

# MATANUSKA-SUSITNA BOROUGH Fish & Wildlife Commission

350 E Dahlia Ave., Palmer, Alaska 99645

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Andy Couch

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Tim Hale

Gabe Kitter

Bill Gamble

Kendra Zamzow

*Ex officio:* Jim Sykes

## Regular Meeting

May 9, 2024

### [Supplemental Handout – Table of Contents](#)

- 1 = Email from AC re: UCI Drift Fishery Management
- 2 = Letter to FWC from NDSNA

Physical Location of Meeting: Lower Level Conference Room,  
DSJ Bldg, Palmer. Remote Participation: See agenda.

Planning and Land Use Department - Planning Division

<http://www.matsugov.us> • [planning@matsugov.us](mailto:planning@matsugov.us)

## Clarification / Concerns 2024 Upper Cook Inlet Drift Gillnet Fishery Management -- Andy Couch

Andy Couch <fishing@fish4salmon.com>

Mon 5/6/2024 12:46 PM

To: Vincent-Lang, Douglas S (DFG) <doug.vincent-lang@alaska.gov>

**[EXTERNAL EMAIL - CAUTION: Do not open unexpected attachments or links.]**

Doug,

While attending the Northern District Setnetters Association annual meeting on May 5, 2024, I heard Upper Cook Inlet commercial manager, Colton Lipka, discuss how ADF&G is may manage the Central District drift gillnet fishery and Northern District set net fishery in 2024.

### **Avoid Increased Exploitation**

Along with with ALL the Northern District set netters in the room, I became very concerned when I heard the Department is considering scheduling regular period drift openings in state waters seaward from the 3-mile Kenai and Kasilof sections on separate days of the week from when the Federal fishery in EEZ waters will occur. The last time I talked with you — I did not realize this might be part of the management package — and now express concerns how the state water fishery by the drift gill net fishery could impact Northern bound salmon. Allowing additive days per week of drift gillnet harvest in federal plus state portions of the Upper Cook Inlet Conservation Corridor could potentially and significantly expand exploitation rates of Northern bound salmon stocks.

### **Management Improvement / Benefits**

The Mat-Su Borough Fish and Wildlife Commission agrees with ADF&G that how the Federal fishery in Cook Inlet EEZ waters is currently configured (May 1, 2024), presents the department an excellent opportunity to learn / better understand where drift harvests of specific stocks may be occurring in both area and timing. Having the EEZ fishery separated from the state fishery, plus the required use of a vessel monitoring system (VMS), and the required listing of each drift set start and finish, within that EEZ fishery should provide a wealth of new harvest data. VMS tracking should improve fishery boundary enforcement and facilitate harvest tracking accuracy as well.

### **Importance of Tracking / Recording Accuracy**

The Commission also believes that tracking harvest data accurately as to when drift harvests occur in EEZ waters and when they occur in state waters is vitally important to protecting specific salmon stocks ( particularly Northern bound stocks) as they migrated through the drift gillnet fisheries. We agree that accurate harvest tracking may close the federal fishery earlier in the season — when a specific EEZ Total Allowable Catch (TAC) is reached — or even assumed to be exceeded with the next scheduled EEZ Opening. Adequate passage of Northern bound salmon, through the Upper Cook Inlet Conservation Corridor, may be highly dependent upon the tracking / recording accuracy of EEZ versus state water salmon harvests.

### **Drift Gillnet Harvest — Limited Days Within Conservation Corridor**

The Commission strongly prefers the state adhere to a concept of the Central Drift Gillnet Fishery Management Plan — that drift gillnetting remain limited throughout both federal and state portions of the Conservation Corridor to no additional days per week as put forward in the plan. Please Note: Federal management scheduled EEZ drift gillnet openings to occur on state drift gillnet regular opening days of Monday and Thursday — to avoid increasing drift gillnet exploitation rates on less abundant (and specifically Northern bound) salmon stocks.

It would be helpful if you could clarify, for the Commission, how the department intends to manage the state waters drift gillnet fishery from July 16 - August 15 concerning area and time (specific days per week) / were specific commitments made during the UCI Board of Fisheries?

The Commission will further discuss this issue (clarify positions) in relation to EEZ / state waters drift harvest days at our regularly scheduled meeting on Thursday May 9, 2024.

Respectfully,

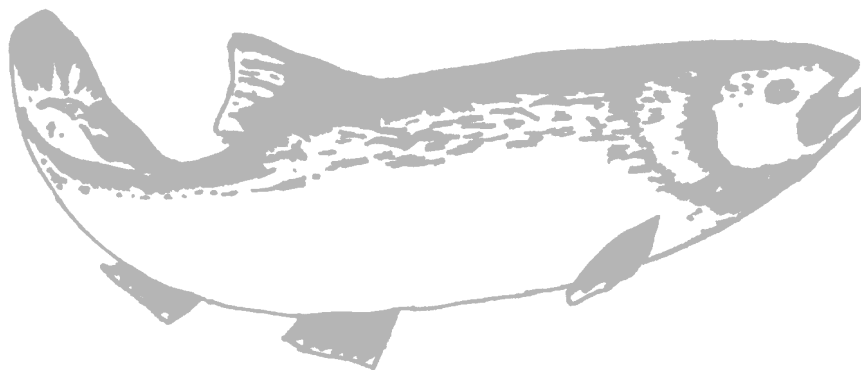
Andy Couch

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**NORTHERN DISTRICT SET NETTERS ASSOCIATION OF COOK INLET**

P.O. Box 101480 ♦ Anchorage, Alaska 99510-1480



8 May 2024

Matanuska-Susitna Borough  
Fish and Wildlife Commission  
350 E Dahlia Ave., Palmer, Alaska 99645

Re: Chairman Andy Couch Attendance to Northern District Set Netters Annual Meeting and Subsequent Letter to the ADF&G Commissioner

Dear Commissioners:

In an effort to improve and foster communication between users, the Northern District Set Netters Association (NDSNA) invited the Commission to attend our annual meeting as guests and observers. We are a private organization, and our meetings are not open to the general public. Andy Couch attended introducing himself as from the Matanuska-Susitna Borough Fish and Wildlife Commission (FWC). During our meeting our association discussed many topics and gave information and opinions to the ADF&G Commercial Fisheries area manager Colton Lipka.

After the meeting Mr. Couch sent an email to the ADF&G Commissioner which misrepresented our organization.

First, he reported to the Commissioner opinions expressed by our members without our consent and cited our meeting discussion without our consent, something as an invited observer, our board believes should not have been done. Our annual meeting is part of a decision-making process and not the final decision by our association.

Second, in Mr. Couch's email, the NDSNA is associated with the Commission's opinions on how the Central District drift fleet should be managed. Specifically, his email makes it appear that we support not restricting the drift fleet until July 16. This is not true. The NDSNA has on the record for several decades advocated to start the drift fleet areawide restrictions July 7 to 9 to facilitate sockeye passing into the Northern District.

Mr. Couch sent the email to the Commissioner without our review and with the appearance that our organization was in agreement with the Commission. We are not and were not consulted nor given a chance to read it before it was sent. This is unacceptable.

Because of Mr. Couch's actions, NDSNA asks that the FWC to notify the Commissioner that:

- the Commission does not represent our association;
- our association was not consulted in writing the email and does not necessarily agree with its contents; and
- based on ADF&G's data and past management practices, the NDSNA believes that Central District drift fleet areawide restrictions should start as early as July 7 to 9.

Thank you.

Stephen Braund, President