

UNITED SOUTHEAST ALASKA GILLNETTERS

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In This Issue

Taku River Update
.....page 7

President's Message
.....page 2

Sealaska Lands Bill
.....page 2

*Guggenbickler fills
Wrangell Seat*
.....page 3

*USAG Legislative
Overview*
.....page 4-5

New Observer Program
.....page 6

The Last Set

Three long-time gillnetters moved on to better fishing grounds this off season.

Ron Sparks, FV Memories-Haines
Jim Larson, FV Spaniard's Bay-Juneau
Russ "Bubba" Walton, FV Selah-Haines

Those that knew them, know they will be sorely missed. According to friends, Sparks' ashes were spread across the infamous Pt. Sherman line in Lynn Canal.

Enhanced Salmon Information, and New Rotation at Deep Inlet

One of the biggest issues facing the gillnet fleet continues to be the allocation of enhanced fish. Percentages were adopted into regulation under the enhanced allocation plan many years ago that set each gear group's enhanced fish allocations based on the monetary value earned. According to the plan, the gillnet fleet continues to be above our enhanced allocation. This has caused a stir amongst the seiners and the trollers looking to take away both fish and fishing opportunities from the gillnet fleet.

The USAG board (all active gillnetters) has been meeting on a regular basis to address the situation. USAG is the only member-based organization comprised of 100% gillnetters. We have been working steadily to regain lost fishing time in both Anita Bay and Deep Inlet. Fortunately, we were able to regain some time back this year in Deep Inlet due to our skilled USAG members and USAG board members, who also serve as NSRAA board members. The rota-

tion is still one to one, but the rotation increases this year with three days one week to four days the next week in a continual-shared rotation with the seiners. For our fleet, time was the largest single factor lost last year. This was particularly evident in mid-August and early September where our common property fisheries normally have a lull. To regain some time is key in keeping our fishing fleet spread out and allowing all permit holders the most opportunity.

We have also been working to increase enhanced production for other gear groups within the various hatcheries. By doing this, our percentage would drop accordingly and keep other gear groups from asking for gillnet-caught salmon. We have been pushing for increases at SSRAA, NSRAA, Port Armstrong, and Gunnuk Creek. Had many of the increases gone through at the recent Regional Planning Team (RPT) we would be in a very different position in the coming years with regards to enhanced production. Unfortunately,

...Continued on page 7

Presidents Message...Get Out and Be Seen!



above: Board President Bill Auger on FV Bronze Maiden

It is once again election year and candidates are out looking for votes. The most glaring thing that I've seen over the last couple of election cycles- is that candidates haven't been asking us fishermen for our input or our support. I believe the lack of interest is attributed to the fact that very few fishermen show up to scheduled events for our industry, much less other functions throughout the year. I have gone to about five events recently where elected officials were in attendance; and

sadly, I was the only individual from the fishing sector in the room.

While being recognized as a fishery participant, all too often the question arises, "Where are the rest of your guys?" Those comments come from local and state officials alike. We fishermen are very good at complaining about what is not being done to address our concerns, especially amongst ourselves. Yet those officials that actually can do something

for our industry only hear from a very small number. I know that it can be a pain to get out and hit some of the functions in your town, but if our elected officials don't see more of us, they won't take us seriously or believe that we are a voting block to be concerned about. Honestly, votes are what gains attention for most folks in elected office or campaigning for office. I am not advocating for any candidate, but we need to show that we exist as an industry. We need to gain the attention of elected officials or those hoping to be elected.

I am encouraging everyone when the opportunity presents itself to make it known to the people running for office this year that you are a fisherman and have real issues and concerns about the fishing industry. The more the politicians hear from us, the more likely the realization will occur that our votes are needed. The squeaky wheel gets the grease, and we aren't getting much grease of late.

Sealaska Lands Bill

Senate Bill 881

Sen. Murkowski and Rep. Young recently introduced legislation to complete land transfers from the federal government to Sealaska. The current bill under discussion is Sen. Murkowski's bill, S881. This issue continues to draw criticism and support from many folks across Southeast Alaska. The bill, as currently written, opens the door to land selections that were currently not available for selection as determined by the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act (ANCSA) in 1971. The bill allows Sealaska to select prime land areas on or near streams and tributaries that in most cases are fully allocated to various fishing industries, sport, charter

and commercial. USAG has commented on the legislation, as many aspects may be detrimental to the fishing industry.

USAG does not oppose Sealaska gaining access to the lands owed by the federal government under ANCSA. Under ANCSA, Sealaska may select lands to be transferred. The Bureau of Land Management then surveys the land, and transfers occur automatically under existing law. S881 simply allows Sealaska to choose more desirable lands not available and speeds up the process by transferring the land

...Continued on page 7

Guggenbickler fills Wrangell Seat for USAG

Chris Guggenbickler from Wrangell joined the USAG board of Directors in April. He is a third generation commercial fisherman, fishing from Tree Point to Lynn Canal since 1988. Primarily, fishing areas 6 and 8, he likely will be fish-traveling more this summer due to lost fishing opportunities in central Southeast. Besides gill-netting, Guggenbickler also fishes for blackcod, halibut, dungeness crab, and shrimp with pots.

A big concern for Guggenbickler rests in the current McDonald Lake sock-eye situation, which curtails fishing for usually 120 gillnetters in area 6 and 8. "The management structure to deal with McDonald Lake interferes with peak-fishery interception of Neets Bay, Anita Bay, and Kendrick Bay chum production," suggests Guggenbickler. He further added that the situation also influences the Burnett and Neck Lake Coho opportunities. Guggenbickler is particularly concerned about the RPT process in relation to the enhanced allocation plan.

Guggenbickler will provide needed representation from the Wrangell area, where USAG has not had a board member in a few years. Guggenbickler brings a great deal of fisheries and board experience to USAG, as he currently serves on the Southern Southeast Regional Aquaculture Association (SSRAA) board and the Wrangell Fish & Game advisory committee. His addition fills out the USAG board to nine members total.



Chris Guggenbickler, FV Marantha

USAG Membership-Join Today!

Are you a member of USAG? If you receive this newsletter you should be. No other organization fights for, or looks after your gillnet interests only. Trollers and Seiners have been making it clear over and over again in recent meetings that we are outside our enhanced allocation. Only by being well organized, well funded, and in-masse, can we hold our fisheries harmless or regain lost fishing time. We need your help! Please join and help us defend our interests.

USAG's Board of Directors 2010

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• Current officers were elected in November 2009

USAG Legislative Overview 2010

USAG's executive director also works as the group's lobbyist during the legislative session. The board makes decisions on the more weighty issues. We are engaged on most if not all legislative bills directly impacting the Southeast Gillnetters and the commercial fishing industry. Here is a summary of some of the issues we were working on this year to represent your interests.

HB 20-Loans for energy efficiency upgrades, passed the legislature. The bill was sponsored by Rep. Bryce Edgmon, who fished Bristol Bay for many years. The bill basically provides cheap loans, 3% money, to repower your boat with a fuel-efficient engine and/or generators. The only requirement is that you must be a state resident. The loans are available with the state's division of investments. Fishermen can borrow money for the cost of the engine including installment and pay back in 10 or 15 years. The Senate Finance Committee had some issues about what fuel efficiency means, and the bill was tightened up to prevent abuse of energy efficiency definitions. Basically UFA and USAG were spearheading the efforts once things got bogged down in the Senate. Fortunately we were successful in making this happen. HB 20 is the most significant bill to pass the legislature this year that will have direct benefits to the commercial fishing industry. The cheap loans available under the program can be used to save money in the long-term by utilizing new fuel-efficient engines.

SB 163- Fishermen Fund Legislation, sponsored by Senator Joe Pasqvan also passed this year. This is another important bill for commercial fishermen by raising the payment cap to \$10,000 from \$2500 for an injury aboard a fishing vessel. This is a huge increase for us as most injuries eat up \$2500 fairly quickly. So if you haven't used fisherman's fund before it is a good thing to utilize, if and when you are injured, or your crew for that matter, aboard a fishing vessel. There is a provision that if you have insurance, half of your deductible can be refunded from fishermen's fund up to \$5000. This is a very good bill for fishermen as a percentage of every commercial fishing license and permit fee generates money into the fund. Money from the fund pays for workplace injuries for fishermen as fishermen are exempt from worker's compensation laws. The bill had multiple delays due to issues between the state and various fisheries-based organizations. Fortunately, those issues

were worked out and the bill passed both legislative bodies. We supported the bill and worked with the sponsor to overcome some of the obstacles during the session.

HB 344-Processor tax credit for salmon for value-added infrastructure also passed. The bill gives up to a 50% tax credit on processors' raw fish taxes owed by deducting salmon infrastructure expenditures. Basically, this was a good bill for the processing industry. We supported the measure. The bill now includes ice machines, which was not an allowable expense in previous versions of the bill passed in previous years. Other processing equipment purchased in the last three years can also be deducted for value added salmon products. Like the oil industry and other industries, this bill will serve our industry well in encouraging the processing industry to continue to invest in new technology, which will hopefully lead to new markets and better prices. HB 344 will sunset in four years.

HB 365- Seiner's buyback conforming CFEC data bill passed. We did not get involved with this bill, but did follow it within the committee process. This bill allows for the sharing of information between Commercial Fisheries Entry Commission and NOAA-National Marine Fisheries to implement and assess a tax on the Southeast Seine fleet. The seiners have been working for many years to implement a buy-back program to cut down the number of vessels participating in the southeast fishery. The processors lined up against the bill at the beginning, but seemed to back off once the bill entered the home stretch. USAG neither opposed nor supported the bill.

The State Budget was very large with regards to capital spending this year. Roughly, the budget was a \$3.1 billion dollar budget, well above the normal \$1.5 to \$2 billion yearly expenditure. USAG was able to work with the existing hatchery operators by helping find deferred maintenance dollars for SE hatcheries. The money is to be used for buildings and other structures owned by the state that are in disrepair. An appropriation for \$500k for DIPAC was inserted to replace a roof at the Snettisham hatchery. Another \$800k will go to NSRAA for various projects as well. USAG was also able to drop in a \$35K request to study the

...Continued on page 5

USAG Legislative Overview continued...

acid leakage issue on the Taku-Tulsequah Rivers. Money goes to the Dept of Fish & Game to fund a thorough study of the acid leakage from the now vacant Canadian mine.

ADF&G Budget- This is always a concern for us commercial fishermen as our budget has historically been cut repeatedly. In the past few years, we have directly been able to add money each year to do important projects important to our industry. There were about \$600k of additional funds for SE projects this year beyond the original budget. USAG was helpful in securing some money for additional sonar funding on the Chilkoot River along with some additional monitoring of McDonald Lake-both gillnet areas are facing issues relating to under escapement and stock of concern issues. Gillnetters have lost time and area to protect these wild-stock sockeye systems, which have been cutting into opportunities to harvest hatchery and wild-stock salmon. Overall, the department's budget is up \$1.8 million from a flat funded ADFG governor's submitted budget. USAG will continue to work on budget issues moving forward as many of our budget issues are tied to the Pacific Salmon Treaty utilizing federal funds and other treaty based funding sources. Without these funds, many of our gillnet fisheries would likely be undermanaged and in some cases closed.

ACMP- SB 4, by Sen. Donny Olsen, coastal management program pushed by the North Slope Borough did not pass the legislature. This program was rewritten to the detriment of fishermen in 2003 under the Murkowski Administration. During that time local coastal districts were removed from having review and a direct decision upon local development projects, in particular mining projects that used local rivers in coastal areas. The 2003 change limits fishermen from having input about their fishery when projects are in the permitting stage. SB 4 would have rewritten the legislation and returned the law to the 2003 level. All mining groups opposed the measure. If this bill were to pass it would allow local coastal regions to control some of the development in their own areas. This bill would have affects on any large-scale project near coastal areas. USAG supported the legislation.

HB 266-Personal Use Fishery Priority- sponsored by Rep. Bill Stoltz. The bill would have granted priority to urban fishermen on all fishery resources in the state. Under the

bill, Subsistence and Personal Use priority would have in effect killed many commercial fisheries particularly in Cook Inlet. This bill was ill conceived and meant to hack away at the Cook Inlet fishery, which has been a sore spot for many Mat-Su based legislators. ADFG contributes recent poor salmon runs to habitat destruction and the introduction of salmon-eating pike within the Mat-Su area. We did not support the bill and worked with other fishery groups to provide good, science based arguments to defeat the measure. This issue will likely come back in the future and the fishing industry as a whole will need to be vigilant and active in educating friends and relatives living in Southcentral Alaska. We did support additional money to do evasive species (pike) removal along with additional hatchery output in the Mat Su.

Mixing zones in salmon habitat-HB 46-This was another bill aimed to redo legislation pushed by the Murkowski Administration. As passed under Murkowski, development projects can use spawning habitat as mixing zones for discharge of effluent or even mining waste. The bill would have reversed the current law to the 2004 law, which prohibited waste and effluent from mixing in salmon rivers. This bill is probably the most important piece of legislation for all salmon fishermen. Likely for this issue to be corrected, another sponsor should be found to carry the bill and a different version of the bill be drafted for the future. An organized effort by all fishing groups might help move this measure forward as all mining interests worked to defeat the bill. USAG supported the bill.

Weather Stations and Cell Towers

We have been working with NOAA to move at least one existing weather station and maybe build a few more to provide better wind data for our gillnet fleet and other mariners. We have also been contacting a few cell phone companies about new cell towers and better cell coverage. If you have any ideas about new locations for cell coverage or weather stations, email us at usag@alaska.net with some supporting arguments. In advance, thanks!

New Observer Program For All Federal Fisheries

North Pacific Fisheries Management Council is currently entertaining a proposal to mandate observer coverage in all federal fisheries. This proposal would have a dramatic affect upon on all 2C and 3A halibut fishermen. A large portion of our gillnet fleet also fishes for halibut. From our perspective, there are some serious issues and concerns regarding this proposal to our fleet.

First, many of our gillnet boats are ill equipped to handle an additional body aboard an already small fishing vessel. With our small vessels, standing, observing and writing down catch data might increase the risk of injury to the observer as smaller vessels often don't have adequate safe zones. Observers are paid contractors with liability issues landing upon individual boat owners. Small-boat owners' risk associated with liability, will increase substantially.

Secondly, paying for an observer may dramatically increase costs associated with catching halibut particularly for gillnetters with just a few thousand pounds or less. In some situations, loans and crew costs are already eating up most if not all revenues generated from halibut catches. Adding an observer could tip the scales too far the other direction.

Importantly, with cost increases, heightened risk and insurance issues along with already cramped halibut fishing operations, further consolidation in the halibut fishery would likely occur. Either small boat fishermen will sell their quota or fish their quota on larger vessels that have the space requirements for an observer along with financial resources to pay for an observer. Less boats and less crew does not bode well for having a strong advocacy for our industry. Lost revenues to local suppliers and fish plants if fish are sold elsewhere and lost raw fish taxes will continue to hurt our industry as a whole.

The reason for complete coverage seems unclear. As of yet, there are no specific data collection issues identified so far. Currently, there are requirements for mandatory retention on specific fish species including mandatory logbooks, which aids the IPHC and NMFS to meet all needs for fish data. Access to our vessels and our catch is unrestricted if we hold a federal fisheries permit. The Coast Guard, NMFS

enforcement and the Alaska State troopers can board and observe our fishery practices at any time during and after fish are landed.

Why is this moving forward? The Commissioner of Fish & Game, who fills the state seat on the council, continues to push the program. The belief is that the commissioner is attempting to use the black cod and halibut fees to pay for an observer program on trawlers and long-line fishermen fishing for pacific cod around Kodiak. There has been some disagreement between the pcod fishing groups about observers on all vessels, so the position is being pushed by the Commissioner for all boats to carry observers. Money would be generated for the program from the more expensive halibut and black-cod fisheries, as opposed to the low-price pcod fishery. USAG will be working to address this issue, but we need your help. Contact Denby Lloyd, Commissioner at the Dept of Fish & Game to put your concerns on record and with the council.

Address to Commissioner Denby Lloyd, ADF&G PO Box 115526 Juneau, Alaska 99811-5526. Address to Eric Olsen, Chair, North Pacific Fishery Management Council, Sustainable Fisheries Division, PO Box 21668, Juneau, Alaska 99802-1668

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Taku River Update

USAG Grabs \$35k for F&G to gather scientific information

As you may have heard, there might be a new owner vying to pull mining minerals out of the Tulsequah Chief Mine on the Canadian side of the border. The current mine site sits on the Tulsequah River, a major tributary for the Taku River. A large portion of our Taku-based coho and sockeye actually spawn in the confluence area where the Tulsequah meets the Taku River. The previous owner planned to use the river itself for moving minerals with a barging type system. USAG had been working with state agencies to ensure barging would not affect our fishery. Low-water conditions persist for most of the year making any type of barging extremely difficult if not disastrous for spawning salmon and smolt rearing in the river.

The original company recently folded, yet the new activity on the 30-year-old mine site increased acid leakage into the Tulsequah and Taku Rivers. We are unsure to what extent this acid

leakage affects our returning salmon. With the help of Rep. Beth Kerttula (Juneau) and Rep. Bill Thomas (Haines), we were able to grab \$35,000 to gather some much needed water sampling and other information regarding the acid situation. The amount came out of Kerttula's individual capital amount as each legislator gets a certain amount to spend. In addition, we have met with the Governor's office with the understanding, that the Canadian Government needs to be pushed politically by the state and the US Government, to clean up the mess.

It is unclear when and if the new owner will attempt to barge material out. We do not oppose the new owner's right to open the mine site. We will be vigilant of the process moving forward to ensure our fishery is adequately protected and we are hopeful the existing acid leakage can be cleaned up in the process.

Enhanced Fish Status continued...

only limited increases in production were approved for NSRAA and for SRRAA. The Dept. of Fish & Game has recently come out with concerns about hatchery raised chum salmon and thus killed any future expansion projects at least temporarily and maybe into the future.

We will continue to work at the issue, but this will be a long and difficult process moving forward. Our concerns revolve around the Dept of Fish & Game but also with fighting-off the seiners and trollers, who see the gillnetters as a group to take enhanced fish from. A few years of strong ocean survivals for enhanced fish in mid to southern Southeast would make our job on enhanced fish allocation easier; however, until that happens we will continue to fight for what we have and what we have lost. Our board is united as our name suggests. We will need your support moving forward both financially and in person at the 2012 Board of Fish meeting.

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Sealaska Lands Bill continues...

via immediate congressional authorization. If this bill were to pass, likely every Native Corporation would follow suit and would look to choose other lands within the state not available under ANCSA. We have been in contact with Sen. Murkowski's office and we will continue to work with United Fishermen of Alaska to ensure our fishing opportunities are not lost in congressional actions.

If you would like to read about the bill, type in the following information into your web browser for more information:

<http://www.govtrack.us/congress/bill.xpd?bill=s111-881>

You can also write a letter to the current committee of referral at:

Senator Ron Wyden, Chair
Senate Committee on Energy & Natural Resources:
Subcommittee on Public Lands and Forests
223 Dirksen Senate Offices,
Washington, D.C. 20510-3703



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