

MATANUSKA-SUSITNA BOROUGH Fish & Wildlife Commission

Peter Probasco – Chair • Andy Couch – Vice Chair • Gabe Kitter • Bill Gamble • Kendra Zamzow • Michael Bowles • Marty Van Diest • Terry Gorlick • Jim Sykes – Ex officio member • Paul Clark – Staff

Regular Meeting

May 14, 2026

Meeting Packet – Table of Contents

Pg. = Item:

- **1 = Meeting Agenda**
- **3 = Draft FWC 3.26.26 Meeting Minutes**
- **5 = Draft FWC 4.9.26 Meeting Minutes**
- **7 = ADF&G Upper Cook Inlet Escapement Goal Memo**
- **14 = Assembly Presentation (4.21.26) Slide**
- **15 = Draft FWC Events Calendar**
- **32 = Jayde (JD) Ferguson Bio & Summary**
- **33 = HB 321 Letter of Opposition**
- **35 = FWC Draft Resolution 26-001 (Pike Barriers)**

DSJ Building, Conference Room 203

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
Marty Van Diest
Terry Gorlick
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
Tyler Young, Platting Officer

May 14, 2026
REGULAR MEETING
4:00 p.m.

Ways to participate in MSB Fish and Wildlife Commission meetings:

IN-PERSON: DSJ (Main) Borough Building, Conference Room 203
350 E. Dahlia Ave, Palmer, AK 99645

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. March 26, 2026 (Special Meeting)
 - B. April 9, 2026
- VI. AUDIENCE PARTICIPATION (*three minutes per person*)

VII. STAFF/AGENCY REPORTS & PRESENTATIONS

A. Staff Report

1. ADF&G 2026 Escapement Goals
2. Summary of April 21 Assembly Presentation
3. Calendar with Key Activities

B. Chair's Report

C. ADF&G Fish Pathology Program – Jayde Ferguson

D. MSB Fish Passage & Barriers Projects – Mike Campfield

VIII. UNFINISHED BUSINESS

A. Prep for 2027 Board of Fisheries Cycle

1. Communications Strategy
2. It Takes Fish to Make Fish Update

IX. NEW BUSINESS

A. Letter of Opposition for HB321

B. Pike Mitigation Resolution Approval*

C. Schedule Remaining 2026 Meetings

X. MEMBER COMMENTS (10 minutes)

XI. NEXT MEETING DATE: To be determined.

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
MARCH 26, 2026, SPECIAL MEETING 4:00 p.m.

MINUTES

- I. CALL TO ORDER
Meeting called to order at 4:01pm

- II. ROLL CALL – DETERMINATION OF QUORUM
Present
Pete Probasco
Andy Couch
Gabe Kitter
Bill Gamble
Kendra Zamzow
Marty Van Diest
Jim Sykes
Michael Bowles (arrived at 4:07pm)

- III. PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

- IV. APPROVAL OF AGENDA
AC moves, GK second, no objections, agenda approved

- V. AUDIENCE PARTICIPATION (*three minutes per person*)
Stephen Braund

- VI. STAFF/AGENCY REPORTS & PRESENTATIONS
 - A. Staff Report

 - B. Chair Report

- VII. ITEMS OF BUSINESS
 - A. Board of Fisheries 2026 March Meeting
 1. After Action Review

AC moved to change the word “Prepare” to “Consider” in policy recommendations of the action report and remove items C. and F., MVD second. No objection, motion carried.

AC moved to accept action report as amended, GK second. No objections, motion passed.

Pete would like to send all Assembly members the after-action report and get on an agenda to provide a short presentation on the FWC’s success, the importance of a good budget next year, and good staff support. Andy could serve as a back-up.

2. Next Steps

B. Prep for 2027 Board of Fisheries

1. Draft proposals

2. Goals

C. Providing a Letter of support for HB 321 “Fish & Game Wildlife Refuges”

FWC discussed various concerns with the bill as currently written and decided to take no action at this meeting, but leave it on the agenda for further discussion.

Follow-up action is to ask Rep McCabe if he has any comments regarding HB 321

VIII. MEMBER COMMENTS (10 minutes)

IX. NEXT MEETING DATE: Regular Meeting, April 9, 4:00 PM at 533 E Fireweed

X. ADJOURNMENT

KZ moves to adjourn, AC seconds, no objections, meeting adjourned at 5:22pm.

Pete Probasco, Chair

Date

Paul Clark, MSB Long Range Planner

Date

MATANUSKA-SUSITNA BOROUGH

Fish and Wildlife Commission
REGULAR MEETING, April 9, 2026, 4:00pm
MINUTES

I. CALL TO ORDER

Meeting called to order at 4:03pm

II. ROLL CALL – DETERMINATION OF QUORUM

Present

Pete Probasco

Andy Couch

Gabe Kitter

Terry Gorlick

Michael Bowles

Marty Van Diest

Bill Gamble

Kendra Zamzow (joined at 5:25pm)

Absent:

Bill Gamble

ADF&G Members

Todd Rinaldi, Regional Management Coordinator

Manny Eichholz, Wildlife Biologist

Ross Dorendorf, Area Biologist

III. PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

IV. APPROVAL OF AGENDA

Andy Couch moved, Gabe Kitter seconded, no objections, agenda approved.

V. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

A. February 26, 2026 (Special Meeting)

Gabe Kitter moved, Michael Bowles seconded, no objections, minutes approved.

B. March 12, 2026

Gabe Kitter moved, Andy Couch seconded, no objections, minutes approved.

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

Margaret Stern

Becky Long
Howard Delo
Neil Dewitt

VII. STAFF /AGENCY REPORTS & PRESENTATIONS

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

VIII. UNFINISHED BUSINESS

- A. Prep for 2027 Board of Fisheries Cycle
Andy Couch notified commission of the Board of Fisheries special meeting on May 1.
- B. Letter of support for HB321
Andy Couch moved to approve letter of support, Marty Van Diest seconded, motion failed unanimously (7-0).

Michael Bowles moved to approve writing a letter of opposition to HB 321, Andy Couch seconded, no objections, motion approved.

Michael Bowles tasked with writing HB321 letter of opposition outlining FWC concerns with HB321's intentions.

IX. NEW BUSINESS

- A. ADF&G Annual Game Summary Meeting
ADF&G responses to FWC questions were posted to the FWC website at <https://matsugov.us/docs/meetings/25068/ADFG-Responses-to-FWC-Questions.pdf>

X. MEMBER COMMENTS (10 Minutes)

XI. NEXT MEETING DATE: May 14, 4:00-6:00 PM DSJ Building, Conference Room 203

XII. ADJOURNMENT

Terry Gorlick moved to adjourn, Michael Bowles seconded, no objections, meeting adjourned at 6:00pm.



MEMORANDUM

TO: Israel Payton, Director, Division of Sport Fish

DATE: April 01, 2026

Forrest Bowers, Director, Division of Commercial Fisheries

SUBJECT: Upper Cook Inlet Escapement Goal Memorandum

THRU: Kristine Dunker, Regional Supervisor, Division of Sport Fish, Region II *KJD*

Bert Lewis, Regional Supervisor, Division of Commercial Fisheries, Region II *BL*

FROM: Nick DeCovich, Regional Research Coordinator, Division of Sport Fish, Region II *ND*

Jack W. Erickson, Regional Research Coordinator, Division of Commercial Fisheries, Region II *JWE*

The Alaska Department of Fish and Game (department) reviewed escapement goals for salmon stocks in the Upper Cook Inlet Management Area as part of the 2026–2027 Board of Fisheries regulatory cycle.

Based on this review, the department recommends:

- No change to escapement goals for any king, chum, pink, or coho salmon stocks.
- Updating the Kasilof River sockeye salmon biological escapement goal to a range of 200,000–350,000.
- Discontinuing the Packer Creek sockeye salmon sustainable escapement goal.

Details of the escapement goal review committee findings are found below, and an overview of this review will be provided at the Board of Fisheries work session in October 2026.

This memo presents the department review and recommendations for escapement goals for Upper Cook Inlet Management Area (UCIMA). The *Policy for Statewide Salmon Escapement Goals* (5 AAC 39.223) recognizes the establishment of salmon escapement goals as a joint responsibility of the Alaska Department of Fish and Game (department) and the Alaska Board of Fisheries (board) and describes the concepts, criteria, and procedures for establishing and modifying salmon escapement goals. Under the policy, the board recognizes and describes the department's responsibility for establishing and modifying biological escapement goals (BEG) and sustainable escapement goals (SEG).

Beginning in September 2025, an interdivisional salmon escapement goal committee, including staff from the divisions of Commercial Fisheries and Sport Fish, met twice to discuss salmon escapement goals in the UCIMA. Escapement goals for this area have been set and evaluated at regular intervals since statehood and many of these stocks have long-term historical datasets. The review was based on the *Policy for the Management of Sustainable Salmon Fisheries* (5 AAC 39.222) and the *Policy for Statewide Salmon Escapement Goals* (5 AAC 39.223). Two important terms are

5 AAC 39.222 (f)(3) “*Biological Escapement Goal* (BEG): the escapement that provides the greatest potential for maximum sustained yield (MSY);” and

5 AAC 39.222 (f)(36) “*Sustainable Escapement Goal* (SEG): a level of escapement, indicated by an index or an escapement estimate, that is known to provide for sustained yield over a 5-to-10-year period, used in situations where a BEG cannot be estimated or managed for.”

The committee determined the appropriate goal type (BEG or SEG) for each salmon stock with an existing goal and reviewed other monitored stocks that do not have escapement goals. Using available data, we determined the most appropriate methods to develop each escapement goal.

Currently, 33 escapement goals are established in UCIMA (Table 1). Due to the comprehensive previous analyses (McKinley et al. 2024 McKinley et al. 2020, and Erickson et al. 2017), the review committee focused its attention on updating and reviewing the stock-recruit analyses for the following stocks.

Crooked Creek king salmon

The committee recommended no change to the current SEG of 700–1,400 based on information available at the time of review. Alternative approaches were discussed, including size-based goals and incorporating hatchery-origin fish contributing to the spawning escapement. Additional evaluation of this goal is ongoing to better reflect total production and spawning contribution within this integrated supplementation system. This work includes development and analysis of additional data to inform potential goal changes. The results of that assessment will be provided outside of this memo as they become available.

Susitna River king salmon

The committee findings are for no change to the 3 SEGs and 1 BEG for the four king salmon stocks in the Susitna River drainage. The run-reconstruction and stock-recruit models used to establish the current escapement goals for Deshka, Eastside, Talkeetna, and Yentna Rivers in

2020 were updated using data available through 2025. Estimates from this analysis reveal there has been no yield available during the recent period of poor king productivity, therefore it is not reasonable to use these updates to adjust current escapement goals. A Susitna River king salmon stock status report that includes these findings will be provided prior to the 2027 UCI Board of Fisheries meeting.

Kenai River early- and late-run king salmon

The committee findings are for no change in the SEGs for either of these king salmon stocks. Large fish (fish ≥ 75 cm mid-eye-to-fork of tail length) escapement goals (assessed by estimates of large fish produced from sonar) were adopted for the first time for both of these stocks in 2017. Similar to Susitna king salmon stocks, the stock-recruit models used to develop the current escapement goals were updated with data available through 2025. These analyses indicated that there is negligible harvestable surplus available in recent years. A stock status report for early and late-run Kenai River king salmon will be provided prior to the 2027 UCI Board of Fisheries meeting.

Fish Creek sockeye salmon

The current weir-based SEG (15,000–45,000) for Fish Creek was established in 2017 using the percentile approach. For this review, the committee updated the time series through 2025 and evaluated data used in prior analyses. The committee identified several years in the historical time series that relied on alternative assessment methods to estimate sockeye salmon escapement into Fish Creek that included incomplete counts. An updated dataset excluding these years produced results consistent to previous analyses. The committee's findings are for no change to the Fish Creek sockeye salmon SEG.

Kasilof River sockeye salmon

The current sonar-based BEG (140,000–320,000) for Kasilof River sockeye salmon was established in 2020. For this review, the committee updated the escapement time series, incorporated brood table production estimates through 2018, and re-evaluated escapement and recruitment data used in prior analyses. The committee determined that production estimates prior to 1983 were unreliable for several reasons, consistent with findings reported by Hasbrouck et al. (2022) for late-run Kenai River sockeye salmon. Spawner-recruit analyses of brood years 1983–2018 indicated that a Ricker model incorporating a first-order autoregressive error structure (AR1) best described the spawner-recruit relationship for this stock. Model parameter estimates indicated an increase in the escapement that is expected to maximize yield (S_{MSY}) compared to the previous analysis (McKinley et al. 2024). The committee's findings are to update the Kasilof River sockeye salmon BEG to 200,000–350,000.

Kenai River sockeye salmon

The current sonar-based SEG (750,000–1,300,000) for Kenai River sockeye salmon was established in 2020 using a traditional Ricker stock–recruit model (Hasbrouck et al. 2022). Incorporation of additional escapement and production data through 2018 resulted in negligible changes to the estimated stock–recruit relationship and biological reference points. The committee’s findings are for no change to the Kenai River sockeye salmon SEG.

Packers Creek sockeye salmon

The current SEG (15,000–30,000) for Packers Creek sockeye salmon was established in 2008. Packer Creek sockeye salmon are no longer assessed, with no plans to assess it in the future. The project lacks funding to continue operating the video weir on a consistent basis. The project has experienced chronic technical issues that prevent staff from enumerating the entire run. The committee’s findings are to discontinue the Packers Creek sockeye salmon escapement goal.

Jim Creek coho salmon

The current SEG (250–700) for Jim Creek coho salmon is a percentile-based goal for McRoberts Creek, a tributary of the Jim Creek drainage, using a foot survey index.

At the September interdivisional escapement goal committee meeting, Palmer Sport Fish staff agreed to investigate an escapement goal based on Jim Creek weir counts. It was determined that harvest rates of > 40% precluded a percentile approach to developing weir-based goal. The committee’s findings are for no change to the Jim Creek coho salmon SEG.

Summary

In summary, the escapement goal committee reviewed 33 salmon escapement goals for the UCIMA. The committee’s findings are to update the Kasilof River sockeye SEG and discontinue the escapement goal for Packers Creek sockeye.

A report containing details of the escapement goal analyses will be published prior to the February 2027 Upper Cook Inlet regulatory meeting. A brief oral report will be given to the board at the October 2026 Work Session. A more detailed oral report concerning escapement goals will be presented to the board in February 2027. These reports will list all current and new escapement goals for UCI, as well as a detailed description of the methods used to reach the committee’s findings. In addition, stock status reports for the Susitna River and Kenai River king salmon stocks will be presented.

Salmon stock of concern recommendations will be finalized after the 2026 salmon season to include the most recent year’s escapements. These recommendations will be formalized in a memo and presented at the board Work Session in October 2026.

References Cited

- Erickson, J. W., T. M. Willette, and T. McKinley. 2017. Review of salmon escapement goals in Upper Cook Inlet, Alaska, 2016. Alaska Department of Fish and Game, Fishery Manuscript No. 17-03, Anchorage. <http://www.adfg.alaska.gov/FedAidPDFs/FMS17-03.pdf>
- Hasbrouck, J. J., W. D. Templin, A. R. Munro, K. G. Howard, and T. Hamazaki. 2022. Spawner–recruit analyses and escapement goal recommendation for Kenai River late-run sockeye salmon. Alaska Department of Fish and Game, Fishery Manuscript No. 22-01, Anchorage.
- McKinley, T., N. DeCovich, J. W. Erickson, T. Hamazaki, R. Begich, and T. L. Vincent. 2020. Review of salmon escapement goals in Upper Cook Inlet, Alaska, 2019. Alaska Department of Fish and Game, Fishery Manuscript No. 20-02, Anchorage.
- McKinley, T. R., J. W. Erickson, T. Eskelin, N. DeCovich, and T. Hamazaki. 2024. Review of salmon escapement goals in Upper Cook Inlet, Alaska, 2023. Alaska Department of Fish and Game, Fishery Manuscript No. 24-01, Anchorage.

Table 1.– Summary of current escapement goals and 2026 committee findings for salmon stocks in Upper Cook Inlet.

System	Current Escapement Goal			Recommended actions for 2027		
	Goal	Type	Year Adopted	Range	Data ^a	Action
King Salmon						
Alexander Creek	1,900-3,700	SEG	2020		Single aerial survey	No change
Campbell Creek	340	LB SEG	2024		Single foot survey	No change
Chuitna River	1,000-1,500	SEG	2020		Single aerial survey	No change
Chulitna River	1,200-2,900	SEG	2020		Single aerial survey	No change
Crooked Creek	700-1,400	SEG	2020		Weir	TBD
Deshka River	9,000-18,000	BEG	2020		Weir	No change
Eastside Susitna R.	13,000-25,000	SEG	2020		Multiple aerial surveys ^a	No change
Kenai R. - early run (large fish) ^b	2,800-5,600	SEG	2017		Sonar	No Change
	3,900-6,600	OEG	2017		—	—
Kenai R. - late run (large fish) ^b	13,500-27,000	SEG	2017		Sonar	No change
	15,000-30,000	OEG	2020		—	—
Little Susitna R. (aerial) ^c	700-1,500	SEG	2020		Single aerial survey	No change
Little Susitna R. (weir)	2,100-4,300	SEG	2017		Weir	No change
Talkeetna River	9,000-17,500	SEG	2020		Multiple aerial surveys ^a	No change
Theodore River	500-1,000	SEG	2020		Single aerial survey	No change
Yentna River	13,000-22,000	SEG	2020		Multiple types ^a	No change
	16,000-22,000	OEG	2020		—	—
Chum Salmon						
Clearwater Creek	3,500-8,000	SEG	2017		Peak aerial survey	No change
Coho Salmon						
Deshka River	10,200-24,100	SEG	2017		Weir	No change
Fish Creek (Knik)	1,200-6,000	SEG	2020		Weir	No change
Jim Creek	250-700	SEG	2020		Single foot survey	No change
Little Susitna R.	9,200-17,700	SEG	2020		Weir	No change
Sockeye Salmon						
Fish Creek (Knik)	15,000-45,000	SEG	2017		Weir	No change
Kasilof River	140,000-320,000	BEG	2020	200,000-350,000	Sonar	Update
	140,000-370,000	OEG	2020		—	—

Table 1. Continued....

System	Current Escapement Goal			Year Adopted	Range	Recommended actions for 2017	
	Goal	Type	Year			Escapement Data ^a	Action
Kenai River	750,000-1,300,000	SEG	2020		Sonar	No change	
Packers Creek	15,000-30,000	SEG	2008		Weir	Eliminate	
Russian R. - early run	22,000-42,000	BEG	2011		—	No change	
Russian R. - late run	44,000-85,000	SEG	2020		Weir	No change	
Chelatna Lake	20,000-45,000	SEG	2017		Weir	No change	
Judd Lake	15,000-40,000	SEG	2017		Weir	No change	
Larson Lake	15,000-35,000	SEG	2017		Weir	No change	

Note: BEG = biological escapement goal; SEG = sustainable escapement goal; LB SEG = lower-bound SEG; OEG = optimal escapement goal

^a Single aerial surveys of individual tributaries are combined with other historical data to estimate annual run size for three king salmon stocks of the Susitna River drainage. For the Yentna River stock, sonar counts from Lake Creek and radio telemetry data collected in 2022 were added to the model.

^b Large fish are 75 cm mid-eye-to-fork of tail length or longer.

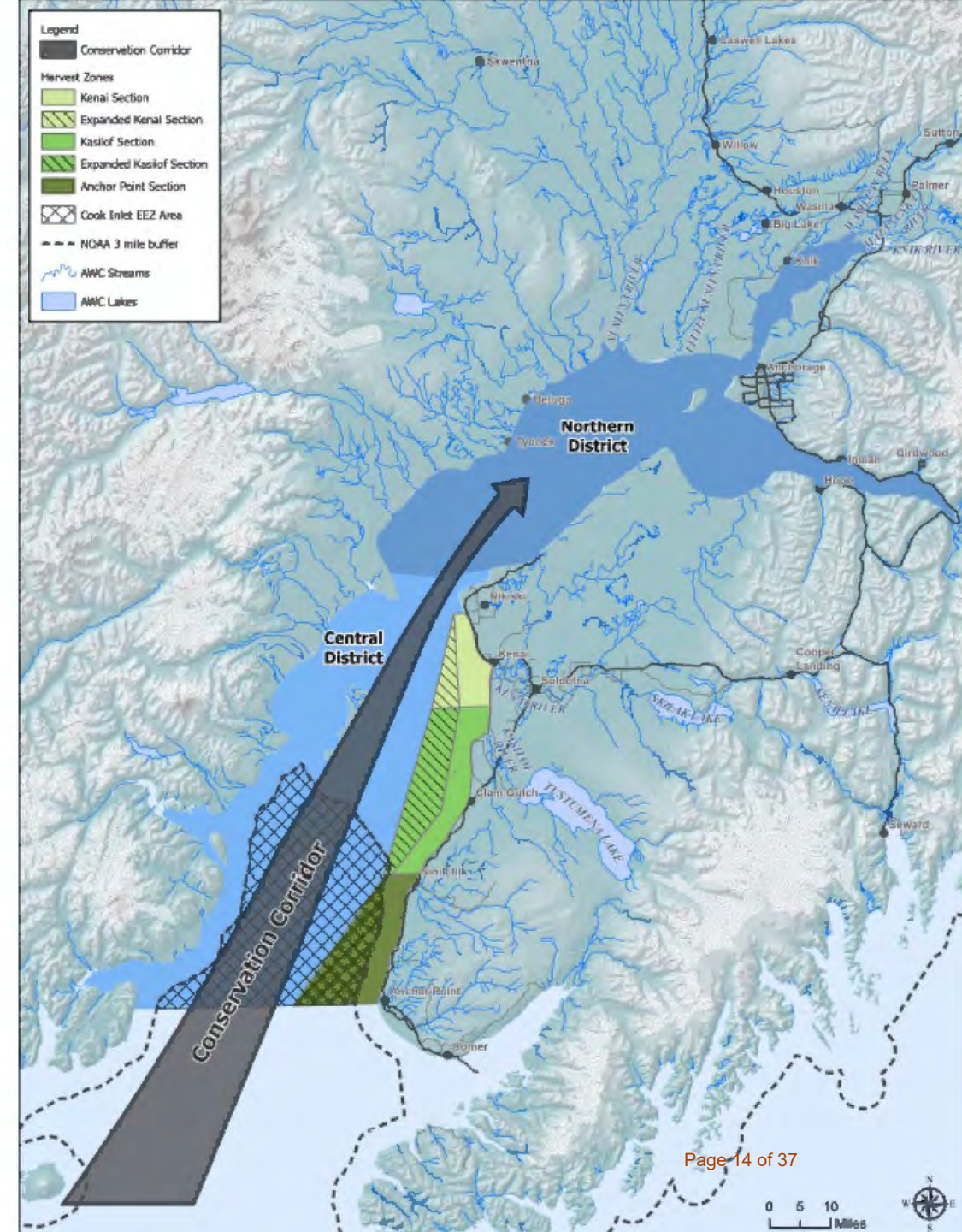
^c Little Susitna River king salmon aerial survey goal is only used to assess escapement if weir count is not available.

IT TAKES FISH TO MAKE FISH



Changes to the Upper Cook Inlet Central District Drift Gillnet Management Plan:

- Created a **Conservation Corridor** by
 - Closing areas of the state waters to commercial fishing
 - Focuses the commercial harvest closer to the mouth of the Kasilof and Kenai Rivers.
- **Two weekly time windows** to let coho and sockeye salmon pass to the Northern District.
- Changed the standard for declaring the “end” of the sockeye run, leading to **earlier closure of the commercial fishery**



MSB Fish & Wildlife Commission Events Calendar

Upper Cook Inlet / Mat-Su Focus — May 2026 through April 2027

May-August 2026

- May-June – MSB FY27 Budget finalized (\$65k split between travel & contractual)
- Off-season work
- Special meetings?
- ACR deadline for 2027 BOF Meeting – August 28, 2026
- 3 BOF nominations – Mike Wood (reappointment), Paul Cyr, Blair Hickson
 - Confirmation hearings in May

September – December 2026

FWC Regular Meeting

September 10, 2026

Agenda Priorities: Legislative priority updates

Mat-Su Borough Assembly – Legislative Priorities Adoption

Timing: September–October 2026

Location: Palmer – Assembly Chambers

Purpose: Adopt official Borough legislative priorities for the upcoming state session.

Why it matters: Determines which fish and wildlife issues the Borough actively advocates for with the Mat-Su Delegation and in Juneau.

Tasks: Revise Fishery Management legislative priorities and send to the Assembly.

FWC Regular Meeting

October 8, 2026

Agenda Priorities:

Board of Fisheries – Work Session

Dates: October 28–29, 2026

The Alaska Board of Fisheries convenes a two-day fall **Work Session**, as listed on the official Board of Fisheries meeting schedule. [\[adfg.alaska.gov\]](https://adfg.alaska.gov)

Location:

Anchorage – Egan Civic & Convention Center (with live stream typically provided by ADF&G Boards Support). [\[adfg.alaska.gov\]](https://adfg.alaska.gov)

Purpose:

The Board of Fisheries Work Session is used to:

- **Review and act on Agenda Change Requests (ACRs)**
- Discuss **Stocks of Concern**
- Organize and set direction for the **upcoming regulatory meeting cycle**
- Address administrative, procedural, and planning matters before regional and statewide meetings

No direct regulatory changes are adopted at the Work Session, but decisions made here determine what issues and requests move forward.

Why it matters:

The Work Session is a key **gatekeeping step** in the Board of Fisheries process. Acceptance or denial of ACRs and organizational decisions made at this meeting:

- Determine **which Upper Cook Inlet–related issues** may advance outside the normal regulatory cycle
- Influence the scope, timing, and structure of future Board of Fisheries regulatory meetings that directly affect Mat-Su fisheries [\[adfg.alaska.gov\]](http://adfg.alaska.gov), [\[adfg.alaska.gov\]](http://adfg.alaska.gov)

Tasks:

- **Monitor the Work Session agenda and materials**, with attention to Agenda Change Requests that may affect Upper Cook Inlet or Mat-Su fisheries. [\[adfg.alaska.gov\]](http://adfg.alaska.gov), [\[adfg.alaska.gov\]](http://adfg.alaska.gov)
- **Track Board decisions on ACR acceptance, deferral, or rejection**, noting implications for upcoming regulatory cycles.
- **Participate (in person or via live stream) as appropriate** when Mat-Su-relevant issues are discussed.
- **Brief the full Commission** following the Work Session on outcomes affecting future Board of Fisheries actions and timelines.

FWC Regular Meeting

November 12, 2026

Agenda Priorities:

Mat-Su Salmon Science & Conservation Symposium

Timing: Mid-November 2026 (Thursday–Friday)

The Mat-Su Salmon Science & Conservation Symposium is an **annual two-day fall event**, traditionally held in mid-November on a Thursday–Friday schedule. [\[matsusalmon.org\]](https://matsusalmon.org)

Location:

Palmer Community Center (Depot), Palmer – The Symposium is routinely hosted at the Palmer Depot.

Purpose:

The Symposium serves as a **regional forum** to:

- Share **salmon science, monitoring results, and habitat research**
- Highlight **restoration, conservation, and planning efforts** in the Mat-Su Basin
- Facilitate coordination and information exchange among agencies, tribes, researchers, NGOs, and local governments [\[matsusalmon.org\]](https://matsusalmon.org)

Tasks:

- **Prepare and deliver a presentation** summarizing **2026–27 Fish & Wildlife Commission activities**, priorities, and emerging issues relevant to salmon and habitat.
- **Identify potential speakers or topics** emerging from the Symposium that could inform future Fish & Wildlife Commission meetings or work plans.
- **If 4 or more** plan to attend, provide public notice of a possible FWC quorum.

FWC Regular Meeting

December 10, 2026

Agenda Priorities:

Alaska Governor Election & Inauguration

Timing: Early December 2026

Why it matters:

The Governor of Alaska plays a central role in fish and wildlife governance by:

- **Appointing members of the Alaska Board of Fisheries and Alaska Board of Game**, subject to legislative confirmation
- Appointing the **ADF&G Commissioner** and influencing agency leadership structure
- Setting **administration priorities and budget direction** that affect fisheries management, habitat programs, and conservation capacity statewide

Early engagement following the election is important to ensure Mat-Su fish, wildlife, and habitat issues are understood by the incoming administration. The FWC can help establish

early lines of communication between the Borough and the Governor’s Office on priority resource issues.

Tasks:

- **Draft a formal introduction letter** from the Mayor or the Fish & Wildlife Commission to the Governor’s Office:
 - Introduce the Commission and its advisory role
 - Summarize key **Mat-Su fish, wildlife, and habitat priorities**
 - Offer the Commission as a resource for regional insight
- **Transmit the letter soon after inauguration**, with a copy to the **ADF&G Commissioner** once appointed.
- **Track executive appointments** to the Boards of Fisheries and Game and ADF&G leadership for future Commission engagement.

FWC Regular Meeting

Timing: January 14, 2027

Agenda Priorities: Hatchery Plan comments, NPFMC comments

Alaska State Legislature – Regular Sessions

Alaska State Legislature – 35th Legislature, 1st Regular Session

Mid-January 2027 through spring 2027 – The Alaska State Legislature convenes its First Regular Session in **January of odd-numbered years** and typically remains in session through **April–May**, subject to statutory and constitutional limits.

Why it matters:

Legislative decisions made during the First Regular Session directly affect:

- **Funding levels for ADF&G**, including staffing, research, monitoring, and program capacity
- Resources available for **salmon science, monitoring, and management**
- **Confirmation of Board members** who regulate fisheries and wildlife critical to the **Upper Cook Inlet and Mat-Su region**

Because these actions set policy and funding direction for the biennium, early engagement during the session is especially important for local and regional interests.

Tasks:

- **Coordinate with the Mat-Su legislative delegation** to understand fish- and wildlife-related bills, budget items, and confirmation schedules relevant to the Mat-Su. [akml.org]

- **Identify priority topics** affecting ADF&G capacity, salmon management, and Board composition early in the session. [\[alaskapublic.org\]](http://alaskapublic.org)
- **Designate 1–2 Fish & Wildlife Commission members** to travel to Juneau (or participate via teleconference) to:
 - Observe committee hearings and joint sessions relevant to fish and wildlife
 - Provide informal technical insight and local perspective when appropriate
 - Build and maintain working relationships with legislators and staff
- **Report back to the full Commission** on session developments and emerging issues with Mat-Su relevance

January – March 2027

Annual ADF&G Fish Stocking / Hatcheries Plan

January 2027

ADF&G Division of Sport Fish releases the draft *Statewide Sport Fish Stocking Plan* for public review, with a formal public comment period typically open **through January 31**.

[\[adfg.alaska.gov\]](http://adfg.alaska.gov)

The Statewide Stocking Plan outlines **where, what species, life stage, and approximate numbers of hatchery-reared fish** ADF&G proposes to stock across Alaska in the coming year, including Southcentral waters relevant to the Mat-Su.

The plan directly influences: [\[adfg.alaska.gov\]](http://adfg.alaska.gov)

- Recreational and subsistence fishing opportunities
- Use and management of lakes, rivers, and access points
- Interactions between stocked and wild fish populations
- Long-term sport fish enhancement objectives and budget priorities

ADF&G gets **public and stakeholder input** before finalizing the plan, and newly proposed stocking locations do not proceed without prior notice and opportunity for comment.

[\[adfg.alaska.gov\]](http://adfg.alaska.gov)

Tasks:

- **Review the draft Statewide Stocking Plan**, with emphasis on Southcentral Alaska and Mat-Su-area waters identified in the plan.
- **Identify proposed changes or new stocking locations** that may affect Mat-Su Borough waters, access points, or users.
- **Coordinate with ADF&G Sport Fish staff as needed** to clarify local conditions, access constraints, or known concerns (e.g., habitat sensitivity, user conflicts).

- **Develop and approve commission comments or recommendations**, focusing on local insight, consistency with Borough priorities, and potential benefits or concerns.
- **Submit comments within the January public comment window** using ADF&G's established submission channels (email or mail).

FWC Regular Meeting

February 11, 2027

Agenda Priorities: Finalize NPFMC Council meeting / Federal fisheries strategy

North Pacific Fishery Management Council Meeting

February 22 – March 2, 2027 – The North Pacific Fishery Management Council's winter meeting, as listed on the Council's future meetings schedule. [\[npfmc.org\]](http://npfmc.org)

Anchorage, Alaska – NPFMC winter meetings are routinely held in Anchorage, with public access and live streaming available through the Council's website and YouTube channel. [\[npfmc.org\]](http://npfmc.org), [\[npfmc.org\]](http://npfmc.org)

Purpose & Role:

The North Pacific Fishery Management Council:

- Guides **federal fisheries management** under the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act
- Considers **ecosystem and bycatch policies**, including salmon bycatch
- Reviews Stock Assessment and Fishery Evaluation (SAFE) reports and **recommends salmon harvest specifications for the Cook Inlet federal (EEZ) salmon fishery** [\[npfmc.org\]](http://npfmc.org), [\[meetings.npfmc.org\]](http://meetings.npfmc.org)

Council recommendations form the basis for National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) federal rulemaking.

Why it matters for Upper Cook Inlet:

- **Federal decisions immediately precede the Upper Cook Inlet Board of Fisheries meeting**, potentially shaping conservation context and allocation discussions.
- The Council establishes **salmon harvest specifications for the Cook Inlet federal fishery**, including TACs and ACLs, which affect overall harvest pressure on Upper Cook Inlet salmon stocks. [\[meetings.npfmc.org\]](http://meetings.npfmc.org), [\[fisheries.noaa.gov\]](http://fisheries.noaa.gov)

Tasks:

- **Review Council materials in December-January**, including:

- Draft Stock Assessment and Fishery Evaluation (SAFE) reports
- Draft Environmental Assessment (EA) for Cook Inlet salmon harvest specifications [\[meetings.npfmc.org\]](#), [\[downloads...ations.gov\]](#)
- **Coordinate and submit written comments**, individually or through the Borough, addressing Upper Cook Inlet conservation, stock status, and ecosystem considerations prior to the February meeting. [\[npfmc.org\]](#)
- **Attend or monitor the meeting** (in person or via live stream) during Cook Inlet-relevant agenda items. [\[npfmc.org\]](#)
- **Brief the full Commission** on Council outcomes that may affect subsequent Board of Fisheries deliberations.

FWC Special Meeting

Timing: February 25, 2027

Agenda Priorities: 2027 BOF Meeting strategy

FWC Regular Meeting

Timing: March 11, 2027

Agenda Priorities:

Board of Fisheries – Upper Cook Inlet Finfish

March 4–15, 2027 – The Alaska Board of Fisheries’ Upper Cook Inlet Finfish regulatory meeting for the 2026–2027 cycle, as adopted during the Board’s fall Work Session.

[\[aws.state.ak.us\]](#), [\[adfg.alaska.gov\]](#)

Anchorage – Egan Civic & Convention Center – The Board selected Anchorage as the meeting location for the Upper Cook Inlet Finfish meeting. [\[peninsulaclarion.com\]](#), [\[adfg.alaska.gov\]](#)

Purpose:

This meeting is the **primary regulatory forum** for setting the rules governing **Upper Cook Inlet finfish fisheries**, including:

- Allocation frameworks among user groups
- Fishing seasons, openings, and restrictions
- Management plans, escapement objectives, and conservation measures

Decisions made at this meeting establish the regulatory structure for multiple fishing years.

[\[adfg.alaska.gov\]](#)

Why it matters:

The Upper Cook Inlet Finfish meeting has **direct, long-term impacts** on the Mat-Su Borough because it determines:

- **Harvest allocations** affecting sport, commercial, personal use, and subsistence fisheries
- **Season structures and management tools** that influence access to Mat-Su waters
- **Conservation outcomes** for salmon stocks originating in Mat-Su river systems

This meeting effectively sets the **policy baseline** for Upper Cook Inlet fisheries until the next regulatory cycle. [\[adfg.alaska.gov\]](http://adfg.alaska.gov)

Tasks (See Appendix A for a more detailed strategy)

- **Identify proposals of highest relevance** to Mat-Su fish, wildlife, and habitat interests [\[adfg.alaska.gov\]](http://adfg.alaska.gov)
- **Prepare and deliver oral testimony**, either directly or in support of Borough testimony, during public testimony periods
- **Submit written comments** on Upper Cook Inlet Finfish proposals by the published comment deadline (February 17, 2027). [\[adfg.alaska.gov\]](http://adfg.alaska.gov)
- **Attend or closely monitor the full meeting**, focusing on proposals affecting Mat-Su waters, allocation balance, and conservation outcomes.
- **Brief the full Commission and Borough leadership** following the meeting on adopted regulations, key votes, and implications for Mat-Su fisheries.

FWC Regular Meeting

April 8, 2027

Agenda Priorities:

Mat-Su Borough Assembly – Budget Development & Adoption

- **Department Budget Presentations: Early April 2027** – Borough departments formally present proposed budgets to the Assembly during special and regular meetings. [\[matanuska....gistar.com\]](http://matanuska....gistar.com), [\[transparen...atsugov.us\]](http://transparen...atsugov.us)
- **Public Hearings: Mid-Late April 2027** – A series of Assembly public hearings are held across the Borough to receive public testimony on the proposed budget. [\[matanuska....gistar.com\]](http://matanuska....gistar.com)
- **Budget Adoption: Early-Mid May 2027** – The Assembly adopts the final annual budget and associated levy ordinance for the upcoming fiscal year. [\[matsugov.us\]](http://matsugov.us),

Why it matters:

Borough budget decisions can directly support or constrain:

- **Public access infrastructure** (e.g., river access points, parking, trails)
- **Fish and wildlife-related facilities and services**
- **Advocacy, planning, and technical capacity** tied to state and federal fisheries processes

Early identification of fish and wildlife-related funding needs increases the likelihood those priorities are incorporated into the adopted budget. [matsugov.us]

Tasks:

- **Coordinate with the Planning Department in Dec-Jan** to:
 - Identify **out-year funding needs** related to fish, wildlife, and habitat (e.g., access improvements, studies, or advocacy support) at early January meeting.
- **Monitor department presentations** for budget items affecting fish and wildlife resources or access.
- **Attend public hearings**, as appropriate, to:
 - Provide context-based input on fish and wildlife implications of proposed funding decisions.
- **Flag emerging issues** to the full Commission and Borough leadership if budget decisions may affect future Board of Fisheries, Board of Game, or federal advocacy capacity.

Appendix A: Recommendations from 2026 BOF After Action Report

Policy

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.

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.

Consider Action Plan Recommendations. The FWC 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.

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.

Politics

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.

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.

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.

Public Relations

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.

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 for media coverage.

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 related 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.

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.

Continue to share messages about 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.

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 integrated into such a trip.

Appendix B: FWC Strategy for Board of Fisheries Upper Cook Inlet Finfish

Goal: Ensure Mat-Su priorities are clearly defined, consistently messaged, well-supported by testimony, and delivered at the moments that matter most in the BOF process.

PHASE 1 — Proposal Triage & Priority Setting

September–October 2026

Objectives

- Identify which proposals *matter most* to Mat-Su. Avoid dilution of effort

Key Actions

- **Full proposal scan**
 - Review the Upper Cook Inlet Finfish proposal book as soon as released
 - Flag proposals that:
 - Affect Mat-Su-origin salmon stocks
 - Shift allocation, access, or management tools
 - Create precedent likely to persist for multiple cycles
- **FWC triage discussion**
 - Categorize proposals into:
 - **Tier 1 (Critical – active advocacy required)**
 - Tier 2 (Important – support/monitor)
 - Tier 3 (Monitor only)

Deliverables

- ✓ FWC priority proposal list
 - ✓ Initial recommended FWC positions (support / oppose / amend / monitor)
-

PHASE 2 — Position Development & Evidence Building

November–December 2026

Objectives

- Ground advocacy in data, regulation, and past BOF precedent
- Prepare defensible positions before the meeting rush

Key Actions

- **ADF&G & background review**
 - Staff reports, escapement histories, management plans
 - Prior BOF actions on similar proposals
- **Clarify FWC policy logic**
 - For each Tier 1 proposal:
 - What problem is being solved?
 - Why the Mat-Su approach is reasonable and fair
 - How it aligns with conservation *and* access
 - What other information is needed?

Deliverables

- ✓ Draft FWC position statements (bullet-ready)
- ✓ Evidence/source list for testimony
- ✓ “If asked...” backup talking points

PHASE 3 — Written Comment & Testimony Drafting

January–Early February 2027

Objectives

- Lock in clear, consistent messaging and reduce risk of last-minute scrambling

Key Actions

- **Draft written comments**
 - Borough letter (lead policy statement)
 - FWC letter (supporting, reinforcing, or clarifying)
- **Prepare oral testimony templates**
 - 2–3 minute versions for:
 - Mayor / Borough staff
 - FWC Chair or designee
 - Individual commissioners

- **Message discipline**

- Ensure:
 - Sound scientific and policy basis
 - No internal contradictions
 - Framing emphasizes *Mat-Su impacts*, not just user conflict

Deliverables

- ✓ Final written comments (submitted by BOF deadline)
 - ✓ Short-form oral testimony scripts
 - ✓ Consistent “core messages” document
-

PHASE 4 — Witness Coordination & Testimony Planning

February 2027 (Pre-Meeting)

Objectives

- Ensure **the right voices speak to the right issues**
- Avoid duplication and fatigue

Key Actions

- **Witness mapping**
 - Identify who should speak to:
 - Habitat impacts
 - Allocation outcomes
 - Subsistence, personal use, sport access
 - Mat-Su community effects
- **Coordinate testimony order**
 - Borough leadership first
 - FWC reinforcing positions
 - Technical / user testimony filling gaps
- **Prepare backup speakers**
 - Assume schedules change
 - Ensure no relevant proposal goes undefended

Deliverables

- ✓ Witness list by proposal
 - ✓ Testimony assignment matrix
 - ✓ Backup witness plan
-

PHASE 5 — BOF MEETING EXECUTION

March 4–15, 2027

Objectives

- Maintain presence throughout deliberations
- Respond to amendments and shifting dynamics

Key Actions

- **Attend or closely monitor daily**
 - Focus on:
 - Committee discussions
 - Board questions that signal vote direction
- **Targeted follow-up testimony**
 - Short clarifications when:
 - Board misinterprets impacts
 - Amendments shift proposal intent
- **Internal coordination**
 - Daily check-ins among FWC/Borough representatives
 - Adjust strategy as needed

Deliverables

- ✓ Oral testimony delivered
 - ✓ Responsive clarification statements
 - ✓ Internal notes on emerging decisions
-

PHASE 6 — Post-Meeting Documentation & Follow-Through

Late March–April 2027

Objectives

- Capture outcomes while fresh
- Prepare for implementation and next cycle

Key Actions

- **FWC debrief**
 - What passed, failed, or changed
 - Implications for Mat-Su fisheries
- **Brief Assembly / Mayor (if needed)**
- **Archive materials**
 - Testimony
 - Vote breakdowns
 - Lessons learned for the next UCI cycle

Deliverables

- ✓ FWC after-action summary
- ✓ Implementation watch list (ADF&G actions)
- ✓ Start-list for next proposal cycle

Appendix C: Other Meetings and Events to Monitor

Board of Fisheries – Lower Cook Inlet Finfish

Dates: December 1–4, 2026

Location: Seward – AVTEC

Purpose: Purpose: Consider finfish regulations for Lower Cook Inlet.

Why it matters: Why it matters: Mixed-stock decisions influence salmon moving into Upper Cook Inlet.

Suggested Fish & Wildlife Commission Role: Commission Role: MONITOR

Board of Fisheries – Kodiak Finfish

Dates: January 5–8, 2027

Location: Kodiak

Purpose: Purpose: Consider finfish regulations for Kodiak fisheries.

Why it matters: Why it matters: Board decision-making patterns often carry into Upper Cook Inlet deliberations.

Suggested Fish & Wildlife Commission Role: Commission Role: MONITOR

Board of Game – Work Session

Dates: January 22, 2027

Location: Kotzebue

Purpose: Purpose: Administrative planning and agenda preparation.

Why it matters: Why it matters: Shapes how statewide and regional wildlife issues proceed.

Suggested Fish & Wildlife Commission Role: Commission Role: MONITOR

Board of Game – Interior & Eastern Arctic

Dates: March 19–26, 2027

Location: Fairbanks

Purpose: Purpose: Consider wildlife regulations for Interior and Arctic regions.

Why it matters: Why it matters: Statewide policy direction can influence later Southcentral decisions.

Suggested Fish & Wildlife Commission Role: Commission Role: MONITOR

NOTE: Central/Southwest Region Board of Game meetings will be in 2027-2028



Jayde Ferguson, PhD

Fish Pathologist

**American Fisheries Society-Fish
Health Section Certified Fish
Pathologist**

**Alaska Dept. Fish & Game, Division
Commercial Fisheries, Fish
Pathology Laboratory, Anchorage,
AK**

Dr. Jayde (JD) Ferguson is the Fish Pathologist for the Alaska Department of Fish and Game's Statewide Fish Pathology Program that has fish health oversight of cultured and wild finfish and shellfish. He has 15 years of experience in this role working with a diversity of species, including salmonids, other finfish species, and various types of shellfish. His recent research has been focused on investigating the impacts of *Ichthyophonus* on Yukon Chinook salmon and developing new tools to assess the associated mortality risk for management. He earned his Ph.D. in 2011 from Oregon State University where he evaluated the link of multiple parasite infections on the fitness of threatened coho salmon using field and laboratory approaches. He has authored or co-authored over 25 peer-reviewed manuscripts on various fish or wildlife disease projects. He also teaches a 3-day workshop on fish health for hatchery managers and provides fish health support for these facilities and other finfish and shellfish stakeholders in Alaska. Jayde has been an active member of the AFS-FHS since 2006 and is certified as a Fish Pathologist by the section. He will be providing an overview of ADF&G's Fish Pathology Regulatory Program that oversees fish health statewide. He will also present a short summary of an open case involving a pre-spawning mortality event of Jim Creek adult coho and sockeye salmon.



MATANUSKA-SUSITNA BOROUGH

Fish & Wildlife Commission

Planning and Land Use Department

Planning Division

350 East Dahlia Avenue • Palmer, AK 99645

Phone (907) 861-7833

<https://www.matsu.gov> • planning@matsu.gov

Date

RE: HB 321 – An Act relating to state refuges, sanctuaries, and fish and game critical habitat areas; relating to the hunting of brown bear; and providing for an effective date.

Dear Representative Josephson,

The Mat-Su Borough Fish and Wildlife Commission (FWC) provides this letter of opposition to Alaska House Bill 321 (HB 321), particularly due to its potential for significant negative consequences for the Matanuska-Susitna Borough (Mat-Su). While the bill aims to standardize wildlife area classifications and improve statutory clarity, the FWC's analysis of HB 321 identified several items that could negatively impact Mat-Su residents, local governance, and long-term access to public lands.

The bill's language to prohibit the use of firearms poses land use risks to Mat-Su Borough residents and infringes on our rights protected under the United States and Alaska Constitutions. While intended to address unsafe firearm discharge and other hazards, the FWC believes this could allow agencies to close portions of wildlife refuges without legislative oversight and infringe on inherent protected rights to bear and use firearms.

The Goose Bay, Palmer Hay Flats, and Susitna River Refuges are the primary areas of direct relevance to the Mat-Su Borough, and HB 321 proposes converting it into a state wildlife refuge while incorporating additional state-owned or future state-acquired lands into its boundaries. This automatic inclusion of future acquisitions without any requirement for Mat-Su Borough consultation creates uncertainty for land-use planning and for residents who rely on consistent access to these high-use areas. As a result, we have significant concerns about how future boundary changes may interfere with local land use planning.

HB 321 also appears to shift authority away from local communities and toward state agencies. By elevating habitat protection as the primary statutory purpose of wildlife areas, HB 321 may enable ADF&G to restrict access through regulation rather than legislative action. For a rapidly growing region like the Mat-Su Borough where residents depend on accessible hunting, fishing, and recreation, this shift raises legitimate concerns about long-term access. Access to public lands is central to our community identity and outdoor culture, thus the potential for regulatory closures by unelected officials is particularly concerning.

Additionally, HB 321 includes statutory brown bear hunting closures in the McNeil River and Katmai regions. Although these areas lie outside the Mat-Su Borough, the precedent is relevant. Our analysis concludes that these closures expand no-hunt zones in ways that are difficult to reverse and prioritize tourism over hunting opportunity. This raises concerns about how similar statutory restrictions could be applied elsewhere in the future, including within or near Mat-Su Borough wildlife areas.

Providing Outstanding Borough Services to the Matanuska-Susitna Community

Finally, the bill's prohibition on personal watercraft in certain wildlife refuges may conflict with a recent Alaska Supreme Court decision and could limit Alaska Department of Fish and Game's (ADF&G) ability to conduct habitat restoration work. This contradiction suggests that HB 321 may unintentionally hinder the very conservation efforts it seeks to establish.

In summary, while HB 321 aims to improve clarity and strengthen conservation, it introduces substantial risks for the Matanuska-Susitna Borough, including infringement on inherent rights, reduced local control, expanded unelected agency authority, uncertain impacts on access, and potential conflicts with existing management practices. These concerns warrant careful reconsideration of this bill. For these reasons, I respectfully urge you to significantly amend HB 321 to ensure that Mat-Su residents and the local government remain a strong element in the management of wildlife areas in the Mat-Su Borough.

Sincerely,

Pete Probasco
Chair

MATANUSKA-SUSITNA BOROUGH
FISH & WILDLIFE COMMISSION SERIAL NO. FWC 26-001

A RESOLUTION SUPPORTING MATANUSKA-SUSITNA BOROUGH FUNDING FOR
NORTHERN PIKE BARRIERS TO PROTECT SALMON STREAMS

WHEREAS, The Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ADF&G) has formally designated northern pike (*Esox lucius*) as an **invasive species in Southcentral Alaska**, including the Matanuska-Susitna Basin, based on extensive evidence of harm to native fish populations following illegal introduction; and

WHEREAS, ADF&G has documented that northern pike are **efficient, piscivorous apex predators** that concentrate in shallow, low-velocity off-channel habitats that are critical for juvenile salmon rearing, resulting in high predation pressure on Chinook, coho, and sockeye salmon; and

WHEREAS, ADF&G and cooperating scientists have identified multiple **high-risk and heavily impacted watersheds within the Matanuska-Susitna Basin**, including but not limited to:

- **Alexander Creek (Susitna River drainage)**, where ADF&G has documented severe salmon declines and has conducted long-term pike suppression due to the risk of salmon stock collapse;
- **Deshka River**, where juvenile Chinook and coho salmon have been repeatedly documented as dominant prey in northern pike diets;
- **Yentna River tributaries**, which ADF&G has identified as vulnerable to continued pike spread through interconnected slough and lake habitats;
- **Nancy Lake, Big Lake, and associated lake-stream complexes**, where pike populations are well established and pose ongoing threats to connected salmon-bearing waters; and

WHEREAS, ADF&G has concluded, based on these and similar systems, that **salmon populations can be reduced to extremely low abundance or extirpated** in waters where invasive northern pike become established, and that **coexistence of productive salmon runs and invasive pike is unlikely** without active containment or prevention measures; and

WHEREAS, ADF&G's Invasive Northern Pike Management Plans (2007-2021; 2022-2030) identify **prevention and containment—particularly through physical barriers—as the most effective and cost-efficient management tools**, noting that eradication becomes impractical once pike spread into open, connected drainages; and

WHEREAS, ADF&G has documented that **physical barriers on priority anadromous streams can effectively prevent upstream movement of northern pike**, protecting salmon spawning and rearing habitat where suppression alone cannot provide long-term protection; and

WHEREAS, Despite the removal of **almost 40,000 invasive northern pike from Southcentral Alaska waters since 2010**, ADF&G has emphasized that long-term suppression requires perpetual effort in the absence of physical containment, resulting in high ongoing costs and continued ecological risk; and

WHEREAS, ADF&G has consistently advised that **early, preventative action is critical** to avoid irreversible loss of salmon productivity and substantially higher future management costs;

WHEREAS, ADF&G has requested **Borough assistance with barrier construction** in areas where pike are known or reported to be currently spreading into salmon habitat, including Meadow Creek, Cottonwood Creek, and Wasilla Creek;

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED THAT:

1. The Matanuska-Susitna Borough Fish and Wildlife Commission **supports Borough funding participation** for the design, construction, and long-term maintenance of northern pike barriers on ADF&G-identified priority salmon streams and watersheds.
2. The Commission recommends that Borough funding be used to **leverage state, federal, and grant funding** and to support projects consistent with ADF&G's Invasive Northern Pike Management Plans.
3. The Commission encourages close coordination with **ADF&G, local Fish and Game Advisory Committees, Tribal governments, and affected stakeholders** to ensure that barrier projects are scientifically sound, properly sited, and maintain effective salmon passage.

4. The Commission recognizes Northern Pike barriers as a **preventative conservation measure**, necessary to protect intact salmon systems in the Matanuska-Susitna Borough from impacts already documented in Alexander Creek, the Deshka River, Big Lake and other connected drainages.

ADOPTED by the Matanuska-Susitna Borough Fish and Wildlife Commission this ___ day of May, 2026.

Pete Probasco, Chair