

MATANUSKA-SUSITNA BOROUGH Fish & Wildlife Commission

350 E Dahlia Ave., Palmer, Alaska 99645

CHAIRPERSON

Peter Probasco

VICE CHAIR

Andy Couch

MSB STAFF

Paul Clark



BOARD MEMBERS

Michael Bowles

Marty Van Diest

Gabe Kitter

Bill Gamble

Kendra Zamzow

Ex officio: Jim Sykes

Regular Meeting

February 12, 2026

Meeting Packet – Table of Contents

Pg. = Item:

- 1 = Meeting Agenda
- 3 = Jan 8, 2026 Meeting Minutes
- 6 = Jan 29, 2026 Meeting Minutes
- 12 = West Su Access Road Potential Impacts
- 20 = BOF Guidelines for Written Comments
- 21 = Draft Letter Supporting HB203A

Assembly Chambers, DSJ Bldg, 350 E. Dahlia Ave., Palmer, AK 99645

Remote Participation: See attached agenda on p. 1

Planning and Land Use Department - Planning Division

<http://www.matsugov.us> • planning@matsugov.us

MATANUSKA-SUSITNA BOROUGH
MSB Fish and Wildlife Commission
AGENDA

Edna Devries, Mayor

Peter Probasco – Chair
Andy Couch – Vice Chair
Gabriel Kitter
Bill Gamble
Kendra Zamzow
Michael Bowles
Vacant – Seat 3/Hunting
Marty Van Diest
Jim Sykes – Ex officio member

Paul Clark – Staff



Michael Brown, Borough Manager

PLANNING & LAND USE DEPARTMENT
Alex Strawn, Planning & Land Use Director
Jason Ortiz, Planning & Land Use Deputy Director
Wade Long, Development Services Manager
Fred Wagner, Platting Officer

*Assembly Chambers
Dorothy Swanda Jones Building
350 E. Dahlia Avenue, Palmer*

FEBRUARY 12, 2026
REGULAR MEETING
4:00 p.m.

Ways to participate in MSB Fish and Wildlife Commission meetings:

IN-PERSON: Assembly Chambers, DSJ (Main Borough) Building

REMOTE PARTICIPATION VIA MICROSOFT TEAMS:

Join on your computer:

[Join the meeting now](#)

Meeting ID: 280 029 644 221 62

Passcode: uP7Kq2v6

Or call in (audio only):

1-907-290-7880

Phone Conference ID: 632940304#

- I. CALL TO ORDER
- II. ROLL CALL – DETERMINATION OF QUORUM
- III. PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE
- IV. APPROVAL OF AGENDA
- V. APPROVAL OF MINUTES
 - A. January 8, 2026
 - B. January 29, 2026
- VI. AUDIENCE PARTICIPATION (*three minutes per person*)

VII. STAFF/AGENCY REPORTS & PRESENTATIONS

- A. Staff Report
- B. Chair's Report
- C. Presentation – Potential Impacts of the West Susitna Access Road, Rachel James (SalmonState) and Emily Anderson (Wild Salmon Center)

VIII. UNFINISHED BUSINESS

- A. Board of Fisheries 2026 March Meeting Strategy
- B. Prep for 2026-27 Board of Fisheries Cycle
- C. Waterbody Setback Ordinance Staff Update and Discussion
- D. ADF&G Summary Meetings
 - 1. Questions for ADF&G Annual Game Meeting (April 9)
 - 2. Fish genetics presentation
- E. Deshka Watershed Land Classification Resolution (RS 25-02) - Bill
- F. Letter and Resolution supporting [HB 203](#) / [SB 161](#) – Kendra
- G. NPFMC Outbrief
- H. Pike Mitigation Ideas

IX. NEW BUSINESS

- A. 2026 FWC Officer Elections

X. MEMBER COMMENTS (10 minutes)

XI. NEXT MEETING DATE: February 26, 4:00-6:00 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.

MATANUSKA-SUSITNA BOROUGH
MSB Fish and Wildlife Commission
AGENDA NOTES

Edna Devries, Mayor

Peter Probasco – Chair
Andy Couch – Vice Chair
Gabriel Kitter
Bill Gamble
Kendra Zamzow
Michael Bowles
Vacant – Seat 3/Hunting
Marty Van Diest
Jim Sykes – Ex officio member

Paul Clark – Staff



Michael Brown, Borough Manager

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*Assembly Chambers
Dorothy Swanda Jones Building
350 E. Dahlia Avenue, Palmer*

JANUARY 8, 2026
REGULAR MEETING
4:00 p.m.

Ways to participate in MSB Fish and Wildlife Commission meetings:

IN-PERSON: Conference Room 203, DSJ (Main Borough) Building – Limited Seating

REMOTE PARTICIPATION VIA MICROSOFT TEAMS:

Join on your computer:

[Join the meeting now](#)

Meeting ID: 234 006 359 176 90

Passcode: 5Np6wF6b

Or call in (audio only):

1-907-290-7880

Phone Conference ID: 819 907 478#

I. CALL TO ORDER

II. ROLL CALL – DETERMINATION OF QUORUM

Present

Pete Probasco

Andy Couch

Gabe Kitter

Kendra Zamzow

Michael Bowles (left meeting at 5:48PM)

Marty Van Diest

Jim Sykes

Absent

Bill Gamble

III. PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

IV. APPROVAL OF AGENDA

AC – request to include hatchery plan up for comment – Chair added as Item F under new business
AC moves, GK seconds, agenda as amended approved

V. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

A. November 13, 2025 (packet pg. 4)

AC moves, GK seconds, no objections, minutes are approved

VI. AUDIENCE PARTICIPATION (*three minutes per person*)

Rep Kevin McCabe
Ben Americus
Stephen Braund
Margaret Stern
Sue Mauger
Sam Oslund
Bill Stoltze
Chennery Fife

VII. STAFF/AGENCY REPORTS & PRESENTATIONS

A. Staff Report

1. Post-Salmon Symposium Opportunities for Engagement – Susitna River Watershed Plan, Mat-Su Salmon Habitat Partnership Strategic Plan Update

2. BLM Preliminary EA – authorize ROW for construction vehicles on existing Routes in Knik River SRMA - [EA Glacier View Access](#)

3. Availability of ADF&G for Game Summary Meeting – April 9 Game Mtg.

4. Upcoming State & Federal Meetings

- Jan 22, 2026, 9:00am, Wrangell - [AK Board of Game work session](#)
 - Review management of beaver trapping statewide at the Board of Game session immediately following
- Feb 2-11, 8:00am -5:00pm, Anchorage – [NPFMC Meetings](#) – Opportunities to comment are open online

- Feb 2-4 – NPFMC Scientific and Statistical Committee
- Feb 2-7 – NPFMC Advisory Panel
- Feb 5-11 – NPFMC Council Meeting

B. Chair's Report

Some things that require immediate attention on this agenda

1. Response to Mayor's Letter from Governor's Office

Copy of letter (pg. 9)

Key is GOV Dunleavy has put our issues on the ADF&G Commissioner's radar. Both will not be in place for the 2027 BOF Agenda.

VIII. UNFINISHED BUSINESS

A. Board of Fisheries 2026 March Meeting Strategy

BOF Proposal 186 (pg. 11)

Once on the floor, anything can happen to it.

AC moves for the FWC to participate in the BOF meeting addressing BOF Proposal 186, GK second.

No objection, motion passed.

Kendra – recommends focusing on BOF Proposal 186.

Jim – agrees to focus on BOF Proposal 186.

Marty – What would Mac's participation be

Vincent-Lang & Couch discussion summary (pg. 13)

Mac Minard interest email (pg. 15)

Mac Minard proposal (pg. 16)

AC moves to hire Mac Minard for consulting services for the 2026 Statewide BOF meeting as outlined in the proposal, GK seconds.

No objections, motion passes

To do – contact Mac Minard that we are requesting his services

Michael Bowles – asked about Mac Minard's background.

Kendra – some concerns that this may take our focus away from preparing for the 2027 BOF cycle

Pete indicated that this is the most important proposal. Based on current BOF composition and governor and ADF&G commissioner leaving

Andy – it's a chance for the FWC to focus our efforts on one issue, and the fact the BOF accepted the change request indicates it's a great opportunity.

Kendra – also important to reach out to other interests like NCI Setnetters, subsistence, and other Mat-Su interests

Pete – read my email about funding approval

Bill Stoltze – won't have Larry Engel

KRSA 'war room' cost share email (pg. 20)

AC moves to accept offer from KRSA to split the cost of the conference room with KRSA, GK seconds.

KZ objects

Yes – AC, GK, MB, PP, MVD

No – KZ

Motion passes

Schedule special meetings every 2 weeks starting on Jan 29 (Andy will be chair)

***All FWC decide how you want to be involved in the meeting**

B. Prep for 2026-27 Board of Fisheries Cycle – Goals, Tasks, Budget

Proposal deadline announcement – April 10, 2026 (pg. 22)

Strategy document (pg. 25)

AAR from 2024 cycle (pg. 28)

If FWC member has ideas, draft the proposal and bring them forward at our special meetings, or we can also collectively work on proposals at our special meetings

C. Waterbody Setback Ordinance Staff Update and Discussion

Request a summary from Alex on status of the issue.

D. Scheduling ADF&G Summary Meetings

E. Deshka Watershed Land Classification Resolution (RS 25-02)

Gamble-Metzger Email (pg. 63)

GK moves to have Bill Gamble bring forward the resolution to the Assembly

No objection, motion passes

To-do – follow up with BG to get on the assembly agenda

F. Other Follow-Up from Task List

- Gabe Kitter – Resource Development Council Email (pg. 66)

End of August, Gabe will reach back out to RDC to participate

- Jim Sykes – North Pacific Fisheries Management Council (pg. 67)

Not sure if SAFE report is out yet, they are in the middle of the 5-year review for essential fish habitat (EFH), next 5-year plan starts in 2028.

Keep an eye out for SAFE document

Add to Jan 29 Agenda - Consider how we want to proceed for participation at the NPFMC meeting at the Jan 29 meeting.

- MSB – Subcommittee/Working Group Rules

IX. NEW BUSINESS

A. Mayor's Offer for Follow-Up with Governor
Mayor email to Paul (pg. 69)

Gabe will write first draft for the Jan 29 meeting agenda.

**KZ moves to extend meeting to 6:15, AC seconds
No objections, motion passes.**

B. Letter or Resolution supporting [HB 203](#) / [SB 161](#) (request from Rep. McCabe) – “An Act relating to the use of certain trawl or dredge fishing gear in state water; and providing for an effective date.”
HB 203 (pg. 71)

**MB moves to have the FWC develop a letter or resolution of support, AC seconds
No objections, motion passes**

Kendra will take the lead on drafting a letter.

**Ask Mayor and/or Assembly if we want to co-sign the letter
MB is willing to bring forward a resolution for the Assembly**

C. Changing Pike from Sport Fishery to Commercial Fishery (introduced by Mayor)
(Establish a pick commercial fishery)

D. Inviting presenters from the Salmon Symposium – Kendra
(Ex. ADF&G Fish Pathologist sharing info on the Pacific Salmon Health
Monitoring Initiative), Also Erin Larson – Habitat Web Mapper

FWC will consider presentations in May or beyond

E. 2026 FWC Meeting Calendar and Officers

**Schedule meetings for the second Thursday every month through May.
Changing time of the meeting? Stay with 4:00 pm.**

F. Announcement of hatchery plan – comments are due January 31

**GK moves to extend meeting by 5 minutes, AC seconds, no objections, motion
approved**

X. MEMBER COMMENTS (10 minutes)

XI. NEXT MEETING DATE: **January 29**, 4:00-6:00 PM

XII. ADJOURNMENT

AC moves to adjourn, GK second, no objections meeting adjourned at 6:17pm

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MATANUSKA-SUSITNA BOROUGH
MSB Fish and Wildlife Commission
MINUTES

Edna Devries, Mayor

Peter Probasco – Chair
Andy Couch – Vice Chair
Gabriel Kitter
Bill Gamble
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Michael Bowles
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Michael Brown, Borough Manager

PLANNING & LAND USE DEPARTMENT
Alex Strawn, Planning & Land Use Director
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Wade Long, Development Services Manager
Fred Wagner, Platting Officer

*Assembly Chambers
Dorothy Swanda Jones Building
350 E. Dahlia Avenue, Palmer*

January 29, 2026
SPECIAL MEETING
4:00 p.m.

I. CALL TO ORDER

AC called meeting to order at 4:00pm

II. ROLL CALL – DETERMINATION OF QUORUM

Present

Andy Couch (AC)
Gabel Kitter (GK)
Bill Gamble (BG)
Kendra Zamzow (KZ)
Michael Bowles (MB)
Marty Van Diest (MVD)
Jim Sykes (JS)

Absent

Pete Probasco

Quorum is confirmed

III. PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

IV. APPROVAL OF AGENDA

GK moves, KZ seconds, no objections, agenda approved

V. AUDIENCE PARTICIPATION (*three minutes per person*)

Stephen Braund
Oliver Querin
Margaret Stern
Mac Minard

VI. STAFF/AGENCY REPORTS & PRESENTATIONS

- A. Staff Report
- B. Chair's Report

VII. ITEMS OF BUSINESS

A. Board of Fisheries 2026 March Meeting Strategy

- 1. [Comments](#) (Deadline – March 2, 2026)

GK moves that Mac draft a letter for the FWC in support of Proposal 186, KZ seconds, no objection, motion passes

- 2. FWC Member Level of Participation & Tasks

Gabe will work with Paul and Mac to develop a slimmer version of It Takes Fish to Make Fish, maintaining statement about habitat work/fish passage, expectations of productivity, preservation of conservation corridor, able to provide some assistance on updating and slimming down the book

Andy will write a plain-language one pager to make proposal clear

Kendra moves that the FWC members bring a list of invitees to participate in the BOF meeting to the next FWC meeting, GK seconds, no opposition, motion passes.

- 3. Mayor's Response to Governor's Letter

GK moves to send the letter as written to the Mayor, MVD seconds.

BG moves to amend to go to the state delegation as well - passed

GK moves to amend to send it to DVL and BOF chair - passed

Motion as amended passes.

B. 2026-27 Board of Fisheries UCI Cycle

- 1. Goals, Tasks, Budget

Jim will update 2027 BOF goals to better depict the dire nature of our fisheries

- 2. [Proposals](#) (Deadline – April 10, 2026)

FWC members will develop proposals and bring them to the next meeting

C. North Pacific Fisheries Management Council Meetings

GK moves to have Kendra, Jim and/or Pete represent the commission at the NPFMC meetings, MVD seconds, no objections, motion passes

GK moves to have Paul submit the 2025 comment letter to the NPFMC with a comment that updates will be made during oral testimony due to insufficient time to update our written comment, KZ seconds, no objection, motion passes. (Submit comments prior to 12:00pm on 1/30).

VIII. MEMBER COMMENTS (10 minutes)

MVD – no comments

KZ – spoke about the possibility to collaborate on work and goals with Chickaloon, but goodwill is probably not currently there.

GK – Excited about the public outreach and engagement that FWC will be doing in the near future

BG – Spoke about the importance of finding agencies and groups as allies. Need to get the word out more about what we are doing as a commission

MB – Wanted to let the FWC know that lake management plan policy will be discussed soon

AC – Stocking plan. Israel Payton suggested that when we have our summary meeting with ADF&G, we could come up with questions about the plan to be able to make informed comments about it. Add agenda item to include stocking plan in state fisheries summary meeting in Nov-Dec 2026

IX. NEXT MEETING DATE: Regular Meeting, February 12, 4:00-6:00 PM

X. ADJOURNMENT

KZ moves to adjourn, GK seconds, no objection, meeting adjourned at 5:39pm

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.

An aerial photograph of a wide river flowing through a lush green valley. The river is surrounded by dense forest and meadows. In the background, there are large, rugged mountains under a clear blue sky. A small boat is visible on the river in the lower right corner.

Update on the Proposed Road and its Environmental Impacts

The West Susitna Industrial Access Road

West Susitna Industrial Access Road

Mining Industry Lease

Canyon Creek Coal Lease

Skwentna

Caswell Lakes

AK3

Willow

Houston

Big Lake

Knik

W. Susitna River

AK1

Anchorage

Beluga

Tyonek

Cook Inlet

SUSITNA FLATS STATE GAME REFUGE

Triumvirate Glacier

Blackfoot River

Blackfoot Creek

Tentina River

Alexander Creek

Oskage River

Susitna River

Little Susitna

Knik Arm

By the Numbers

100 mile publicly-financed gravel industrial access corridor to a state mining district containing oil and gas deposits, coal, gold, copper, silver, and platinum in the Alaska Range.

\$600 million dollar cost

182 stream crossings...

- 171 of which will get culverts
- 83 of which will be designed for fish

11 new bridges to be constructed

A Stream Crossings

Many of the streams and rivers the road will cross are catalogued as anadromous and the rest flow into anadromous water bodies, affecting salmon habitat downstream and fish passage upstream. In total, the proposed road would consist of 182 stream crossings, 171 of which will get culverts with only 83 designed for fish passage.

B Backcountry

The large roadless area west of the Susitna River allows ample opportunities to experience untamed backcountry and contains many cultural heritage sites of high interest. The road would be private access for use by mining companies trucking from the Alaska Range to Big Lake, requiring industrial-spec infrastructure that would choke the region's watershed and impact the vast intact ecosystems that support the region's hunting and fishing opportunities.

C Habitat

The road traverses through a region made up of vast wetlands rich with biological diversity, including abundant and sensitive fish and wildlife habitat—affecting not only important salmon and migratory bird habitat but also moose, bear, and even Dall's sheep found along the route.

D Bridges

In total, eleven new bridges would be required, four of which would be long-span bridges. A 1,640 ft. bridge would be needed to cross at the Susitna River, with more bridges required to cross at the Little Su, Fish Creek, and Alexander Creek.

E Iditarod Trail

The proposed mining road travels near sections of the historic Iditarod Trail and Iditarod Sled Dog Race route, a culturally significant area for Alaskans and a symbol of frontier travel.

Proposed West Susitna Access Rd.

Salmon Stream

Designated Recreation River (Salmon-bearing)

Designated Recreation River

Other Stream/River

Wetlands

Extractive Industry Lease

State Game Refuge

Salmon Stream Crossing

State Highway

Iditarod Sled Dog Race Route

Iditarod National Historic Trail

Minor Road

MSB Fish and Wildlife Commission

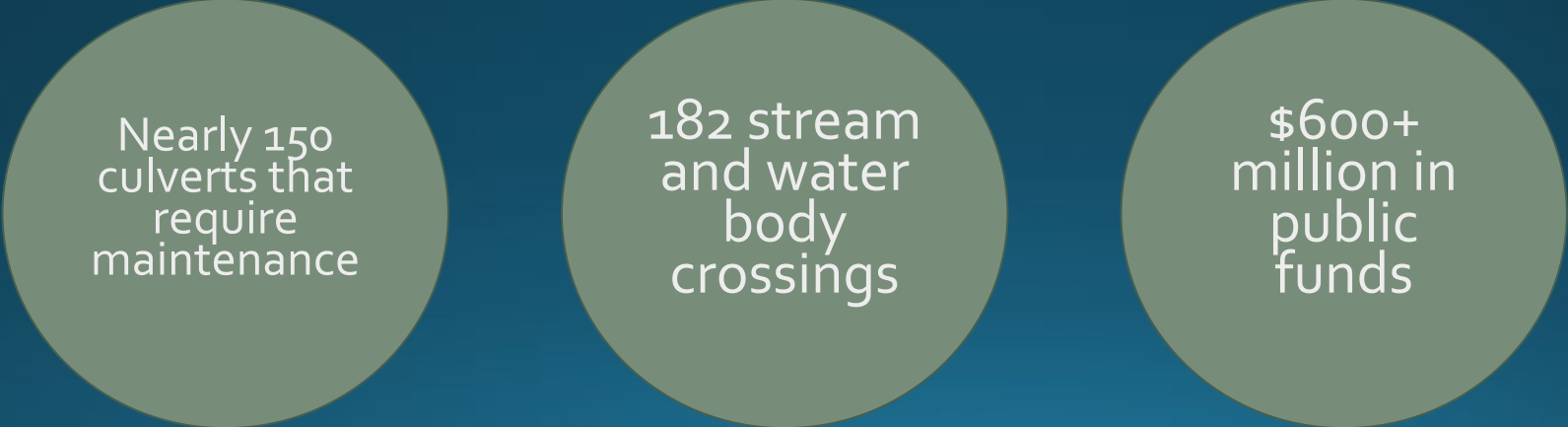
February 12, 2026

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What is the West Su Industrial Access Road?

A proposed 100+ mile industrial road planned into the heart of the West Susitna region.



Nearly 150
culverts that
require
maintenance

182 stream
and water
body
crossings

\$600+
million in
public
funds

Permitting Actions from State of Alaska in 2025

AIDEA - 78.5 miles

- Submitted a Clean Water Act Permit for the West Susitna Access Project (78.5 miles) in July 2025
- Army Corp of Engineers requested more information

AKDOT - 22 miles

- No new public comment periods for the Environmental Assessment
- No application for a Clear Water Permit
- The State Legislature allocated, but did not appropriate funds to DOT for the project in June 2025

Other Permitting Actions in 2025

Portage Creek/Korbel Exploratory Road - 12 miles

- Encompasses an area of State of Alaska land, mining companies are utilizing for exploration activities
- Nova Minerals submitted a Clean Water Act Permit to the Army Corp of Engineers in March 2025

New Norms

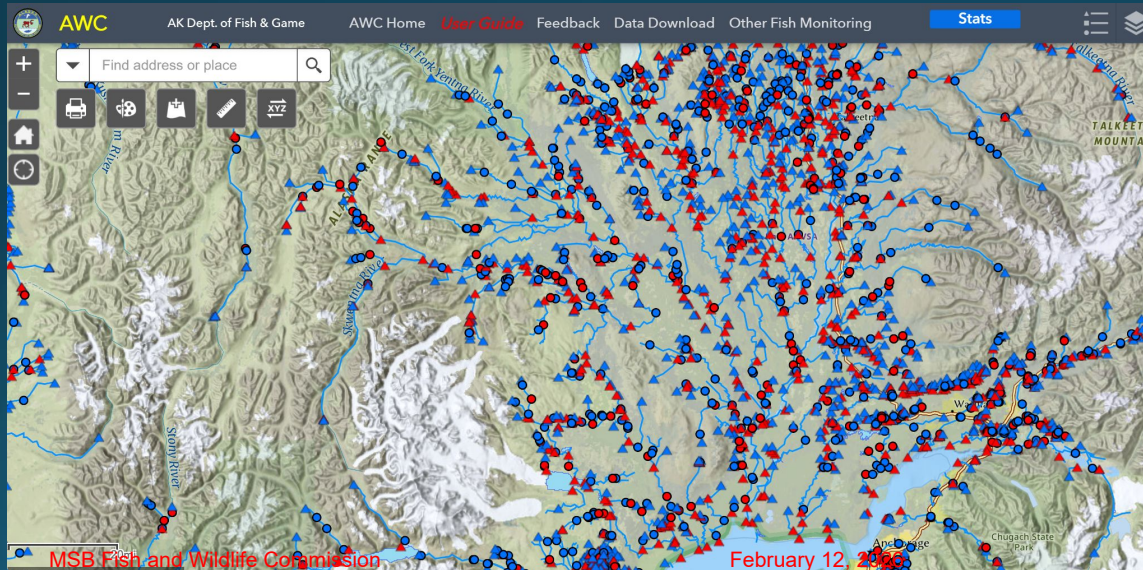
Sections of the road may qualify for expediting permitting under new federal norms.

- Drastically shortened public comment period
- Inadequate biological and cultural science research
- A project with permanent impacts, has rushed planning.

The definition of Waters of the United States is currently under review by the federal government and may have consequences for the designation of wetlands.

New Threats to Salmon and Trout

The West Su Industrial Access Road crosses 183 streams, 83 of which catalogued anadromous stream crossings. Most streams in the region have never been surveyed for salmon.



Tyonek Tribal Conservation District researchers and others continue to catalogue more anadromous streams each year.

Preserving the West Susitna

Next steps:

- The Alaska State Legislators decide how state funding is spent.
- Feedback through letters of concern on state-funded projects from advisory groups are key to ensure science-based land use decisions.





Alaska Board of Game

P.O. Box 115526

Juneau, AK 99811-5526

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www.boardofgame.adfg.alaska.gov

Guidelines for Written Comments

The Board of Game (board) relies heavily on information provided by the public. Explaining the effect of the proposed changes help inform the board members for their decisions on the hundreds of proposals scheduled for consideration each year. The following information provides guidelines and helpful tips to be effective with submitting written comments and oral testimony.

GUIDELINES FOR WRITTEN COMMENTS

Timely submission: Written comments are strongly encouraged to be submitted online at www.boardofgame.adfg.alaska.gov, by the set deadline for each meeting, usually two weeks in advance. New this cycle, Boards Support will be utilizing an online form that will allow comments to be uploaded as a file or entered manually. With the new system in place, Boards Support will no longer accept comments via email.

Comments received by the deadline are provided to the board and the public on the meeting information webpages in advance of the meeting. Each public and advisory committee comment is indexed, assigned a public comment ("PC") or advisory committee ("AC") log number, and cross-referenced with proposals. Comments are public documents and part of the board record.

Tips for format and content:

- Clearly state the proposal number and your position by indicating "support" or "oppose". If the comments support a modification in the proposal, please indicate "support as amended" and provide your preferred amendment in writing.
- Briefly explain why you support or oppose the proposal to help the board members understand the pros and cons of each issue. Board actions are based on a complete review of the facts involved, not the sum of total comments for or against a proposal.
- For advisory committees (AC), meeting recommendations should reflect why the AC voted as it did. If the vote was split, include the minority opinion. A brief description consisting of a couple sentences is sufficient.
- Include your name and if including graphs or charts, please indicate the source.
- If using acronyms, please state what the acronym stands for.
- Page limits: For on-time comments, up to 100 single-sided pages from any one individual or organization; during the meeting, comments are limited to ten single-sided pages.
- If commenting on multiple proposals, please do not use separate pieces of paper.
- If handwriting comments, write clearly, use dark ink and write legibly. Comments will be scanned and photocopied so please use 8 1/2" x 11" paper and leave reasonable margins.

[date]

[address]

Re: HB 203 – an Act relating to the use of certain trawl or dredge fishing gear in state water (“Prohibit Bottom Trawling”)

Dear Representatives McCabe, Foster, and Tomaszewski,

The Mayor’s office provides this letter of support for Alaska House Bill 203 that would prohibit trawl and dredge fishing gear that make substantial contact with the seafloor. This would apply to bottom trawling, pelagic trawls that drop their nets to the bottom, and dredge fisheries. In bottom trawling, heavy metal doors keep the net mouth open and are dragged across the seafloor, essentially rototilling it, while the nets behind capture everything that is brought up. Pelagic trawls (above the seafloor) mimic bottom trawls when the doors towed in open water are dropped to the seafloor. Dredging employs a 10- to 15-foot wide metal frame that tows heavy chain.

These fisheries damage benthic ecosystems, disrupt fish habitat, and catch and kill non-target “bycatch” species, including species that Alaska residents rely on in subsistence, sport, and commercial fisheries. Alaska’s seafood industry contributes \$33.3 million in ex-vessel earnings in the Mat-Su Borough and sportfishing contributes another \$31-\$64 million in local income.

The ability of marine life to rebound after damage to the seafloor may depend on whether fishing occurs on hard or soft bottom, the complexity of the ecosystem and habitat, and the frequency of gear contact. The ability of target species to be harvested sustainably depends on data-informed fisheries management. The types of and rates at which non-target bycatch species are caught come from federal and state fisheries observers. Observers are deployed on mid-water trawl and bottom trawl vessels in federal waters and those that move between federal and state waters. Observers are also deployed on scallop dredge vessels that operate between state and federal waters.

Dredge vessels specifically target weathervane scallops. Over the last 20 years, only two to four vessels have participated in this fishery, moving between federal and state waters with about 22% of the harvest occurring in state waters. The limited number of vessels has limited both the bycatch and the ecosystem damage. There is also research that suggests soft-bottom habitats are able to recover from dredging relatively quickly, unlike hard-bottom seafloor communities. It is unlikely that there will be increased effort in this fishery. In 2013 the fishery was changed from limited entry to open access, yet there has been no increase in effort. This is likely due to the high cost of outfitting a vessel for this type of fishery and the steep learning curve required.

While we share concerns regarding damage to the benthic environment; the ability of benthic communities, target species, and bycatch species to recover from gear contact with the seafloor; and the impact on sport- and subsistence harvests, we are also concerned about the degree to which a ban on dredging could impact fishery management.

In March 2025, the Alaska Board of Fisheries considered Proposal 298, which would amend the State-Waters Weathervane Scallop Management plan to close state waters in the Yakutat, Prince William Sound, Kodiak, and Dutch Harbor areas to commercial scallop fishing using dredge gear and allow other experimental gear types, while removing the vessel monitoring system and onboard observer requirements. While ADFG was neutral on the allocative aspects, they opposed aspects that reduced their ability to assess fishing effort and harvest. An effect they considered was the potential for this to shift vessels entirely into federal waters and increase pressure in those areas. It could also affect the data being collected and potentially threaten the fishery itself. While the scallop fishery is co-managed by federal and state agencies, ADFG manages the observer program. Should state waters be closed to dredging, all weathervane scallop harvest would be stopped until a new Fishery Management Plan could be developed in which the federal government set up and managed an observer program on these vessels

Given the current limited impact of the dredge fishery and the benefit of the data collected by observers, our recommendation would be to ban bottom trawling and pelagic trawls that contact the bottom, but to leave in place ADFG's management of the dredge fishery while research is conducted on impacts of gear contact with the seafloor in different areas and habitat types, and development of less destructive gear options.

HB203 recognizes the importance of research on the impacts of gear on fish habitat, ecosystems, and bycatch. The NOAA SAFE report and ADFG have outlined some of the most pressing scallop research needs. These include greater understanding of age-to and size-at maturity, stock assessments, environmental variables at specific scallop beds, and understanding where there are distinct populations, how they interact, and how that influences the ability of stocks to recover from harvest. Before-after control-impact (BACI) controlled fishing experiments could improve understanding of the ability for benthic communities to recover from dredging on soft-bottom habitats. These are just a few of the stock research studies that could be conducted. Additional studies could be conducted to determine the feasibility of alternative harvest methods, including scallop farming, and on the ways in which biodiversity and health of Alaska's fisheries – including salmon, halibut, crab, and flatfish – are dependent on benthic habitat and resilient to habitat damage.