

MATANUSKA-SUSITNA BOROUGH

350 E Dahlia Ave., Palmer, Alaska 99645

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VICE CHAIR

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MSB STAFF

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Ex officio: Jim Sykes

FISH AND WILDLIFE COMMISSION

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Physical Location of Meeting: LLCR, DSJ Bldg, 350 E. Dahlia Ave., Palmer.

Remote Participation: See attached agenda.

Planning and Land Use Department - Planning Division

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Draft BOF Proposal #1 Submitted by Andy Couch for FWC Consideration

ALASKA BOARD OF FISHERIES

Regulation Proposal Form 2023—2024

Proposals Must Be Received by Tuesday April 11, 2023

PO Box 115526, Juneau, Alaska. 99811-5526 or FAX (907) 465-6094

Board of Fisheries Regulations

Subsistence____. Personal Use____. Sport____. Commercial__X__.

Which meeting would you like to submit your proposal to?

Upper Cook Inlet Finfish__X__. Kodiak Finfish____. Lower Cook Inlet Finfish____.

1. Alaska Administrative Code Number: 5 AAC_21.350_____2. What is the issue you would like the Board to address and why?

1 In Upper Cook Inlet most significant salmon streams with established salmon spawning
2 escapement goals have 1-mile radius or larger commercial fishing closed water areas near the
3 drainage terminus at saltwater. This provides a protected zone where salmon may be bunching
4 up as they explore the freshwater / saltwater mixing zone or make the osmoregulatory change
5 from the saltwater to freshwater environment. Avoiding excessive harvests near stream mouth
6 terminus areas is a strategy that may allow all user groups to fish throughout an entire season
7 (and sometimes for multiple species) uninterrupted by inseason restrictions or closures.

8
9 In Upper Cook Inlet's Northern District (the end of the harvest gauntlet) two significant salmon
10 stream terminus areas lack these standard 1-mile radius commercial closure areas. Susitna
11 River drainage and Little Susitna River each support populations of 5 species of salmon. Each
12 river has a long history of emergency inseason restrictions to both saltwater and freshwater
13 user groups in efforts to attain different salmon escapement goals. Even with emergency
14 restrictions and closures each river also has a history of failing to attain salmon spawning
15 escapement goals. Therefore, consistent with the purpose of the Northern District Salmon
16 Management Plan, we request the board add Susitna River and Little Susitna River to the
17 regulatory list of Northern District salmon streams with one statutory mile commercial closed
18 waters from their terminus. **Note:** Both Susitna River and Little Susitna River support much
19 higher levels of inriver users than all other streams on the current Northern District list. The
20 Proposal below seeks to make regulation consistency with other significant Northern District
21 salmon streams -- if the terminus of either Susitna River, Little Susitna River, or any of the other
22 streams on this list might need further definition for enforcement or biological reasons the
23 commission would like that to be considered at this time as well.

24
25 At the Susitna River terminus we are unaware of current commercial fishing — providing an
26 opportune time to make this change.

3. What solution do you recommend? In other words, if the board adopted your solution, what would the new regulation say? (Please provide draft regulatory language , if possible).

Closed Waters:

(c) Northern District

(1) within one statute mile of the terminus of the following salmon streams:

- (A) Swanson Creek
- (B) Bishop Creek
- (C) Three-mile Creek
- (D) Chuit River
- (E) Nikolai Creek
- (F) McArthur River

(G) Susitna River

(H) Little Susitna River

Submitted By:

Individual or Group

Address:

City, State, zip code:

Home phone:

Work phone:

Email:

MATANUSKA-SUSITNA BOROUGH**FISH & WILDLIFE COMMISSION RESOLUTION SERIAL NO. FWC 23-02**

A RESOLUTION OF THE MATANUSKA-SUSITNA BOROUGH FISH AND WILDLIFE COMMISSION REQUESTING FULL FUNDING FOR ADF&G SALMON-COUNTING WEIR PROJECTS IN NORTHERN COOK INLET FOR SALMON STOCKS WITH ESTABLISHED SPAWNING ESCAPEMENT GOALS, AND FUNDING ADDITIONAL GENETIC STUDIES OF COHO SALMON IN UPPER COOK INLET .

WHEREAS, the Matanuska-Susitna Valley's salmon resources have provided food security, throughout centuries, for area residents, since the start of the Mat-Su's area's written history; and

WHEREAS, estimates derived from the State's economic study of Alaska sport fisheries valued the Northern Cook Inlet Management Area (Knik Arm, Susitna River drainage, and West Cook Inlet drainage) sport fisheries as generating \$141 million in direct spending, supporting 1,180 sport fishing related jobs, and supplying \$9.2 million in local, state, and federal taxes in 2007, demonstrate significant economic impact gained from Northern Cook Inlet sport fisheries; and

WHEREAS, a follow up economic study commissioned by the Matanuska-Susitna Borough using the same contractor and similar methodology as the State study estimated Northern Cook Inlet Management Area sport fisheries as generating \$57 million in direct spending, supporting 474 sport fishing related jobs, and supplying \$5.9 million in local, state, and federal taxes in 2017, and continues to demonstrate significant, but a declining economic impact gained from Northern Cook Inlet sport fisheries; and

WHEREAS, Article VIII Sections 2, 3, 4 of the Alaska State Constitution directs the legislature to provide for utilization, development, and conservation of all renewable natural resources

(specifically including fish), reserved to the people for common use, for the maximum benefit of its people, and maintained on the sustained yield principle; and

WHEREAS, large ocean-run salmon return to spawn throughout the Matanuska-Susitna Borough, and the Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ADF&G) has established salmon spawning escapement goals and salmon counting weir projects to better manage some of Northern Cook Inlet's larger and more economically and socially significant salmon spawning stocks – including Jim and McRobert's Creek coho salmon, Fish Creek sockeye and coho salmon, Little Susitna River Chinook and coho salmon, Deshka River Chinook and coho salmon, Chelatna Lake (Lake Creek) sockeye salmon, Judd Lake (Talachulitna River) sockeye salmon, and Larson Lake (Talkeetna River drainage) sockeye salmon; and

WHEREAS, State of Alaska genetic studies indicate these salmon stocks as a whole contribute to salmon harvests off of Kodiak Island and along the Alaska Peninsula, from Central and Northern District Upper Cook Inlet commercial fisheries, to at least two subsistence fisheries, multiple personal use fisheries, and some of the largest sport fisheries in Northern Cook Inlet freshwaters – further documenting the community significance of these salmon stocks fisheries dispersed throughout a vast part of Alaska; and

WHEREAS, previously funded coho salmon genetic studies of Upper Cook Inlet commercial harvest has resulted in better management of this resource by ADF&G, and additional genetic studies should be funded to further refine coho salmon management in Upper Cook Inlet; and

WHEREAS, the Mat-Su Borough's diversity of significant salmon stocks and harvest locations can provide sustained fishing and harvest opportunities even when specific stocks and locations go through periods of lower production, and this diversity should be valued and maintained for the benefit of Alaskans.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, that the Matanuska-Susitna Borough Fish and Wildlife Commission respectfully requests Mat-Su area Legislators, along with Governor Dunleavy, diligently work to restore full funding for each of the above listed weir projects, measuring each established salmon spawning escapement goal, throughout the entire season, as necessary to fully evaluate goal level achievement, and provide for more active inseason management, that both conserves sustained yield of each identified salmon stock, while also maximizing benefit for the people.

ADOPTED by the Matanuska-Susitna Fish and Wildlife Commission this 16th day of March, 2023.

Mike Wood, FWC Chair

ATTEST:

Ted Eischeid, MSB Staff

Draft Letter to Mat-Su Area State Legislators on Weir and Genetic Study Funding

Dear Honorable Governor Dunleavy and Mat-Su Valley Area State Legislators:

Earlier this winter Two Matanuska -Susitna Borough Fish and Wildlife Commissioners, Mike Wood and Andy Couch, discussed with some legislators a Commission priority to fully fund Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ADF&G) salmon counting weir projects, that over the past three years had only been partially funded or in a couple cases not funded at all. At that time we also mentioned the need for restarting a coho salmon genetic testing program — which we have since received a cost estimate from ADF&G.

With the recent announcements of extremely low 2023 forecasted Chinook (king) salmon returns throughout Upper Cook Inlet and the necessary emergency closures and restrictions to commercial and sport fisheries we need to continue monitoring king salmon stocks, while from an economic standpoint for both commercial and sport fisheries solid monitoring and inseason management of Mat-Su sockeye salmon and coho becomes even more of a priority. Given these needs, we would request your consideration of the following funding needs:

Northern Cook Inlet Salmon Weir / Coho Salmon Genetic Testing Budget Needs

Weirs listed in alphabetical order — costs provided by ADF&G:

Chelatna Lake — At the head of Lake Creek, this would count a sockeye salmon population with the largest spawning escapement goal in the Susitna River drainage. This project has been unfunded for the past 3 years. Cost to fund the full sockeye salmon run— **\$60,000**.

Deshka River — Currently counts a Chinook salmon population with the largest escapement goal within the Susitna River drainage — and also counts the early portion of a Coho salmon population with the ONLY coho salmon spawning escapement goal in the entire Susitna River drainage. Cost to extend project from August 15 — September 15 which would count the full coho run, and allow inseason management throughout the coho salmon return — **\$40,000**.

Fish Creek —Currently funded to primarily count sockeye salmon escapement during the month of July. Cost to extend the Fish Creek project from July 31 — September 30 in order to count the entire sockeye salmon and coho salmon returns (both of which have established

Draft Letter to Mat-Su Area State Legislators on Weir and Genetic Study Funding

ADF&G spawning escapement goals) thereby allowing inseason management for both species throughout the season —**\$25,000.**

Jim Creek — This project has currently been unfunded for the past 3 years. Cost to re-install the project from July 15 — September 30, which would count the entire coho salmon return which has an ADF&G established spawning escapement goal (McRoberts Creek), and therefore allow inseason management throughout this timeframe —**\$55,000.**

Coho Salmon Genetic Testing of Upper Cook Inlet Commercial Harvest — This project was first established using money the legislature provided the Matanuska - Susitna Borough for salmon project funding in Upper Cook Inlet. The project has already established Upper Cook Inlet coho salmon genetic baselines, and provided four years of commercial harvest sampling results, but has been unfunded since 2016. Similar to current sockeye salmon genetic testing, coho salmon genetic testing allows the department to determine total run size, harvests rates, and productivity of specific coho salmon stocks within Upper Cook Inlet, thereby providing for better scientific management of these economically important salmon stocks. **\$300,000.**

SubTotals: Weirs \$175,000 Genetic Coho Salmon Testing — \$300,000

Grand Total: \$475,000

Adequately funding these projects will improve salmon management for fisheries impacting the Matanuska-Susitna Borough, the fastest growing region of Alaska. Economic studies completed in 2007 and 2017 show significant positive impacts of fisheries on the Mat-Su economy. These projects matter to the citizens of Mat-Su, Alaskan businesses, and our outside visitors.

Thank you.

Sincerely,

Fish & Wildlife Commission

Draft BOF Proposal #2 from Andy Couch**ALASKA BOARD OF FISHERIES**

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1. Alaska Administrative Code Number: 5 AAC_XXX____

2. What is the issue you would like the Board to address and why?

Purposes of the Northern District Salmon Management Plan include: The department shall manage the chum, pink, and sockeye salmon stocks for commercial and inriver uses to provide an opportunity to harvest these salmon resources based on abundance. 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 other inriver users a reasonable opportunity to harvest these resources over the entire run, as measured by the frequency of inriver restrictions, or as specified in this section and other regulations.

The inriver Lower Susitna River personal use dipnet fishery is only allowed to harvest salmon on Saturdays and Wednesdays from July 10 — 31. The board created this fishery with conservative opportunity during the last board cycle. Personal use harvests have been modest during the first three years of this fishery — and harvest data indicates the first Saturday and Wednesday (up to one third of the annual personal use harvest opportunity in this fishery) occur before there are many salmon available for harvest. Harvest data and ADF&G Susitna River drainage fish wheel and weir data indicate better abundance of all of the 4 salmon species open to harvest in this fishery later in the season. In addition harvest data indicates that a few king salmon have been illegally taken in this fishery. Whereas the Northern District Salmon Management Plan specifically seeks to provide harvest opportunity based on abundance, and whereas the plan further specifies providing sport, guided sport, and OTHER INRIVER USERS a reasonable opportunity to harvest not just chum, pink, and sockeye salmon, but also coho salmon over the entire run, and whereas (illegal to harvest) king salmon are more likely to be caught in the early portion of July, we therefore propose amending the Lower Susitna River personal use fishery to run one week later on Saturdays and Wednesdays from July 17 — August 7.

3. What solution do you recommend? In other words, if the board adopted your solution, what would the new regulation say? (Please provide draft regulatory language, if possible).

Season for Lower Susitna River Personal Use Fishery:

July 17 – August 7: [JULY 10 - JULY 31:] Open to fishing only on Wednesdays and Saturdays from 6 a .m . to 11 p .m . each day .

Submitted By Individual or Group. Address: City, State, zip code: Home phone:
Work phone: Email: