

MATANUSKA-SUSITNA BOROUGH Fish & Wildlife Commission

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CHAIRPERSON
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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

Special Meeting
March 26, 2026

HANDOUTS

Pg. = Item:

- 1 = BOF After Action Report

**Matanuska Susitna Borough
Fish and Wildlife Commission**

**Alaska Board of Fisheries
Statewide and Supplemental Proposals
After Action Report**

March 17 – March 21, 2026

*Submitted by
Mac Minard
Northwestern Natural Resource Consultants*

I. Meeting Outcome Goals

There were three Matanuska Susitna Borough Fish Wildlife Commission (MSBFWC) outcome goals identified for the 2026 Statewide Board of Fish Meeting:

1. Ensure effective conservation of Northern Cook Inlet coho and sockeye salmon,
2. Address unforeseen effects of record large sockeye runs in combination with Federal management of a portion of the fishery which, historically, was solely managed by the State of Alaska, and
3. Fully implement by regulation the conservation corridor for Northern-bound stocks, as referenced in the Borough document *“It Takes Fish to Make Fish”*.

II. Preparations and Coordination

In the months prior to the Statewide Board of Fish meeting the nine-member Mat/Su Borough Fish and Wildlife Commission (MSBFWC) met frequently to discuss the issues and develop comments on Proposal 186, and arrive at a strategy to accomplish the desired outcome goals.

Additionally, the Commission elected to repurpose and resubmit a comprehensive two-year-old document *It Takes Fish to Make Fish*. This 30-page publication effectively communicated the Borough concerns, priorities and prior accomplishments. Many positive comments were received from Board of Fish members and staff as to the utility of this publication.

Additionally, the fisheries work group and Commission reviewed and developed positions for proposals affecting fisheries within the Mat Su (there was only one proposal 186, of specific concern. Coordination with Department staff was included to the extent we were able and open discussions with Board of Fisheries members and Kenai River Sportfishing Association (KRSA) helped to inform the preparations by the MSBFWC. These position statements were sent in as part of the on time written comments to the Board.

Planning and Communications

- 1) Borough staff led the social media campaign to encourage residents to offer formal written comment on proposal 186.
- 2) A report titled *It Takes Fish to Make Fish 2024* was repropose and submitted on behalf of the MSFWC. (RC 36)

The graphics, maps and easy to use format made the material highly effective and was used extensively in preparing Board members and Commission members concerning the issues and priorities. This report tells a compelling story that established a level of understanding and credibility necessary to gain Board of Fish member's confidence. Planning and Public Affairs staff deserve a great deal of credit for their work. This booklet was distributed at the meeting and labeled as RC 36

- 3) Andy Couch, Mat-Su Anglers – multiple columns for Frontiersman newspaper.
- 4) Submission of Record Copies (RCs). The MSBFWC submitted nine RCs that supported positions and informed the Board on issues. These were generally prepared by Mac Minard and submitted on behalf of the Commission.
- 5) Daily updates were authored by Commission member Andy Couch and sent daily to the members of the Mat Su Fish and Wildlife Commission and others by Paul Clark.
- 6) Stefan Hinman, Borough Communications, was onsite during the meeting and captured video and interviews during and after the process.

All documents for the meeting may be viewed here:

<https://www.adfg.alaska.gov/index.cfm?adfg=fisheriesboard.meetinginfo&date=03-17-2026&meeting=anchorage>

III. Logistics: Work Room and Equipment:

MSBFWC combined logistical efforts with KRSA. Access to internet, copy machine, and office space made for an optimal mix of support and coordinated interaction. This coordinated effort reduced costs for both organizations and increased our overall effectiveness.

Housing the Commission and Borough members and Advisory Committee representatives at the Captain Cook was also a strong tactical decision. Board of Fish members stay there as well and we had reasonable access to Board members in the mornings and evenings. Regular contact provided for effective communications.

The combined effort produced an organized and coordinated approach that proved to be a formidable coalition and served the interests of the in-river users of the Mat/Su Borough very well.

Kenai River Sportfishing Association (KRSA) covered all of Mac Minard's lodging, meals and incidental expenses at the Captain Cook Hotel and saved the Borough significantly.

IV. Live Streaming and Email Updates

While the Board is in session, viewers could [stream live audio](#) from the Board of Fisheries home page.

At the close of each day, Commission member Andy Couch, Mac Minard, Paul Clark, and/or members of the Mat Su Committee would outline the content of a daily email summary sent to members of the Borough Assembly and members of the Mat Su FWC as well as interested parties. These updates kept those who were unable to attend the meeting informed and up to date. Approximately 4 Commission Updates were issued throughout the run up to and during the meeting.

V. Public Testimony Tuesday and Wednesday

Approximately 205 people testified before the Board of Fisheries. Matanuska Susitna Borough coordinated six presentations/testimonies and submitted 5 RCs as supporting documentation during this phase of the meeting. When coupled with KRSA testimony we produced a very concise and coordinated effort. Several Board members commented on the effectiveness of our team. RCs are listed in Appendix A.

Table 1. Order by person and topic for public testimony on behalf of the Mat/Su Fish and Wildlife Commission.

| ORDER | WHO | WHAT | Related Goal(s) | RC |
|-------|------------|---|-----------------|-----------------------|
| 1 | Paul Clark | Introduce the Mat-Su Borough Fish & Wildlife Commission, Topics | All | RC049 |
| 2 | Andy Couch | Northern District sockeye and coho conservation concerns. | 1 | RC022 |

| | | | | |
|---|---------------|---|-------|-----------------------|
| 3 | Pete Probasco | History and Efficacy of the Conservation Corridor | 3 | RC050 |
| 4 | Gabe Kitter | Federal Fisheries Management | 2 | RC051 |
| 5 | Jim Sykes | Mixed Stock Fishery Complexity | 1,2,3 | RC052 |
| 6 | Mac Minard | Wrap Up/ Takeaways 1% Rule | All | |

VI. Committee Work

The Board established a Committee of the Whole Group 1 as the entity that would address Proposal 186. We detailed a Public Testimony schedule involving key representatives from the Mat SU Borough. Each testifier was armed/briefed with relevant materials and supporting RCs and Commission positions. Support material was very helpful and allowed full and complete participation by assigned committee members.

[RC131](#) UCI Drift Gillnet Mixed Stock Fishery Management Tools. Four pages, and serves as the primary document outlining the 9 elements of revision and provided the rationale for the changes. Mac Minard was assigned to carry this material into the committee.

[RC130](#) Current UCI Drift Gillnet Season Closure Rule. Two pages, details the One-percent rule for closure and the historic application of this rule. Additionally, the RC examines the utility of moving to 3% closure rule. Mac Minard took the lead on this material.

[RC132](#) Current UCI Drift Gillnet Management Areas. Two pages providing a map of fishing districts and a graphic illustrating the conservation benefit for Northern bound sockeye with non-corridor and corridor only fishing periods. Pete Probasco took the lead in introducing this material as part of the Committee of the Whole.

Committee work was conducted in a New England Town Hall format and was civil and provided an opportunity to get key information on the record. MSBFWC representation was excellent and there was an obvious coordination with most AC testimony as well.

Committee of the Whole – Group 1: Commercial Fisheries (13 proposals, Chaired by, Mike Wood)

Committee of the whole met on 3.20.26 in the afternoon. Borough representatives included Chairman, Pete Probasco, Vice chairman Andy Couch, Jim Sykes, Paul Clark, as well as Mac Minard and KRSA staff Kevin Delaney and Ray Beamsderfer were present and participated in the Committee of the Whole.

During this time the Commission introduced the elements of the needed changes to the Central District Drift plan for conservation purposes. Commission members and staff participated fully in the discussion and answered questions.

Main Elements:

The MSFWC members made the following points and recommendations as part of a coordinated effort to get these points on the record for the purpose of generating substitute language for proposal 186.

- Eliminate Area 2 from state waters regulation.
- Restrict the drift gillnet fishery in state waters to the expanded Kenai/Kasilof Sections.
- Provide Tuesday & Friday windows in drift gillnet openers now limited to the expanded Kenai/Kasilof Sections.
- Drift periods restricted to 12 hrs./day
- Increase trigger for season closure from 1% rule to 3% rule (based on combined catch in state and federal waters).
- Eliminate Area 1 from state waters regulation.
- Eliminate the upper sockeye tier in the drift plan.
- Restrict drift gillnet fishery to 2 miles from shore.
- Exclusive participation on a given day between state and federal fisheries.

VII. Deliberations

All of the Borough recommended elements were incorporated into regulatory language requested by Board Member Svendsen in [RC161](#) as substitute language for Proposal 186 and presented to the remainder of the Board on 3.20.26 during deliberations.

The amended proposal was deliberated and ultimately was passed on a 4 to 2 vote (Board Members Wood was conflicted out).

Assessment of Action

Passage of the amended language which incorporated the elements developed by the Borough Fish and Wildlife Commission is the single greatest reconfiguration of the Central District Drift Gillnet Fishery in history.

This new management approach will:

- 1) Focus the commercial harvest in terminal areas adjacent to the Kasilof and Kenai Rivers. These areas are known as the expanded Kenai and Kasilof harvest areas.
- 2) Close parts of Area 2 and Area 1 to commercial fishing, a move that creates a Conservation Corridor

- 3) Provided two weekly windows in regulation for the purpose of passing coho and sockeye salmon to Northern waters.
- 4) Increase the trigger to declare the “end” of the sockeye run. Known as the one percent rule, it closes the commercial fishery when sockeye salmon catches from two consecutive commercial periods are less than 1 percent of the cumulative commercial harvest to date. The Boards recent action raised that trigger to 3% which will effectively close (on average) the commercial fishery one or two weeks earlier, providing more protection s for Northern district coho salmon.

When taken in aggregate, it can be expected that the Commercial Drift Gillnet Fishery will intercept fewer coho and sockeye salmon bound for the Northern district. This conservation savings may result in an unknown reduction in commercial harvest of Kenai and Kasilof sockeye salmon. Conservation actions have consequences and this will be one of them.

It remains to be seen what will develop in the 2026 season but this Board of Fisheries and the efforts of the Mat Su Borough Fisha and Wildlife Commission, when taken together, are the best available for coho conservation at this time.

It is my understanding that Stefan Hinman, Borough Communications, recorded the entire deliberation process for Proposal 186 as amended. It will be illuminating for those who missed it to view the recording.

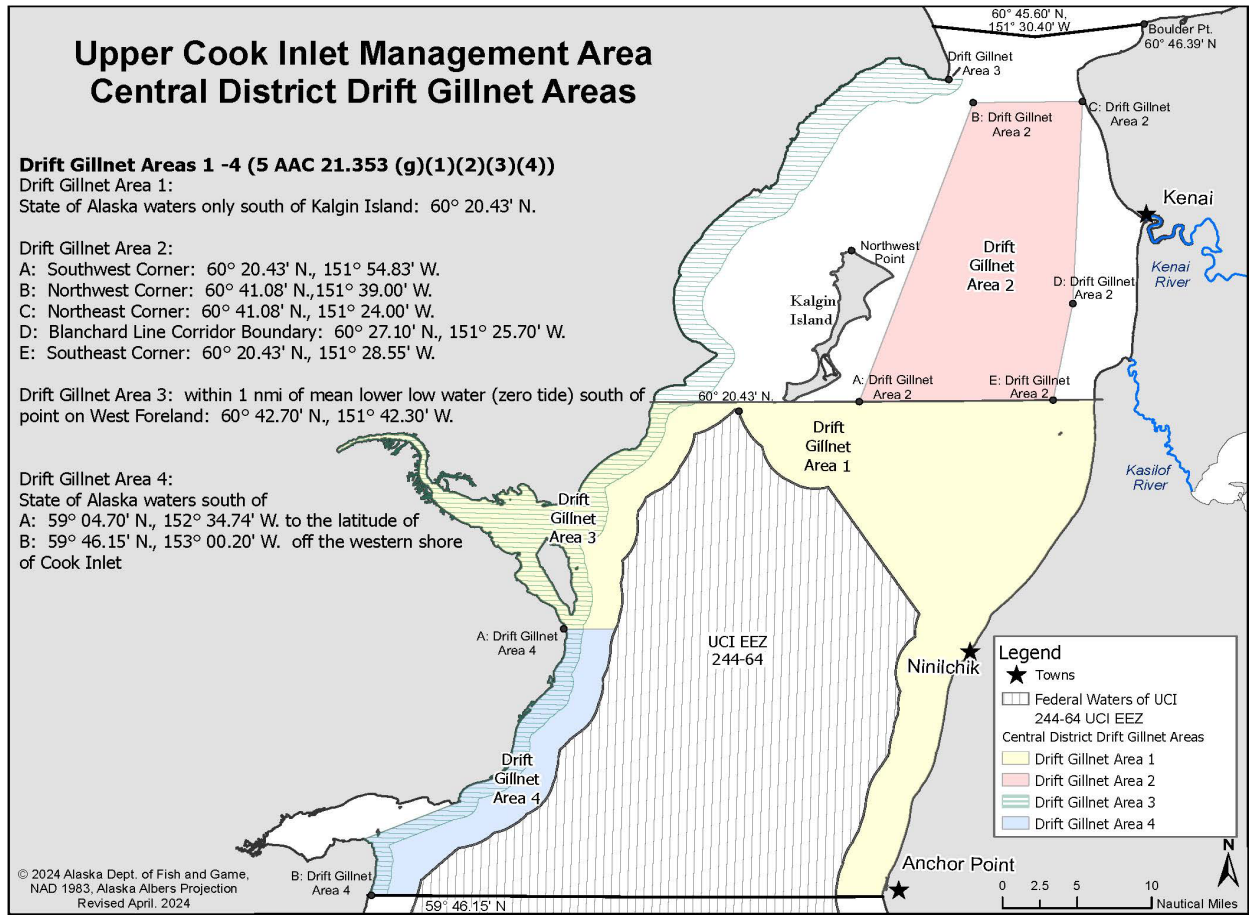
VIII. Evaluation of Goals

The MSBFWC team went into the Board meeting with three goals relative to Proposal 186 that informed and guided their policy and involvement. The overarching goal was to build on previous gains that had been achieved in the past and particularly those related to passage of fish to the Northen District.

The following is an assessment of those goals.

- 1) Ensure effective conservation of Northern Cook Inlet coho and sockeye salmon,**
Met in Full. The actions by the Board of Fisheries clearly increase the likelihood Northern bound coho and sockeye will transition central Cook Inlet.
- 2) Address unforeseen effects of record large sockeye runs in combination with Federal management of a portion of the fishery which, historically, was solely managed by the State of Alaska**
Met as closely to full as possible but will be subject to weather pattern, the future management of the EEZ and run sizes. This goal will need to be closely monitored.
- 3) Fully implement the conservation corridor for Northen-bound stocks.**

Met in Full. Actions by the Board effectively transitions the Central District Drift Gillnet Fishery from a mixed stock fishery to a terminal stock fishery management system. By creating the expanded terminal fishing area, we have also created a Conservation Corridor which will allow unmolested passage of Northern bound stocks of coho and sockeye salmon.



A full summary of Board of Fish action can be found at:
<https://www.adfg.alaska.gov/index.cfm?adfg=fisheriesboard.meetinginfo&date=03-17-2026&meeting=anchorage>

IX. Summary and Recommendations

Summary

The Mat Su was well represented by the members of the MSBFWC and others who made the time to attend. On numerous occasions, Alaska Board of Fisheries members and

ADFG staff, commented positively on the informed quality of your collective involvement. You maintained open and honest communications with Board members, staff, stakeholders and members of the public.

A positive outcome of this meeting is that we institutionalized the Conservation Corridor in regulation, no longer relying on the Commissioner's pledge that the commercial drift gillnet fishery will be confined to the terminal harvest areas. This means that the Conservation Corridor will remain an open pipeline for Northern bound salmon, which was a top tier priority for the MSBFWC.

Maintaining the orderly termination of the sockeye fishery driven by the three-percent rule in the drift fisheries along with the use of the Conservation corridor will permit more coho salmon to reach the Northern district waters.

Recommendations

There are three principal areas of execution that make for successful Board of Fisheries outcomes. These are:

Policy – you must have a solid statement of the problem and the policy outcomes to attain them. The MSBFWC is very good at developing policy that is both necessary and sufficient to attain their stated goals and based on decades of fisheries experience.

Politics – it is essential that the “right” Board members are appointed to the Board. These would be people who are interested in addressing the Borough residents' concerns and willing to work with the MSBFWC to attain stated policy goals. Oddly we did not see this in action at this meeting, there was no clear champion among Board members, for the policy the MSBFWC was advocating. This area also includes political leaders that represent the Borough and fully embrace the policy positions being advocated.

Public Relations (PR) – it is essential that a consistent drip of information be released in a well-planned and executed PR program. This effort generally begins long before the meeting and continues throughout the meeting. Establishing support for the desired policy outcomes and being recognized as the subject matter experts helps drive the media narrative and gain support. This is an essential part of a successful campaign.

1) Policy

- a. Begin preparations for the next Board meeting now. The focus must be to advance conservation and management efforts that lead to viable and robust fisheries in the Northern District waters, sufficient that all users may enjoy historical levels of participation.

- b. Prepare to defend the recent Board Actions. How the 2026 season progresses will have a bearing on how the 2027 Board Fisheries meeting goes for the Mat/Su region. Prepare to document the gains in fishery participation (if visible) to share at the next BOF meeting.
- c. Consider stock of concern status for king status for the Northern District where appropriate. This action is governed by the Policy for the Management of Sustainable Fisheries (5 AAC 39.222) and requires the Department to provide the status of salmon stocks and identify any salmon stock that present a concern. Currently there are four king salmon stocks listed as stocks of management concern and no coho stocks listed. It can be argued that while they are not stocks of management concern, multiple coho stocks in the Northern District would qualify as stocks of yield concern. Gaining designations for stock of concern status will require a focused effort with the Department and getting them to advance a recommendation to the Board. If this can be done at the next regular Cook Inlet meeting that would open the door to address the Stock of Concern Action Plan (this is where the gains can be made) at the next UCI Board meeting.
- d. Prepare Action Plan Recommendations. The MSBFWC is experienced in this area having successfully navigated the sockeye stock of concern in the past. The Action Plan is the vehicle to institutionalize the conservative measures in fisheries directly impacting Northern bound stocks and to identify key assessment tools that need to be developed or better supported.
- e. Remain focused and involved in the Federal Management program of the EEZ. It cannot be overstated how dangerous this new element can be to the sustainability of Northern district stocks. Maintaining involvement and seeking to influence policy decisions by the Feds and the State remains vitally important.
- f. Develop proposals that advance the Northern District interests in getting fish into the watershed with the overarching goal of rebuilding sustainable fisheries at historical levels and accompanying opportunity for personal use and sport fisheries.

2) Politics

- a. Actively work for Board of Fisheries appointments that will be sensitive and supportive of the Borough policy positions. This requires engagement in the process early and working with policy makers and people of influence to accomplish the task. Success at the Board of Fisheries requires four votes and it is important to actively cultivate that level of support.

- b. Engage with local leaders and legislators to make them aware of and supportive of the policy positions of the MSBFWC. Developing the fairness and economic arguments would be logical topics to build from.
- c. Seek out partnerships with others to grow the political support needed to advance policy. For example, maintain/increase the frequency of communications with Northern District Set Net fishers, KRSA and the Mat Su AC over the interim to ensure that policies and proposals are in sync with each other. A mutually supportive coalition is critical to maintaining the gains in salmon conservation and advancing new policy.

3) Public Relations

- a. Continue to budget for and commit resources to a “right-sized” Public Relations (PR) effort. This effort continues to address the lead up to the meeting, coverage during the meeting, and the follow up to the meeting. This effort would logically start six to nine months in advance and be used to garner support for the policy direction the MSBFWC seeks to advance.
- b. A strategic PR campaign that positions MSBFWC as the subject matter and policy experts will allow you to manage the messaging and gain public support. This campaign should cover all outlets of media coverage.
- c. Cultivate relations with leaders of the business community. Businesses within the Borough will benefit from the goals of the Commission and would logically support the Mat Su positions relative to the fisheries. Having representatives of the business community as part of the team going forward will demonstrate the broad positive impacts that additional fish in the Northern district provide.
- d. Develop stories of locals satisfying their food budgets without having to travel long distances. These are powerful and link the importance of the MSBFWC efforts to real outcomes and people. An example is the coverage that was given to the Susitna dipnet fishery last summer. Positive examples linked back to the MSBFWC successful efforts before the Board of Fisheries.
- e. Continue to report out Borough efforts to protect, enhance and improve habitat. Habitat preservation and restoration is a hallmark of the Mat Su Borough. It is powerful testimony to a long-term commitment to healthy fisheries and sets the MSBFWC apart from other advocacy groups in a very positive manner.
- f. Consider another field trip to the Susitna hosted by the Borough. This can be incredibly important in laying a foundation for Board members to understand the area the issues and the people and to develop personal relationships with MSBFWC members. I believe this was done prior to

the 2020 meeting and paid dividends. Perhaps a forum with affected business owners (guides, hotels, restaurants, sporting goods) could be worked in to such a trip.