zamzow (KZ).

Absent: Mike Wood (excused), Tim Hale

Quorum established.

II. APPROVAL OF AGENDA

- Motion: Moved to approve; AC
- Second: LE
- Discussion: None
- Action: Passed unanimously without objection.

III. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

a. Feb. 18, 2021

- Motion: Moved to approve by AC
- Second: LE
- Discussion: Change Pet to PETE on p. 3
- Action: Passed as corrected without objection.

IV. AUDIENCE INTRODUCTIONS & PARTICIPATION (3 min./person, chair's discretion)

1. Bill Stoltze, Birchwood:

- Gave AK Legislative update.4:12

2. Becky Long, Talkeetna, via phone: SB 97 – is opposed to this bill, especially the rec rivers repeal; feels FWC should weigh in on this issue; this bill is similar to last year's SB 204; a review of the rec river plan by an advisory group would take care of any issues; repeal of rec rivers would result in damaged rivers.

3. Steve Braund, Northern District Set Netters Association of Cook Inlet.

4. Jessica Speed, Mat-Su Basin Salmon Habitat Partnership.

V. STAFF/AGENCY REPORTS & PRESENTATIONS

- a. West Susitna Access Road Project Update – Brad Sworts and Jesse Peterson
- b. Staff report/correspondence- Ted Eischeid
- c. Supplemental Wetland Mitigation Ordinance presentation – Ted Eischeid
- d. Senator Scott Kawasaki – SB 44
 - i. Described SB 44.
 - ii. In Senate Resources committee; faces an uphill battle.
 - iii. We have been getting letters of support/comments. Need more, and need to continue this every year.

VI. ITEMS OF BUSINESS

1. West Susitna Access Road Project – Brad Sworts and Jesse Peterson

1. New docs on WSAR Project web site.
2. Provided update to Assembly last Tuesday on Phase 2
3. Have several deliverables up on project web page.
4. Have a recording of the virtual open house online.
5. Highlights of engineering:
 - a. Road about 100 miles long;
 - b. Parallels Donlin Pipeline route in part.
 - c. Cost ranges identified for project.
 - d. Working on phase 3 scope of work to present to Assembly in May.
 - e. Road corridor is an early proposal subject to change, especially due to environmental permitting requirements. Early stage work.
 - f. Will learn more if phase 3 goes forward.

2. Supplemental Wetland Mitigation Ordinance (SWMO)

1. PUBLIC HEARING – opened at 5:50 PM.
 - No Comments
 - Public hearing closed at 5:55 PM.
 - AC Moved resolution FWC 21-01 in support of the draft ; PP second.
 - Discussion:

- Amendment: PP moved an amendment to add the phrase “and other fish and wildlife” whenever the word Salmon/salmonid was used in resolution FWC 21-01; AC seconded.
 - Amendment passes unanimously
- Amendment: AC moved to add word “commercial” to packet p. 74, after the word “subsistence” on line two of the third WHEREAS on that page; PP seconded.
 - Amendment passed unanimously.
- Resolution FWC 21-01 passed unanimously as amended.

3. Federal Subsistence Board upcoming wildlife regulatory cycle/proposals

- Discussion: Shared GMU 13/14 federal subsistence board hunting reg maps;
 - PP did overview of federal subsistence board.
 - HD reviewed information from our February minutes regarding this issue.
 - AC: subsistence regulations are complicated; we have never had anyone from the public ask us to take this issue on as a commission; since these are oftentimes contentious issues I’d prefer we not deal with this.
 - PP: I concur with AC; we need to know specifics on South Central issues that impact the MSB before pursuing any actions.
 - HD: I don’t know I’d write it off as a topic to explore in the future; it is something we should keep an eye on it.
- Motion:
- Second:
- Discussion:
- Action:

VII. MEMBER COMMENTS

1. LE: none.
2. KZ: none.
3. TB: thank you to Ted for SWMO presentation; wasn’t able to listen to SB 97 testimony, but told by a constituent that the testimony by AC was excellent.
4. AC: referred to blue p. 25 in handout on UCI PU fishery harvest estimates for 2020; has info on the Susitna River PU fishery; also, talked to MW and wants to add agenda item: a consideration of how the emergency order to expand the set net fishery for coho is developed; wants to have a further discussion on this at our April meeting; had mentioned the desire to get

and OMA.

5. PP: good meeting.

6. HD: MW went to Farewell Burn area for bison hunting.

7. TE: will send new FWC orientation document I developed for new members to the whole FWC.

VIII. NEXT REGULAR MEETING – April, 2021, 4 PM – AGENDA AND PRESENTATION IDEAS?

1. AC's Comment. Invite Brian Marston to present on this. AC will provide materials to Ted ahead of time.

IX. ADJOURNMENT

- LE: moved to adjourn;
- PP: second
- Motion passed without objection.
- Meeting stands adjourned at 6:33 PM.

Mike Wood, Chair

Dated

ATTEST:

Ted Eischeid, Planner II Staff

Dated

**MATANUSKA-SUSITNA BOROUGH****Planning and Land Use Department****Planning Division**

350 East Dahlia Avenue • Palmer, AK 99645

Phone (907) 861-7833

<http://www.matsugov.us> • planning@matsugov.us**Date:** 15 April 2021**Re:** FWC Staff Report

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1. National Fish Habitat Partnership Board update:**2. Supplemental Wetlands Mitigation Ordinance 21-025 update**

- Recent changes:
 - Based on a question at the March 18 FWC meeting, we separated out “nonconforming uses into its own section (17.31.060), and added language to address a modification to an existing USACE individual permit.
 - Planning Commission work on SWMO is now scheduled as follows:
 - April 19th, Introduction.
 - May 3rd, public hearing and action.
 - MSB Assembly SWMO timeline:
 - May 18th, Introduction.
 - June 1st, public hearing and action.

3. Anchorage Watershed and Natural Resources Advisory Committee Update

- a. March meeting – Canceled.
- b. Next Meeting: April 28th, 12-1 PM, via Teams.

4. FWC committee meeting with Manager Brown on March 24.**5. Packet items-staff review:**

- 1. Correspondence
- 2. Land Acknowledgement Background
- 3. Potential letter to ADFG asking for clarity on fisheries management
- 4. November 2020 ADFG fisheries season summary: FWC questions, ADFG answers.

*Providing Outstanding Borough Services to the Matanuska-Susitna Community****Ted Eischeid, Planner II****Supporting Environmental Planning and the MSB Fish & Wildlife Commission.**Ted.eischeid@matsugov.us Ph. 907.861-8606, Cell 795-6281*

SUSITNA BASIN RECREATION RIVERS: WHAT IS AT STAKE**LEGISLATIVE PROPOSAL SB 97, SECTIONS 19, 20 TO REPEAL AS 41.23.400-510 RECREATION RIVER DESIGNATION AND MANAGEMENT PLAN**

The Susitna Basin Recreation Rivers and their corridors are reserved as a special purpose area under Article VII sec. 7 of the Alaska Constitution. The 6 waterways are each divided into subunits with their own management goals. The Susitna Basin Recreation Rivers are: Little Susitna River Management Unit; Deshka River including Neil Lake, Kroto Creek and Moose Creek; Talkeetna River including Chunilna Creek; Lake Creek including Chelatna Lake; Talachulitna River including Judd Lake; and Alexander Creek including Alexander Lake and Sucker Creek. The land on both sides of the waterway are designated Recreation River Corridors. They vary from one-quarter to two miles wide, dependent on the amount of state land involved. A total of 73 Public Use Sites and 15 Special Management Areas are within the 6 waterway management units.

BACKGROUND OF SUSITNA BASIN RECREATION RIVERS

1. Susitna Area Plan: The first official mention of Recreation Rivers in the Susitna Basins was in the Alaska Department of Natural Resources (DNR) Susitna Area Plan (SAP). This plan was signed by DNR Commissioner Esther Wunnicke on April 4, 24, 1985 after extensive public participation. This was the management plan for state lands in the Susitna Area. SAP's chapter 4 Implementation recommended as a priority for Recreation Rivers Corridors for Kroto Creek, Moose Creek, Lake Creek, Talachulitna River, Alexander Creek and the Talkeetna River.

SAP states when a legislative designation is proposed for long term retention it possesses such high resource values that it is clear that the area should remain in public ownership permanently and/or the nature and value of the resources present require more restrictive management for the protection than is possible under the general multiple use designation.

Regarding these waterways, SAP states:

- These waterways are extremely valuable to the region's economy and environment. Money spent on transportation and river based recreation is an important source of local income;
 - These streams and rivers are heavily used by the public for fishing, floating, boating, transportation and public access to hunting and recreation sites;
 - They attract people across the nation as well as Alaskan residents;
 - All of these rivers are anadromous fish streams supporting the 5 salmon species and resident fish;
 - They are major contributors to the Cook Inlet commercial salmon fishery;
 - Their riparian habitat is also essential for sustenance of mammalian populations. Moose winter range along the rivers is especially important.
2. SB 93 mandating the establishment of the Susitna Basin Recreation Rivers AS 41.23.400-510 was signed into law in 1988. Some highlights of the bill:
 - Section 41.23.500 established the recreation river designation with corridors for 6 rivers. The Little Susitna River was added. Moose Creek/Kroto Creek became sub-units of the Deshka Recreation River.

- The Commissioner shall reserve to the state under AS 45.15.145, an instream flow or level for water in the rivers described in AS 41.23.500 that is adequate to achieve purpose of AS 41.23.400.
- Under AS 41.23.430, a 13 member advisory board is established and will consult with the Commissioner in preparing, adopting and revising management plan and regulations affecting use and management of the recreation rivers.
- A management plan in consultation with affected municipalities, the Advisory Board, the public and state agencies shall prepare a Management Plan. The plan will be submitted to the legislature and if not rejected will take effect `100 days after that passage.
- The Commissioner cannot get land for inclusion in the corridor by eminent domain.
- State owned land and water to be established as recreation river corridor can only happen by legislation.
- Recreation Rivers and corridors are reserved as special purpose areas under article VII sec. 7, Constitution of the State of Alaska.

3. Susitna Basin Recreation Rivers Management Plan (SBRRMP)

A quote from the actual plan describes the public process in creating the plan.

From page 1-7: "The plan is the culmination of the efforts of a wide spectrum of agencies, organization, public, individuals, and the legislature. The plan provides a long-term blueprint for the management of these six important rivers. The plan was not developed in a vacuum... Thousands of individuals attended public meetings, wrote letters, signed petitions, and contributed to the development of the plan alternatives and plan. As a result of this public input, significant changes were made at every step of the process." The process took over 2 years.

The Plan created 73 Public Use Sites for all 6 waterways. These are areas of high public use with unique resource values. They are important access for fishing, camping recreation and other public uses and values.

Fifteen Special Management Areas were created. These are areas of existing or proposed isolated development or clusters of private land. They are to be managed for different levels of development and recreation than on the surrounding public lands.

The plan was adopted after legislative review in the spring of 1991. The plan is for a 20 year period of time with a 5 year review. A Recreation Rivers Advisory Board was to be established to oversee implementation along with an interagency team.

Like many other DNR management plans, the implementation and review requirements did not happen as mandated.

WHAT IS AT STAKE

The passage of SB 97 will undo all of the management goals, long range guidelines, and management practices of these waterways and corridors. This action would effectively eliminate the protection of the six rivers' high public values.

The Administration, through the Director of DNR's Division of Mining, Land and Water testimony, contends that the Susitna Basin Recreation Rivers (SBRR) are covered adequately by the current DNR land management plans Southeast Susitna Area Plan (SESAP) and Susitna Matanuska Area Plan (SMAP). The contention is that their classification as habitat and public recreation dispersed will give them the same protections. This is wrong. Yes, the SBRR are designated and classified under those plan classification orders. However, the management intent and administrative aspects, which are important parts of these plans, DO NOT cover them. Those plans do not cover the recreation rivers, the corridors, the public use sites or the special management areas.

The SBRRs are considered Legislatively Designated Areas (LDA). Here is the exact wording of the current plans regarding those waterways and corridors.

- Page 3-121 of SMAP Resource Allocation Table- Legislatively Designated Areas regarding Unit L-01 the State Recreation Rivers the Designation is Habitat and Recreation dispersed.

"Management Intent: State Recreational Rivers: Manage uses consistent with the legislative purposes described in AS 41.23.500 and with the Susitna Basin Recreation Rivers Management Plan. DMLW is responsible for the management of State Recreational Rivers. Administrative Aspects and Other: **The requirements of this area plan do not apply to State Recreation Rivers. SRRs are closed to locatable mineral entry, but are open to coal and mineral leasing and to oil and gas exploration and development. Specific regulations exist that provide management guidance to DMLW.**" (Emphasis added)

- Page 3-69 of the Southeast Susitna Area Plan under Chapter 3 Navigable Rivers and Lakes under Legislatively Designated Areas.

"LDAs are special purpose sites that are managed according to the requirements of the legislation specific to the site and to the general class of LDA (**Article VIII, paragraph 7 of the State Constitution**), and any subsequent management plans or regulations that implement the requirements of the legislation. The effect of the LDA designation is to reserve state land out of the public domain and use or protect it for the purposes stipulated in enabling legislation.

For these reasons, area plans do not apply to the types of LDAs in the planning boundary, except for the plan designation that is assigned, which is subsequently converted to a land classification in a Land Classification Order. (Emphasis added) Certain types of authorizations issued by the Department involve a disposal of state land and administrative regulation requires that the land, with certain exceptions, must first be classified....These designations are not intended to provide a general management direction similar to the way that designations are applied in other parts of this plan, however Management direction for authorizations within LDAs is provided either through the enabling legislation, state administrative regulation, or management plan. If management plans or administrative regulations are not available, the general management intent specific to the LDA or to the category of LDA are to be followed."

SMAP and SESAP were passed without any guidelines for those 6 waterways and corridors. Thus, if the Administration's solution is to repeal the legislation and let the overall management plans cover the areas then both those plans will have to go through a public process to amend the plans for goals and guidelines for those rivers, streams, lakes, public use sites and special management areas.

Concerns amongst the public about the way the SBRR are managed or rather not managed are legitimate. **The main problem is that DMLW never really followed through in its responsibilities of the legislative mandate and management plan.** If there was an advisory board, as allowed under the plan, there would be flexibility with issues such as dock lengths. An advisory board is not hard to put together. The SBRRMP public process was rigorous. There were many compromises.

The lack of 5 year reviews of the plan as a public complaint is true. However, this is comparable to other DNR land management plans. DMLW had no five year review of their other 2 Susitna area land management plans either. The Susitna Area Plan was signed in 1985. It finally got public review when DMLW split the area and passed the Southeast Susitna Area Plan in 2008 and the Susitna Matanuska Area Plan in 2011. **SB 97, instead of repealing the Susitna Basin Recreation Rivers, should mandate a public review of the management plan.**

Part of the SBRRMP was to mandate acquiring Instream Flow Reservations on these rivers to protect water quality, recreation, and fish and wildlife habitat. **If SB 97 passes, will these important water rights be null and void and repealed as well?** This is an important question that needs answers.

Becky Long
Talkeetna Alaska
4/2/2021

ANCHORAGE IS
DENA'INA
EŁNENA



For thousands of years, the Dena'ina people have cared for this place now known as Anchorage. Their sustainable and symbiotic relationships with the animals, waters and land has made Anchorage what it is today. These relationships are embedded in the Dena'ina language.



INDLU BENA

PLURAL OBJECTS LAKE



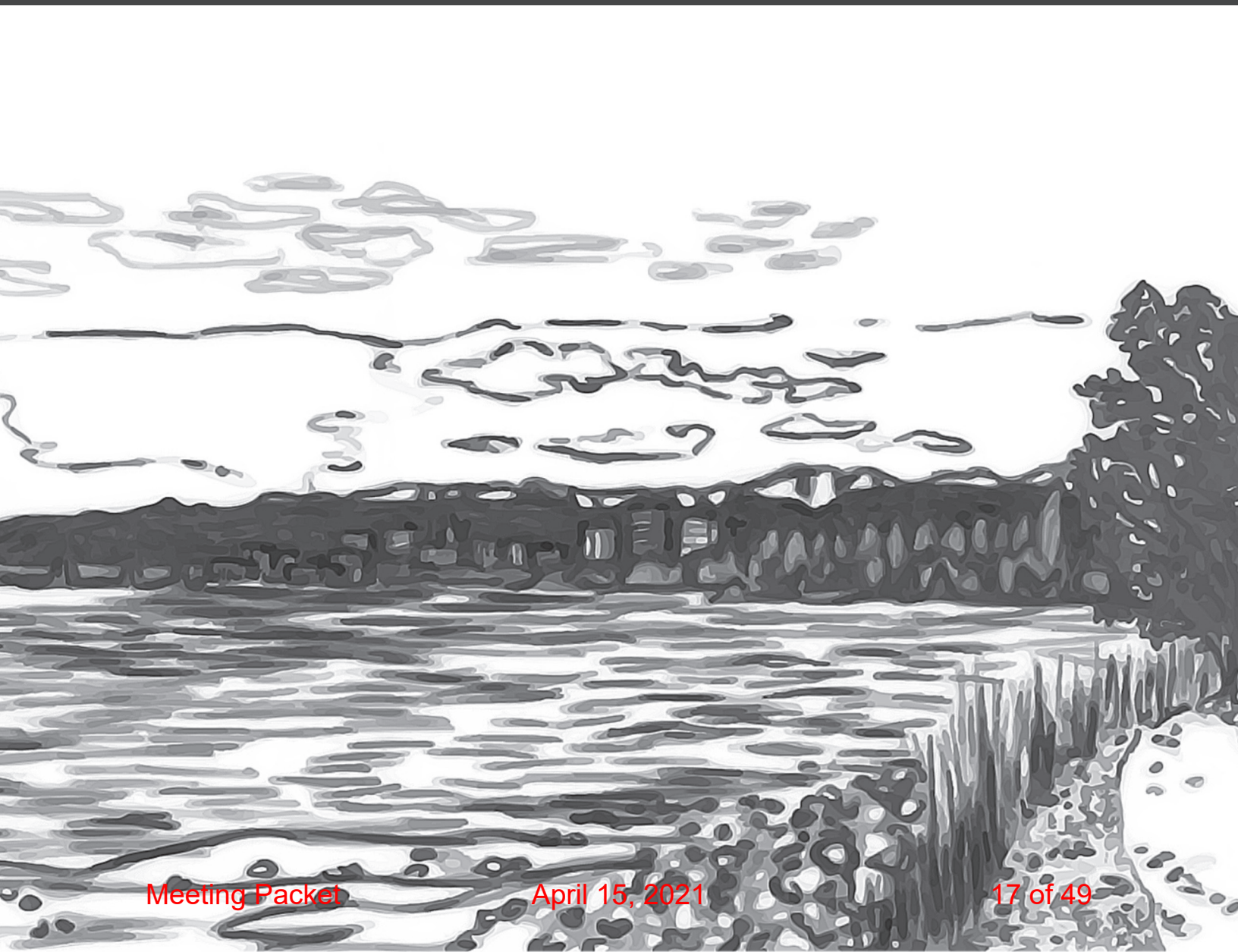
As a step toward reconciliation, we acknowledge Indigenous stewardship and histories.

Land Acknowledgement is about opening a space with gratefulness towards Indigenous people. It is also about personal work and self-examination.



ŁI TA' A GHINI

THAT GLACIER WATER



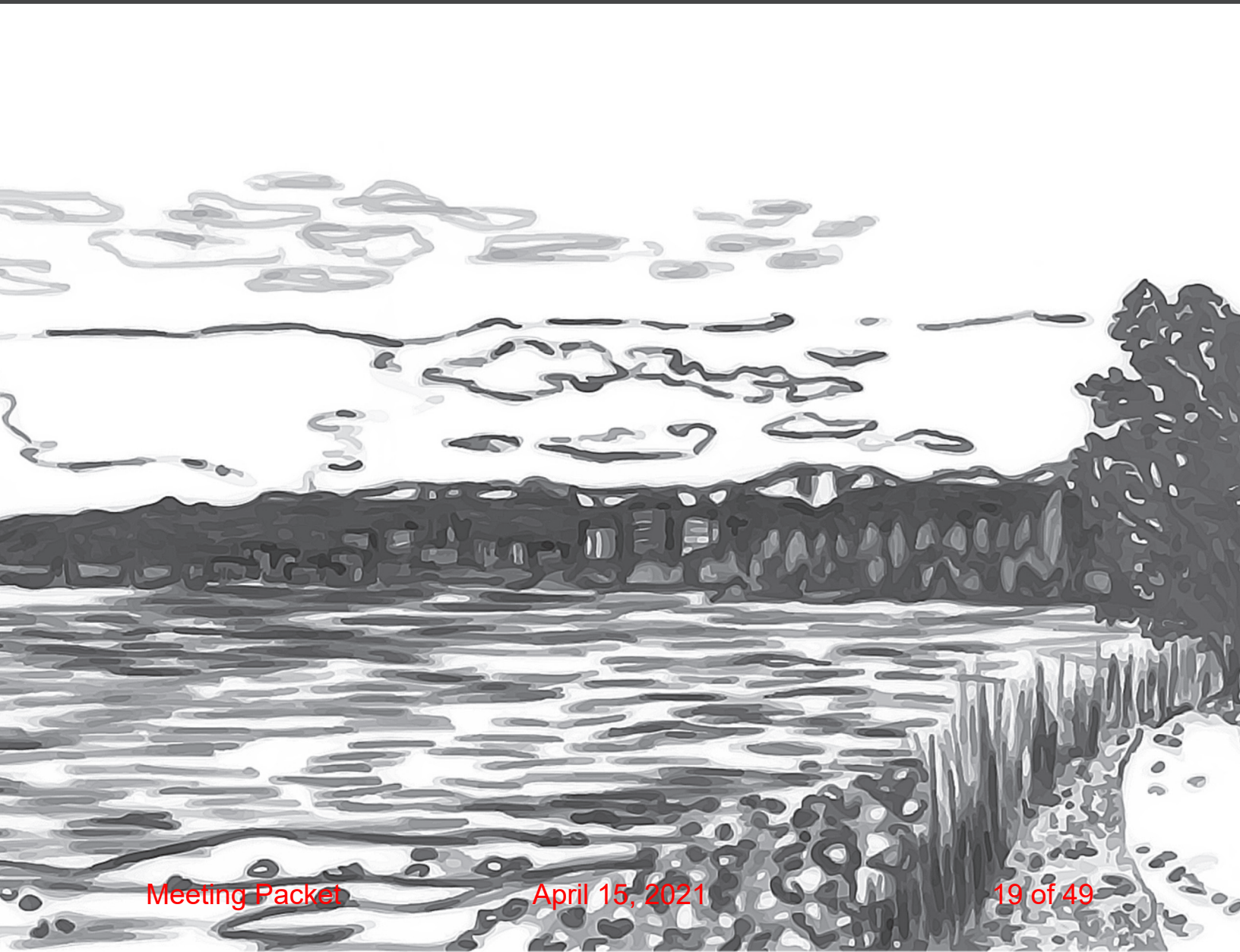
When considering our relationship to Anchorage, we must also consider our relationship to Indigenous peoples.

What knowledge do I have of Indigenous histories? What ongoing actions am I taking to recognize present Indigenous experience?



HUTEN

ASCENDING TRAIL

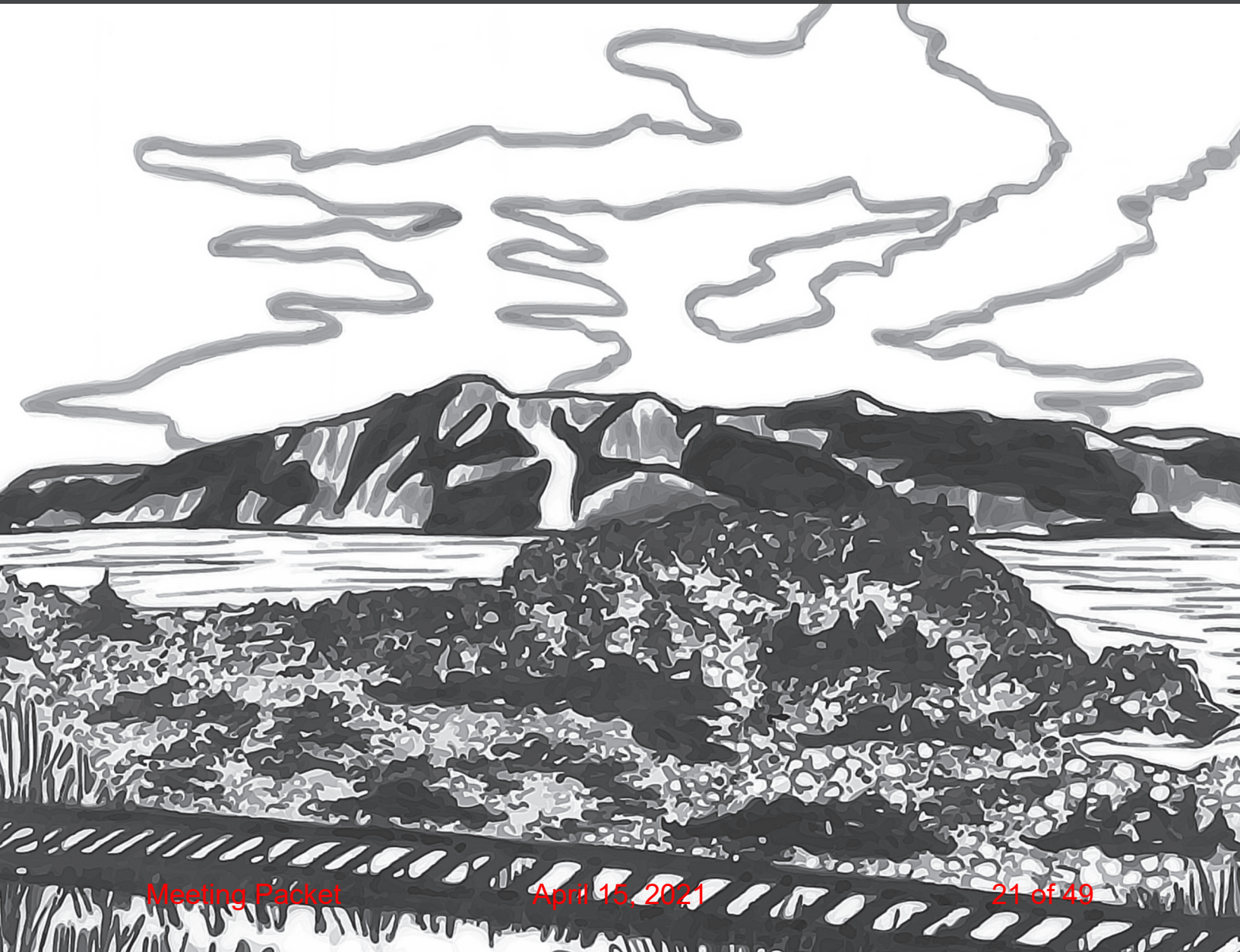


Just as it is our responsibility to understand modern governance of a place, it is also our responsibility to understand the Indigenous people of a place.



TIKAHTNU

BIG WATER RIVER



The work is ours to be done, because everywhere in Alaska there is, and always will be, Indigenous land.



NIŁKIDAL'Y

THE ONES [LAKES] THAT ARE JOINED TOGETHER



When writing your own Land Acknowledgement, consider the work you need to do.

Learn about the Indigenous people of the place you now occupy. Do the work to understand their governance and sovereignty. Reach out respectfully and commit to ongoing actions of reconciliation. Finally, within your Land Acknowledgement, state your reasoning for embracing this movement.



DGHEYEY KAQ'

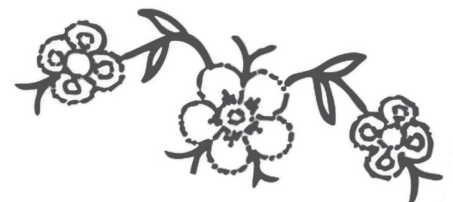
MOUTH OF NEEDLE FISH [CREEK]



In times of great change, we are all learning. This zine, artwork, and content will likely change as well.

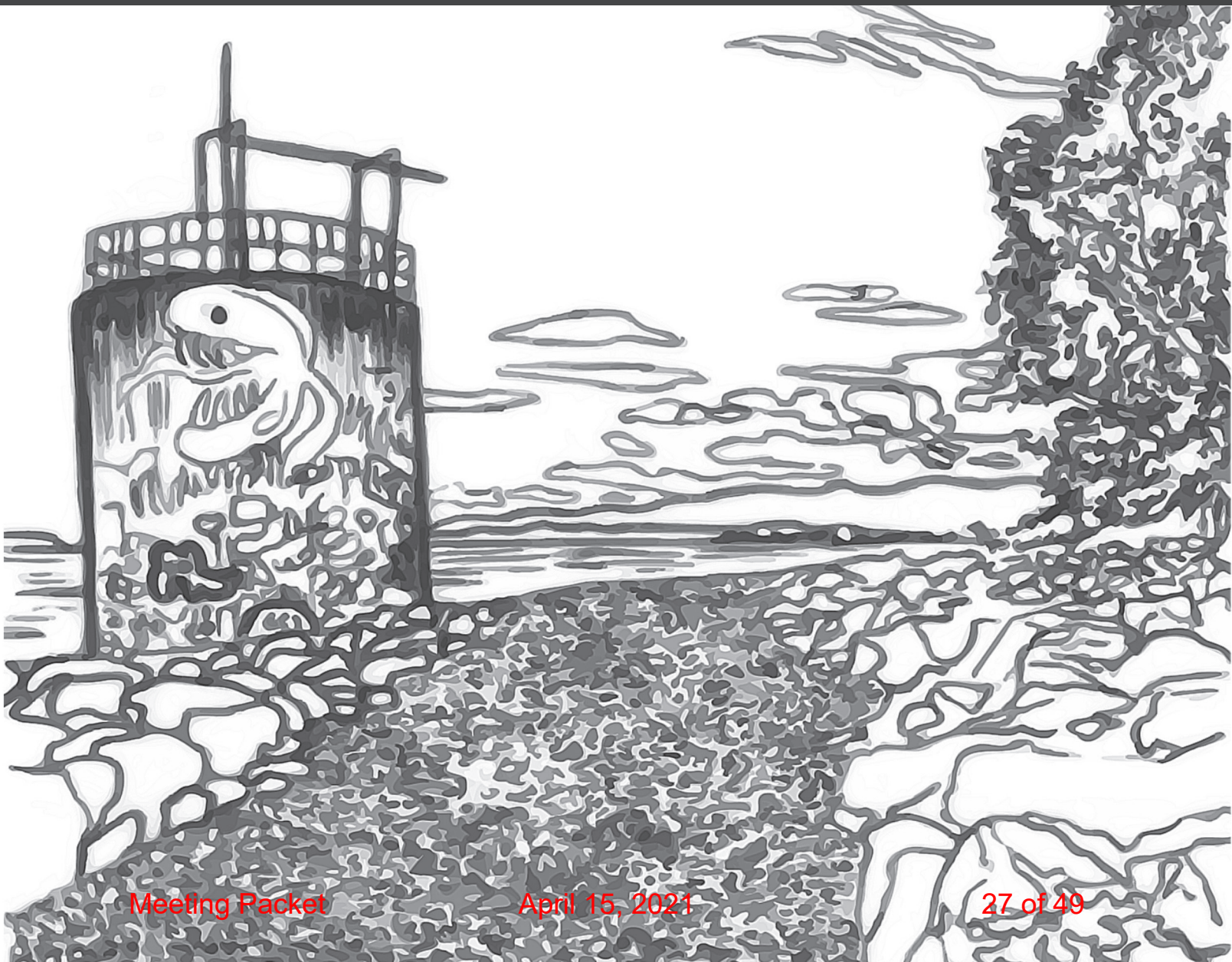
Your Land Acknowledgement should be part of your continual learning of the histories and present experiences of Indigenous peoples.

It is important during this process that we openly accept correction without defensiveness.



NUCH'ISHTUNT

WIND PROTECTED



Land Acknowledgement is about recognizing and thanking Indigenous people for their sustainable care and way of life in a place.

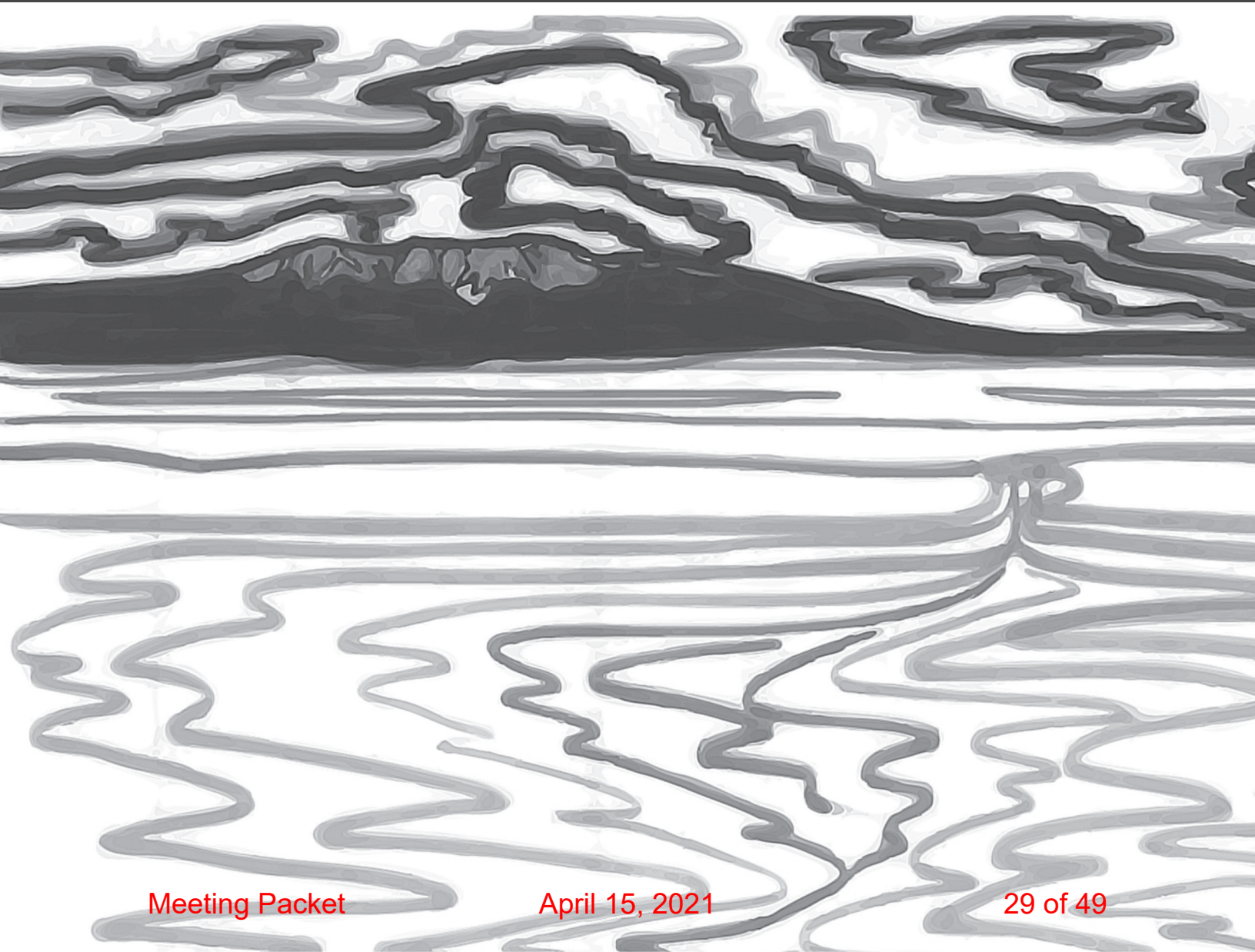
Anchorage is, and always will be, Dena'ina ełnena, Dena'ina homeland.

China'an. Thank you.



DGEHLISHLA

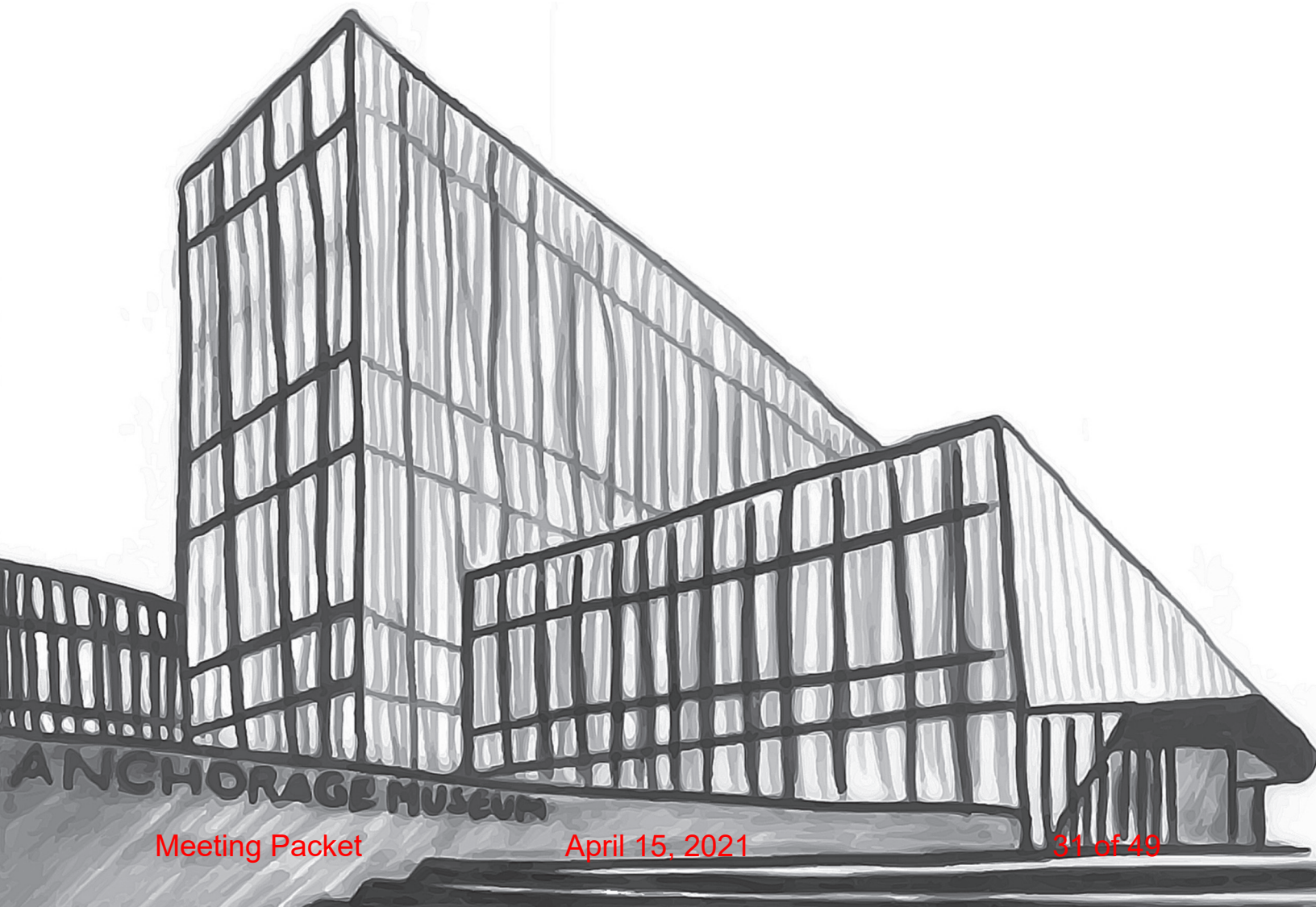
LITTLE MOUNTAIN



NOTES OF GRATITUDE

Draft your own Land Acknowledgement or add your own reflections on recognition of land, language and Indigenous peoples.





**Anchorage is Dena'ina ełnena.
Dena'ina homeland is Anchorage.**

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Artwork and content created by Melissa Shaginoff
in collaboration and with the
Native Village of Eklutna and the Anchorage Museum

Additional support provided by:



2nd DRAFT – Proposed letter to ADF&G from the MSB Fish & Wildlife Commission

Written Alaska Department of Fish and Game Management Clarity Requested

For years Susitna River sockeye salmon were classified as a Stock of Concern, until that designation was removed by the Alaska Board of Fisheries at the 2020 Upper Cook Inlet meeting Board meeting. With removal of that designation, however, the Board had a long discussion with the Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ADF&G) concerning the Department's Susitna River Sockeye Salmon Action Plan, and the Board's intent to continue efforts to manage Susitna River sockeye salmon on a conservative basis into the future. Board intent seemed clear: **Manage to achieve Susitna River sockeye salmon escapement goals, and if a management error is made — err on the side of conservation.**

Section (a) of the Northern District Salmon Management Plan was amended to specify that the Department shall manage chum, pink, and sockeye stocks for commercial and in river uses... The Board also adopted a conservative personal use dip net fishery to allow in river users a more reasonable opportunity to harvest four Susitna River salmon species. Once again Board intent seemed clear: **Manage to provide reasonable harvest opportunities for all Northern user groups.**

Department direction in section (a) of the amended plan continues: The department shall also manage the chum, pink, and sockeye salmon stocks to minimize the harvest of Northern District coho salmon, to provide sport, and guided sport fishermen, and in river users a reasonable opportunity to harvest these resources over the entire run as measured by the frequency of in river restrictions, or as specified in this section and other regulations.

Section (b) directs the department to manage the Northern District commercial fishery based on the abundance of sockeye salmon counted through the weirs on Larson, Chelatna, and Judd Lakes or other salmon indices as the department deems appropriate.

With low salmon escapements in multiple Northern Cook inlet streams during the past 5 year period, and with August restrictions and closures for sport, guided sport, and some commercial harvesters, the public is concerned with how and which Northern District salmon escapement goals or indices the department "deems appropriate" to use to achieve the management objectives identified in section (a) of the Northern District Salmon Management Plan.

Please provide written response on the following escapement indices and how they are used for management:

1. Susitna River sockeye salmon — The only management abundance indices for managing the commercial fishery identified in the Northern District Salmon Management Plan all refer to Susitna sockeye salmon.

- What is the department's best estimate as to the size of the annual Susitna River sockeye salmon run?

- How does that compare to the annual sockeye salmon run for the entire Northern District drainage?
- In comparison to the size of the Susitna sockeye run what is the next largest Northern District sockeye salmon run, and how large is it?

2. How useful is inseason sockeye salmon abundance data from the 3 Susitna drainage weirs (Judd Lake, Chelatna Lake, and Larson Lake) for making Northern District commercial management adjustments by July 20?

3. Judd Lake — Sockeye salmon escapement levels between Judd Lake and Chelatna Lake have varied over time.

- How well does Judd Lake work as a representative for sockeye salmon and coho salmon abundance throughout the entire Yentna River drainage?
- How well does Judd Lake sockeye passage represent mainstream Susitna River sockeye salmon and coho salmon abundance levels?
- Why or why not is Judd Lake sockeye abundance appropriate for inseason management of other Northern District salmon stocks?
- How does the management timing usefulness of sockeye salmon passage at Judd Lake compare to sockeye passage timing at Chelatna Lake? Larson Lake? Fish Creek?

4. Chelatna Lake —

- Since sockeye escapements to Chelatna Lake are a larger percentage of the annual Yentna River sockeye run, does the Chelatna location better measure overall abundance of Yentna River sockeye salmon compared to Judd Lake?
- How appropriate is the Chelatna location for managing main stem Susitna sockeye? and coho salmon stocks? or for managing other Northern District sockeye and coho salmon stocks?
- What is the status of the Chelatna Lake abundance estimates for 2021? and into the future?

5. Larson Lake — At one time the department considered sockeye salmon abundance levels to be split approximately evenly between the mainstream Susitna River and the Yentna River.

- What is the department's current comparative annual sockeye salmon numbers for these two forks of the Susitna River system?
- Is Larson Lake still the department's best assessment tool of sockeye salmon abundance for main stem Susitna River sockeye salmon?
- Will the Larson Creek weir be funded for the 2021 season?
- How is Larson Creek appropriate for managing other Northern District sockeye salmon stocks? and Northern District coho salmon stocks?

6. What percentage of the total annual sockeye salmon harvested by the Northern District commercial fishery has the department identified as Kenai River sockeye salmon stock(s) during 2018? during 2019? and during 2020?

7. After many years of below-goal-range Susitna River drainage sockeye salmon escapement(s), the public has concerns with how the department intends to adaptively manage the Northern District commercial and sport salmon fisheries under different Susitna River sockeye salmon abundance scenarios.

- What is department management intent and likely management adjustment timing when inseason data projects both stems of Susitna River sockeye salmon abundance below goal?
- What is management intent / timing when inseason data projects one stem below goal, and the other stem within goal range?
- What is management intent / timing when inseason data projects one stem below goal range, and the other stem exceeding goal range?
- What is management intent / timing when inseason data projects both stems within goal ranges?
- What is management intent / timing when inseason data projects one stem within goal range, and one stem exceeding goal range?
- What is management intent / timing when inseason data projects both stems to exceed goal ranges?

8. Concerning the differing objectives identified in section (a) of the Northern District Salmon Management Plan it has become obvious, to the public, that the department must (or should) use additional salmon escapement indices in order to fulfill its Northern Cook Inlet management objectives.

- How realistic is it for the department to manage the Northern District commercial fishery to, “ . . . minimize the harvest of Northern District coho salmon, to provide sport and guided sport fishermen and other in river users a reasonable opportunity to harvest these salmon resources over the entire run . . . ,” based solely on the abundance of Susitna River drainage sockeye salmon?

9. Would you please provide some written clarity as to how the Department uses or intends to use the following indices:

A. Deshka River coho salmon abundance—During the past 5 years the Department has used coho salmon escapements through Deshka River weir for inseason management of the Susitna River sport coho salmon fisheries.

- How well does coho salmon abundance and timing at Deshka River compare to overall coho salmon abundance for the mainstream Susitna River?
- How well does Deshka coho salmon abundance and timing compare for inseason management of Yentna River coho salmon?
- Is Deshka River coho salmon abundance and timing useful to the management of the commercial fishery?

- What is the Deshka River coho salmon trigger point(s) and timing the Department uses to liberalize the main stem Susitna River sport coho salmon fishery? and the Yentna River coho salmon sport fishery?
- How does the Department use Deshka River coho salmon abundance to determine if Northern District commercial fishing with more than one net per permit will be allowed on the East Side of the Northern District and in the General Subdistrict south and west of the Susitna River during August and before August 7?
- What are the trigger points and timing for this liberalized commercial harvest, and is it consistent with liberalizations to Susitna River and / or Little Susitna River coho salmon sport fishery?
- What is the status of funding for Deshka River coho salmon abundance enumeration in 2021? into the future?

B. Little Susitna River coho salmon — At one time the department identified the Little Susitna River coho salmon sport fishery as the #2 freshwater sport coho salmon fishery in all of Alaska — trailing only the Kenai River. Little Susitna River was the first coho salmon escapement goal established by the department in Upper Cook Inlet.

- Currently how significant does the sport fish division consider the Little Susitna River coho salmon abundance and timing in management of Northern Cook Inlet coho salmon fisheries?
- Is Little Susitna River coho salmon abundance an appropriate surrogate for silver salmon abundance at other Knik Arm streams? at Turnagain Arm streams?
- Would Little Susitna River coho salmon abundance / timing be appropriate for managing Susitna River coho salmon stocks?
- The Little Susitna River sport coho salmon fishery has been restricted or closed by inseason emergency orders 4 out of the past 5 years due to low abundance and late timing of coho salmon passing the weir. Does the department intend to use Little Susitna River coho salmon timing and abundance in adaptively managing the Northern District commercial fishery, to provide a more reasonable coho salmon sport fishing opportunities that better match intent language in the Northern District Salmon Management Plan?

C. Fish Creek Sockeye Salmon Abundance — In the past Fish Creek sockeye were listed as a Stock of Concern, and sockeye returns to Fish Creek were so low that the department went on record stating that Fish Creek sockeye were too small of a stock upon which to base commercial fishery management. Commercial fish funding for enumeration of Fish Creek sockeye salmon was removed, and taken over by sport fish dollars. Now that Fish Creek sockeye salmon escapement levels have rebounded, the department's commercial manager has suggested that Fish Creek sockeye abundance may be a useful indices for managing the commercial fishery. This is confusing to the public.

- Please clarify, does the department intend to use Fish Creek sockeye as a management index for the Northern District commercial fishery? If so, how?

- If Fish Creek sockeye abundance is to be used as an indices in commercial management, will commercial fish division once again resume funding of Fish Creek sockeye salmon enumeration?
- Are Fish Creek abundance and timing a good measurement of sockeye salmon abundance levels elsewhere in Northern Cook Inlet?
- How do Fish Creek sockeye abundance levels relate to other Knik Arm sockeye abundance levels and timing?
- How do they relate to Turnagain Arm sockeye salmon abundances and timing? How do they relate to Susitna River drainage sockeye salmon abundance levels?

D. Fish Creek Coho Salmon Abundance — At one time Sport Fish Division stated that coho salmon abundance and timing at Fish Creek was a good indices for other Knik Arm coho salmon stocks. For a while sport fish coho salmon management actions at Fish Creek were mirrored in additional Knik Arm sport fisheries like Cottonwood, Wasilla (Rabbit Slough), and Jim Creek. Recently, however, higher coho numbers at Fish Creek do not necessary seem to mean as much to other Knik Arm locations.

- What is Sport Fish Division's current thoughts on the appropriate management relationship between coho salmon abundance at Fish Creek and other Knik Arm coho salmon fishery locations?
- Turnagain Arm coho salmon fishery locations?
- How does the department intend to use coho salmon abundance measured at Fish Creek in the management of other Northern Cook Inlet sport fisheries?
- How does the department intend to use coho salmon abundances measured at Fish Creek in management of the Northern District commercial fishery?

E. Jim Creek Coho Salmon Abundance — In the early 2000's Jim Creek was a huge producer of Upper Cook Inlet sport caught coho salmon, but the fishery declined significantly since then. The Department funded abundance counts with a Jim Creek weir, and was on the way to establishing a weir-based coho salmon escapement goal, before weir funding was cut as a budget-saving measure. Even so, for a few years, without a formal escapement goal, the department used weir abundances inseason to help manage the coho salmon sport fishery. This year a post season coho salmon indices goal was assessed through foot counts on the McRoberts Creek fork, and index count(s) with no identifiable goal are usually made on Upper Jim Creek above Leaf Lake.

- How does the department intend to enumerate Jim Creek coho salmon abundances in the future?
- What significance will this have for inseason management of Northern Cook Inlet sport and commercial fisheries?

F. Index Counts — What has the department learned recently from index counts of coho and/ or sockeye salmon at the following locations:

- Cottonwood Creek, Wasilla Creek, Upper Jim Creek, Bodenbug Creek, Question Creek, Answer Creek?

- Are there any takeaways for management considerations?

10. In the past the Fish and Wildlife Commission and Mat-Su Borough has helped secure legislative support / funding for projects / studies beneficial for better management of Northern Cook Inlet salmon stocks.

- If the department were to prioritize 1 or 2 management projects / studies that would help the department better manage Northern District sockeye and coho salmon stocks, what would they be?

The Matanuska Susitna Borough Fish and Wildlife Commission humbly requests public written clarification on the complicated and inter-related management of Northern Cook Inlet salmon stocks covered by the Northern District Salmon Management Plan. The Commission greatly appreciates your consideration and replies to this request.

Sincerely,

Mike Wood, chair
Matanuska -Susitna Borough Fish and Wildlife Commission

MATANUSKA-SUSITNA BOROUGH

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Ex officio: Bruce Knowles**FISH AND WILDLIFE COMMISSION****Memorandum**

RE: Questions (bolded) for ADF&G Annual Fisheries Season Update for November 18, 2020 special FWC meeting. ADF&G answers (non-bolded) follow each question.

Questions

1a. What options/actions do you have/use to keep the legislators informed of fisheries management decisions/actions? I talked with a number of them recently at a candidates fund raiser the other evening and none were aware of the problem with the Pitman-Robinson or Dingle-Johnson funding. Just an example.

Management related information or data is given out by request and sometimes through direct contact. In the past, legislator questions have been answered at forums, such as this meeting with the FWC, during field trips of various stock assessment projects, or formal legislative hearings. Additionally, the department has several avenues for receiving automated notifications of decisions, which can be tailored to meet the legislator's particular areas of interest.

1b. 2020 10 6 2020 Numbers of salmon returning Shelikof Strait

During the late 1990s negotiations between the Cook Inlet Drifters and the Kodiak commercial fishing groups discussed numbers of one million additional sockeye salmon alone, not counting king, Coho, Pink and chum salmon, that would be heading to Cook Inlet streams. This year's low returns does not reflect positively on

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the new management strategies implemented by the Board of Fish at the Kodiak meeting. *What were the department's expectations for increased numbers of salmon that would return to Chignik, Kodiak and Cook Inlet streams and what are your expectations 2021 and later? What are the department's estimates for the Shelikof Strait salmon fisheries?*

The department did not expect to see measurable changes in abundance of fish returning to Cook Inlet streams resulting from actions taken by the Alaska Board of Fisheries during the December 2019 Kodiak meeting. Harvest of Cook Inlet-origin sockeye salmon in Kodiak Management Area is highly variable annually and spatially within the season. This is due to variability in run strength of local stocks that determines KMA fishing opportunity in areas where Cook Inlet salmon might be present, as well as relative strength and migration pattern of Cook Inlet stocks each year. Upper Cook Inlet (UCI) sockeye salmon return in 2020 was nearly identical to the preseason forecast return. Kodiak Management Area (KMA) sockeye salmon return in 2020 was at the lower end of the forecast range and Chignik Management Area return was below the forecast range. Among Kodiak, Chignik, and UCI management areas, four sockeye salmon escapement goals were not met in 2020 – Chignik early and late-run, Malina Lake, and Larson Lake.

Forecasts for 2021 are being prepared and will be published in the coming months. We do not prepare forecasts for returns further in advance than the upcoming fishing season. Many sockeye salmon stocks in the Gulf of Alaska are experiencing a period of reduced productivity and there is nothing to suggest increasing abundance in 2021 or the near-term future beyond 2021.

The Shelikof Strait commercial salmon fishery occurs in waters of Westside KMA and Mainland District. In 2020 the department monitored the fishery on the grounds to determine sockeye salmon catch and to facilitate orderly and short-notice closures if harvest limits described in the *North Shelikof Strait Sockeye Salmon Management Plan* are met. A Seaward Zone closure was implemented in the North Shelikof Unit at 11:30 p.m. July 13 when it was estimated that cumulative sockeye salmon harvest had approached the 20,000 fish limit. Total July 6 to August 1 harvest in the North Shelikof Unit was 96,593 sockeye salmon, which included both the Shoreward and Seaward Zone harvests. A Seaward Zone closure did not take place in the Cape Igvak Section. Total July 6 to August 1 harvest in the Cape Igvak Section Unit was only 4,000 sockeye salmon, which included both the Shoreward and Seaward Zone harvests. A Seaward Zone closure did not take place in the Southwest Afognak Section. Total July 6 to July 25

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harvest in the Southwest Afognak Section Unit was only 11,807 sockeye salmon, which included both the Shoreward and Seaward Zone harvests. 2020 harvest in KMA waters of Shelikof Strait was 14.4 million pink salmon and 1.2 million sockeye salmon with escapement of 8.3 million pink salmon and 0.8 million sockeye salmon.

2a. To quote, "One puzzling aspect is that the new recommended escapement goals don't appear to be related to the original goals for each system contained in that sub-basin. Also, several areas are being downgraded from having a biological escapement goal, BEG, to having a sustainable escapement goal, SEG."

i. Is the BEG and SEG still being used?

The new goals in fact are not relatable to the old goals. The new goals are abundance-based and assessed goals, while the old goals are index-based and assessed.

The old king salmon escapement goals were all SEGs. Beginning with the 2020 season, the Deshka escapement goal was in fact upgraded to a BEG, and the other new stock goals (Eastside, Talkeetna, and Yentna) were set as SEGs. There is no functional difference between a BEG and an SEG. The SEGs for individual streams within each of these three stock groups were discontinued and replaced by the new goals.

ii. At what point does the department quit depending on estimations and model tweaking and establishing model projections from boots on the ground hard core data?

The department is collecting "boots on the ground" data in the form of aerial surveys, creel surveys, weir projects, radio tagging, and M-R abundance estimates for managing local king salmon stocks. A weir is often the most accurate method for assessing escapement in any system because they provide an actual count. A weir can also be used as a tool for inseason fisheries management, as can sonar and counting towers that also provide daily estimates of escapement or salmon passage. Weir projects are, however, expensive to run and not appropriate or even possible for systems too large to accommodate a weir. The department currently runs weirs for king and coho salmon on the Deshka River and Little Susitna rivers and for sockeye salmon at Judd Lake, Fish Creek, and Larson Creek. The department would like to run a weir or sonar project on Lake Creek, however, we lack the funding to do so at this time.

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Folks commonly ask us how we are using the data we collect to manage fisheries. In the case of Susitna king salmon, we are using all the “boots on the ground” data that has been collected back to the late 1970s to model the historical production in four areas of the drainage that have traditionally been managed as units (we’re recognizing these as “stocks”). This is the culmination of data collected by aerial surveys, creel surveys, weir projects, and M-R abundance estimates. The run reconstruction and production modeling has greater utility than any one source of data because it uses all sources to come up with estimates of actual escapement and total run (vs. an index (aerial or foot survey) which is a fraction of the actual escapement). The new escapement goals are also based on estimates of MSY (vs. the percentile approach which is only a proxy for MSY). The aerial index surveys are a large part of the modeling and must continue to be flown each year to assess achievement of the new stock goals.

2b. How did this year's return of King salmon fit, as compared to prior projections, per the four sub-basin strategy: Yentna, Deshka, Talkeetna, and Eastside Susitna Rivers? Same question, but, drainage by drainage management basis?

The Deshka River run came in close to forecast. Forecasts were not generated for the other three stocks, however, based on past few years of escapements, the expectation was for run performance similar to 2019 or to continue an upward trend on each system. The department had the same expectation for the Little Susitna River. During 2019, the Deshka and Eastside Sustina streams performed more poorly relative to Yentna tributaries and those north of Talkeetna, even Talkeetna itself. Conversely, the outcome of the 2020 season suggests the Deshka and Eastside Susitna stocks performed a little better relative to Yentna and Talkeetna stocks. The Little Susitna River performed as expected. Escapement goals were made on Deshka and Eastside Susitna stocks, and Little Susitna River, and not met on Talkeetna and Yentna stocks. The OEG on Yentna was missed while the SEG was achieved. Whether achieved or not, abundance remains near the lower ends of all goal ranges as production remains on the low side.

Historically fewer than 10% of the Kenai River sockeye salmon entered the river in August. However, during the period 2014 -2019 approximately 46% of run arrived in August. This year 62% of the Kenai River sockeye arrived in August (nearly 500,000 fish during a four day period in mid August).

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3a. How does this change in “entry pattern” impact management of the commercial fishery? Please identify adjustments to management.

The Department manages to achieve escapement goals. Daily management decisions associated with Kenai River sockeye salmon are primarily based on run entry into the Kenai River as observed at the sonar site compared to different run entry scenarios. Average, late, and early run timing scenarios are calculated to compare to inseason observed data to help determine if the run entry may be early or late. OTF data is also used to determine if run entry of all UCI sockeye salmon stocks are early or late entering the inlet. Decisions to open or close commercial fisheries could be enacted later in the year if observed inseason run entry patterns more closely match late run time scenarios. To some degree the *Central District Drift Gillnet Fishery Management Plan* has date dependent stipulations which will still be followed, as well as season closing dates.

3b. Have you considered extending the Anchor Point off-shore test fishery into August to better accommodate this later entry pattern? Why or why not?

Yes, the Department has considered extending the OTF project to measure salmon run entry into UCI after July 31 for both sockeye and coho salmon, but current budget realities do not allow extensions of the OTF.

**A phrase I used when working for the ADF&G, Sport Fish Access Program went:
“Fishing is fun, but only if you can get to the water!”**

4a. What projects and actions are being pursued by the department to improve angler access to the Mat-Su’s rivers and lakes?

A partial list of Access projects in the Mat-Su include:

- Finger Lake Boat Launch Renovation– Remove gravel deposits, extend the length of the existing boat ramp, and embed the lower end of ramp into the lake.
- Echo Lake – Construct a new Echo Lake turnout as part of the Glenn Highway Reconstruction.
- Sheep Creek Streambank Rehabilitation – Cooperative project with the RTS Streambank Rehabilitation Program to rehabilitate ~500 feet of riparian habitat along the shoreline of Sheep Creek.
- Spruce Beetle Hazard Tree Removal – Collaborative efforts from ADFG and the Division of Forestry to remove infected spruce trees from Sheep Creek, Caswell Creek, Susitna Landing, and Little Susitna Public Use Facility and its river accessible campsites.

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- Little Susitna Public Use Facility (LSPUF) - The proposed project would renovate/replace all 12 of the Elevated Light Penetrating (ELP) walkways.
- Sheep Creek Stair/Trail Renovation & Vault Latrine Replacement - Cooperative project with DPOR with ADFG for the removal/replacement of the existing vault latrine (old and in a state of disrepair), and renovation of existing angler access trail, retaining walls, and fence.
- Additional Dirt Work - We have a running list of sites that need trail, road, and parking lot maintenance. This list is prioritized by management by angler use.

4b. What about maintenance of existing facilities? Why has the boat launch area of Susitna Landing not been dredged for nearly four years, resulting in a silted in launch area only accessible to smaller and shallower draft boats?

- Site Visits and Inspections - Currently there are 141 angler access sites on Mat-Su Valley rivers and lakes located on and off the road system. Our goal is to visit all the road system access sites twice annually for site inspections and maintenance each spring and fall. Maintenance includes groundskeeping, refuse removal, sign repair and replacement, trail and parking lot maintenance as needed.
- Maintenance of ADFG Owned Sites - Bonnie Lake, Caswell Creek, Little Susitna Public Use Facility, Sheep Creek, Susitna Landing annual maintenance included janitorial, groundskeeping, porta potty rental, CXT vault latrine pump out, refuse removal, landscaping, parking lot grading, kiosk updates and sign repair or replacement.
- Susitna Landing - Susitna Landing Boat Launch and Campground is a Department of Fish and Game owned facility that is managed by a private concessionaire. Maintenance of the facility included annual dredging of the boat launch as stated in the contract. The concessionaire for the past 2 years was in breach of the contract in this respect. The department contracted a third party to dredge the launch October 14, 2020 and is in the process of contracting a new concessionaire.

5. a. What is our King salmon Season going to look like next year?

The Deshka forecast is being drafted, and next year's management strategy will be determined when the forecast is finalized. Our expectation right now is that the 2021 run will be low, similar to the last few years. Given that the Deshka and Little Susitna goals were achieved last season with C&R fisheries in place, C&R fisheries may be a conservative way to start the 2021 season, using the weir programs to adjust from

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there. But again, the Deshka forecast is still being drafted and any actions will be based on that.

Preseason actions for other stocks of the Susitna (Eastside, Talkeetna, Yentna) remain under review at this time.

6. a. How will ADFG continue to manage sockeye returns to Larson Creek?

The department will continue to monitor counts and assess run strength on a daily basis, managing the sport fishery to attain the escapement goal. With a sport fishery harvest rate of about 10%, actions taken to adjust the sport fishery inseason have a relatively small influence over the final escapement outcome. On low run years, closure of the sport fishery can help attain the escapement goal when projecting close to the low end of the goal range. On high abundance years, inseason liberalizations may have little effect in slowing the daily count but do provide opportunity for sport anglers to harvest more fish.

Commercial fisheries in the Northern District will continue to be allowed as per the *Northern District Salmon Management Plan* (NDSMP) stipulations for JCL sockeye salmon stocks, with gear restrictions from July 20 to August 6. The timing and scope of these net restrictions are informed and targeted with genetic stock composition data of the Northern District harvests, that shows when and where JCL stocks are harvested. The level of gear restrictions used in the Northern District (ND) could be changed if escapement goals of sockeye salmon in the majority of the indicator runs (Judd, Larson, and Fish Creek) are consistently not met, or changes to stock compositions are seen in harvests.

7a. There are several objectives to commercial management of salmon stocks within the Northern District of Upper Cook inlet. *Please prioritize the following eight objectives so the public can better understand ADF&G management actions, using a #1 for the highest priority. Feel free to provide insight as to Department priorities and direction provided by the Board of Fisheries at the 2020 Upper Cook Inlet Board of Fisheries meeting.*

- A. Attainment of each coho salmon escapement range minimum level.
- B. Attainment of each Northern sockeye salmon escapement range minimum level
- C. Attainment of the mid-point of each Department established Northern Cook Inlet sockeye and coho salmon escapement range

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- D. Staying within the upper bound of one or more Northern Cook Inlet sockeye salmon escapement range(s)
- E. Providing shared sockeye, chum, and pink salmon harvest opportunities in Northern Cook Inlet waters / drainages for commercial and inriver users,
- F. Minimizing Northern District commercial coho harvest during July.
- G. Providing reasonable coho salmon sport and guided sport harvest opportunities at Little Susitna River, Deshka River, Fish Creek, Jim Creek
- H. Maximizing Northern District commercial salmon harvests during the first week of August.

The department's priority in managing salmon fisheries is to achieve established escapement objectives. A, B, C, and D above all relate to achievement of escapement objectives and are treated equally. In conjunction with managing for established escapement objectives the department provides opportunity to harvest surplus salmon in accordance with Alaska Board of Fisheries management plans. Items E, F, and G relate to harvest opportunity that falls under management plan direction and are also treated equally. There is no management plan direction related to item H and it is not a priority.

7b. During 4 of the past 5 years (including 2020) the conservative sport and guided sport coho salmon fishery on the Little Susitna River has had to be restricted and/or closed in efforts to attain the minimum coho salmon escapement level. During the past two years the Larson Creek sport sockeye salmon fishery had to be closed inseason to attain the minimum sockeye salmon escapement level, and despite those sport closures the Larson Creek minimum sockeye salmon escapement level was still not attained in either 2019 or 2020. **How does the Department plan to adjust commercial salmon management in Northern Cook Inlet to address these ongoing issues?**

Sockeye salmon commercial fisheries in the Northern District will continue to be managed with net restrictions from July 20 and to August 6 as per the NDSMP. The level of gear restrictions used in the ND could be changed if escapement goals of sockeye salmon in most of the indicator runs are consistently not met.

Coho salmon commercial fisheries in the Northern District will continue to be restricted as per the NDSMP with stipulations that prohibit extra fishing time if coho salmon are expected to be the primary species in the harvest, and additional fishing time may not be allowed based on coho salmon abundance. Additionally, after August 15 fishing time in the ND may not be allowed beyond the regulatory fishing periods of Monday and Thursday each week.

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Finally, The *Northern District Salmon Management Plan* says in part; “The department shall also manage the chum, pink, and sockeye salmon stocks to minimize the harvest of Northern District coho salmon, to provide sport and guided sport fisherman a reasonable opportunity to harvest these salmon resources over the entire run, as measure by the frequency of inriver restrictions, or as specified in this section and other regulations”. If coho salmon abundance, measured by weir counts, in the Deshka and Little Susitna rivers, and Fish Creek are failing to meet established goals the area and time of Northern District set net periods will be restricted, as it has been in past years, targeted at the set net areas that harvest the most coho salmon bound for those rivers. In recent years this has been restrictions to the area east of Susitna River to lower the harvest pressure on Little Susitna River coho salmon. These restrictions would be coordinated with actions to the sport fisheries.

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