

FWC Agenda Item X. New Business item #2, Impacts of hatchery-released pink salmon on other salmon species.

February 17, 2021

Dear Chairman Carlson-Van Dort and members of the Alaska Board of Fisheries:

As the Board's Hatchery Committee meets to consider economic benefits and impacts / potential impacts from Alaska's system of salmon hatcheries on March 23, 2021, the Matanuska - Susitna Borough Fish and Wildlife Commission requests the Board acknowledge and attempt to address the vast scientific data gaps raised by the annual releasing of 1 -2 billion hatchery-produced small salmon into the same habitat utilized by wild salmon spawned in Alaska, Canada, Washington, and Oregon.

Lost King Salmon Production

As Board members are well aware, production of wild king (Chinook) salmon has been in decline throughout Alaska and the North American west coast for over a decade. This decline in king salmon abundance has negatively affected many users (some of whom primarily target other salmon species). Have the annual releases of hatchery-raised salmon in Alaska contributed to or exacerbated this decline in wild Alaska king salmon production?

Correlation / Causation — Pink Salmon / Sockeye Salmon

Scientific studies in Prince William Sound following the Exxon Valdez oil spill found a correlation between pink salmon abundance and a decline in sockeye salmon abundance the following year. This trend was noted as particularly occurring following a year with an abundance of over 30 million pink salmon returning to the Sound. At a past Board Hatchery Committee meeting Alaska's chief fisheries scientist told board members that, "Correlation is not causation."

While we agree, correlation MAY NOT indicate a causation — this particular scientific data gap (identified many years ago) — between fisheries as significant as Copper River sockeye salmon and the massive hatchery-enhanced Prince William Sound pink salmon warrants further study. How can Board of Fisheries members make sound decisions to maximize benefit lacking knowledge about how fish stocks and their related fisheries affect each other?

The Commission urges the Board to request additional scientific data concerning benefits and impacts from Alaska hatchery releases, so the Board can make better-informed decisions to maximize benefit from all Alaska fisheries.

Sincerely - FWC