

UNITED SOUTHEAST ALASKA GILLNETTERS

USAG
P.O. Box 20538
Juneau, Alaska 99802

(907) 586-6550
usag@alaska.net
www.akgillnet.org

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President's Message

by USAG President Bill Auger

The next couple of years are going to be very challenging to our fleet. With enhanced fish allocation battles, loss of federal funding for the Dept. of Fish and Game, current and potential new stocks of concern, subsistence rights, and implementation of the Pacific Salmon Treaty. In all areas, it seems someone is looking to pick our pockets. I feel it is very important to hear from the fleet on how to tackle many of these issues facing us today. The board of directors for USAG doesn't claim to have all of the answers or ideas on



Bill Auger in fishing vessel Bronze Maiden

how to deal with issues before us. With our website, newsletters and chapter meetings we will work hard to get information out on these issues so that the fleet can better understand what we're up against. All of the issues we face are connected and boil down to our ability to access fish whether it be wild or enhanced. So involvement of the fleet is paramount to all of our long-term interests. If there are meetings in your community, please take the time to get involved and show up to hear what can be done and to provide input on many of the important issues. The last few months, I've had the chance to meet with gillnetters in Wrangell, Sitka, Juneau and Ket-

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Annual Gillnet Task Force Held in Ketchikan

The Gillnet Task Force provides for an annual meeting for gillnetters to meet with the Dept. of Fish & Game to reevaluate the recent fishing season while looking ahead to preliminary forecasts and concerns facing the gillnet fleet. 2009's task force was held in Ketchikan with nearly the entire USAG board and the executive director in attendance.

Each area-wide biologist gave a presentation of the fishery's recent harvest and the escapement goals and how they were or were not achieved. For a detailed summary of each presentation, check out the USAG website at www.akgillnet.org. The two regional hatchery organizations, NSRAA, SSRRA, along with the private non-profit DIPAC, were also in attendance to answer and add hatch-

ery information where applicable. While the meeting is open to all gillnetters and the public at large, this was an important meeting for USAG as there are many issues concerning the board in the near future.

For the gillnetters, there were no real hot spots to speak of, according to the data summarized. District 11 had the greatest number of fish ever caught in one opening by the gillnet fleet ever. This hit was short-lived, as nearly 150 boats took advantage of the enhanced chum harvest. The per-boat average in District 1 for the entire year may have been the best and most consistent fishing for the gillnet fleet. While there were certainly peaks and valleys in all gillnet districts, the two districts

north-District 11 and 15, had strong chum returns and weak sockeye returns (Chilkat -the exception) respectively with huge numbers of boats following the chum. Districts 6 and 8 had below average years with a stronger showing of coho to wrap up the season, whereas the northern districts had dismal catches after the chums evaporated. District 8 was able to again take advantage of the midweek openings to target sockeye, but the additional fishing time still doesn't make up for lost time and area due to McDonald Lake stock concerns. Same scenario goes for District 6 with regards to McDonald Lake.

The poor returns to Deep Inlet and Anita Bay did not have much ef-

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New Board Members to USAG

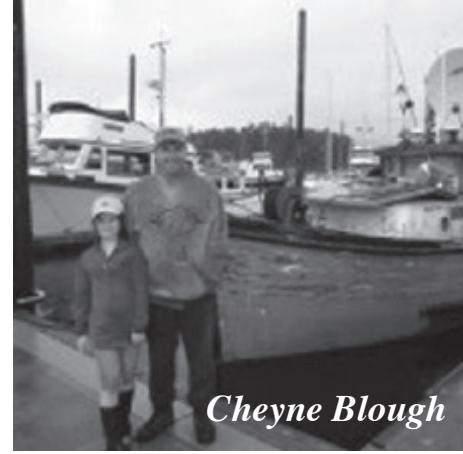
United Southeast Alaska Gillnetters expanded the board recently to incorporate two new members. Richard "Botso" Eliason was added to the board last year to represent the gillnetters based out of Sitka. His board approval was confirmed by unanimous consent. There are on average about 12 gillnet permits based year round in Sitka. He is a third generation fisherman born and raised in Sitka. Fishing since 1967, Eliason has participated in most fisheries in southeast Alaska. He fishes mainly in district 15 and in Deep Inlet THA. Eliason is very concerned about the Southeast enhanced salmon alloca-

tion plan and what it means for SE gillnetters.

Cheyne Blough was added to the board this past fall. Blough like many of the gillnet fishermen in the 70s, fishes nearly all of the districts. He mainly fishes Districts 15, 6, 8 and Deep Inlet THA. He is one of two gillnetters living in Hoonah. His approval to the board was also by unanimous consent. Soon he will be representing an "at large" seat meant to provide representation for gillnetters across the panhandle and elsewhere. Blough has



Richard Eliason



Cheyne Blough

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About Us

United Southeast Alaska Gillnetter's Association (USAG) is a member-based organization representing the Southeast Alaska Gillnet Fishery. USAG's main purpose is to protect, enhance, and look after the commercial gillnet fishery within the US Canada Treaty process, the Alaska Board of Fish process, United Fishermen of Alaska, the gillnet task force, the regional and non-regional hatchery system, the RPT committee, the enhanced allocation process, the state administrative and legislative processes, and in all political and developmental fronts affecting the fishermen and the gillnet fisheries within Southeast Alaska. At times we may come into conflict with other gear groups as our primary goals and interests rest with the gillnet fishery and the gillnet fishermen.

Appointing and endorsing various members to panels, political boards and hatchery boards is often at the forefront of USAG's representation. USAG's board is a reflection of the gillnet fishery within most SE Alaska towns, including fishermen from the lower 48. The board sets the policy for most weighty political actions for USAG with long-term sustainability and long-term solutions at the crux of any real decision. The executive director handles USAG's correspondence, front line representation, information distribution, capital and administrative lobbying, and handles the day-to-day operations.

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New Board Members continued...

fished all over the state most notably in Cook Inlet for many years. Blough too is concerned about the enhancement plan and would like to see gillnetters regain the rotational schedule for Deep Inlet prior to last year's Board of Fish meeting.

USAG president Bill Auger believes the two new board members will provide new ideas to the board. Auger thinks that the two new board members will help represent the gillnetters focused on chum harvests while helping represent individuals all too often unwilling to get involved in fish politics. "Already the two have added a lot to the board," stated Auger. "We have new ways of looking at things especially with regards to allocation," further added Auger.

With the new board members, the USAG board expands to 8 individuals including the following members: Arnold Enge from Petersburg, Bill Auger from Ketchikan, Norman Hughes from Haines, Jim Becker from Juneau, Steve Clark from north Puget Sound, and Max Worhatch from south Puget Sound/Petersburg. Currently, there is one vacancy for a seat designated in Wrangell.

USAG's Board of Directors 2010

President, Bill Auger
(FV Bronze Maiden)
BLAuger@gci.net

Vice President, Norm Hughes
(FV Chilkat)
stormisurf@yahoo.net

Secretary Jim Becker
(FV Kristine)
jmbecker@gci.net

Treasurer Arnold Enge
(FV Moonshadow)
moonshadow1@gci.net

Max Worhatch
(FV Summer Breeze)
mnmnwiv60@msn.com

Steve Clark
(FV Ivy)

Richard Eliason
(FV Laurel C)
salmo@gci.net

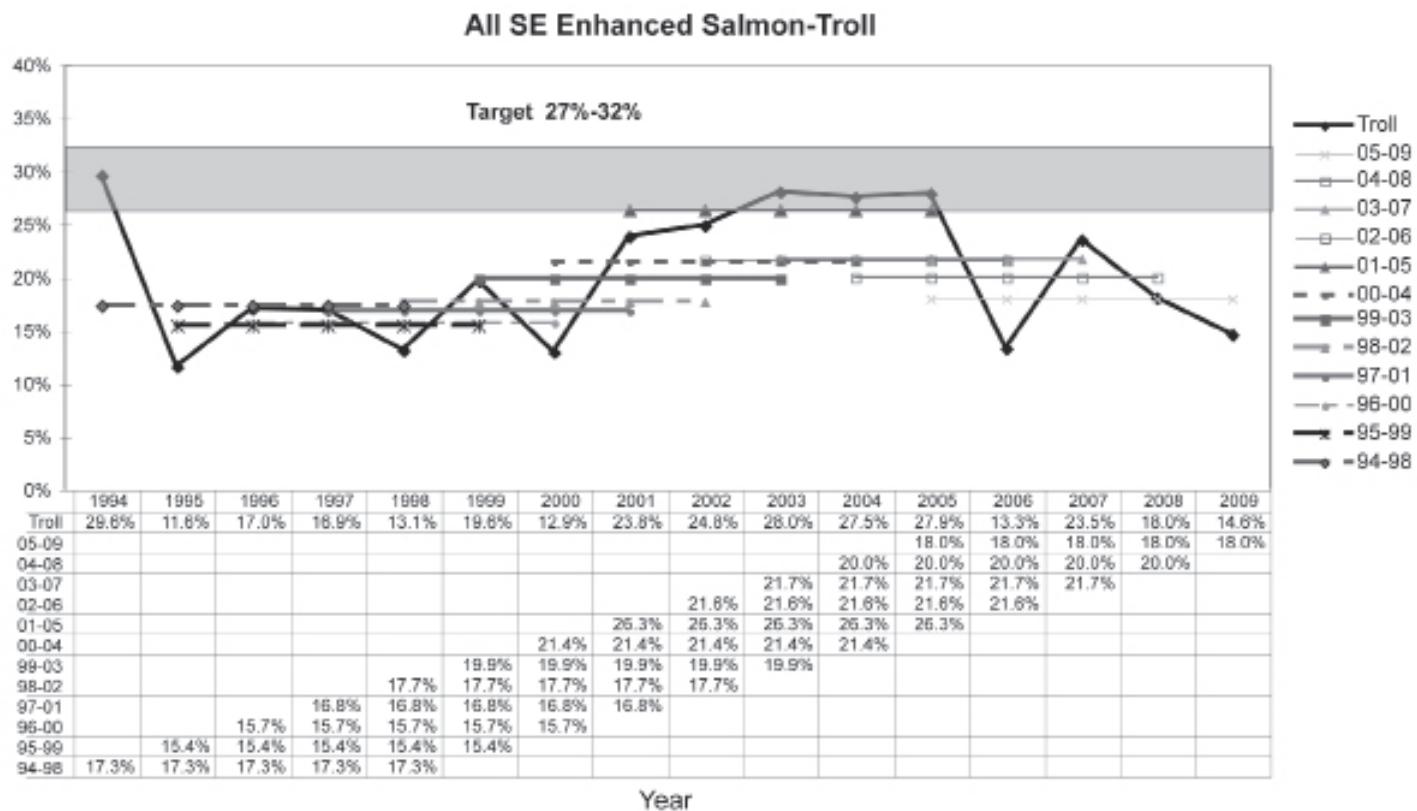
Cheyne Blough
(FV Mayhem II)
rnrblough@hotmail.com

• Recent officers were elected in November 2009

Allocation Update

Enhanced Salmon Production- a blessing and a curse for gillnet fleet

As many of you have heard, enhanced allocation between different salmon gear groups has become extraordinarily contentious. After recommendations by the Regional Planning Team (RPT), which were ultimately adopted at last year's board of fish meeting, most gillnetters were unaware of the situation. Part of the RPT committee report recommended changing the ratios from 2 to 1 (gillnet to seine) to a 1 to 1 rotation in both Anita Bay and the Deep Inlet THA. This action by the Board of Fish took fishing time away from gillnetters in both areas. The impetus for doing so was based primarily on the Southeast Enhanced Salmon Allocation Plan. According to the plan, gillnetters were above their allocated percentage in the past five years, thus the RPT committee, which is responsible for adjusting regional enhanced production, made the recommendation to cut days affecting the gillnet fleet.

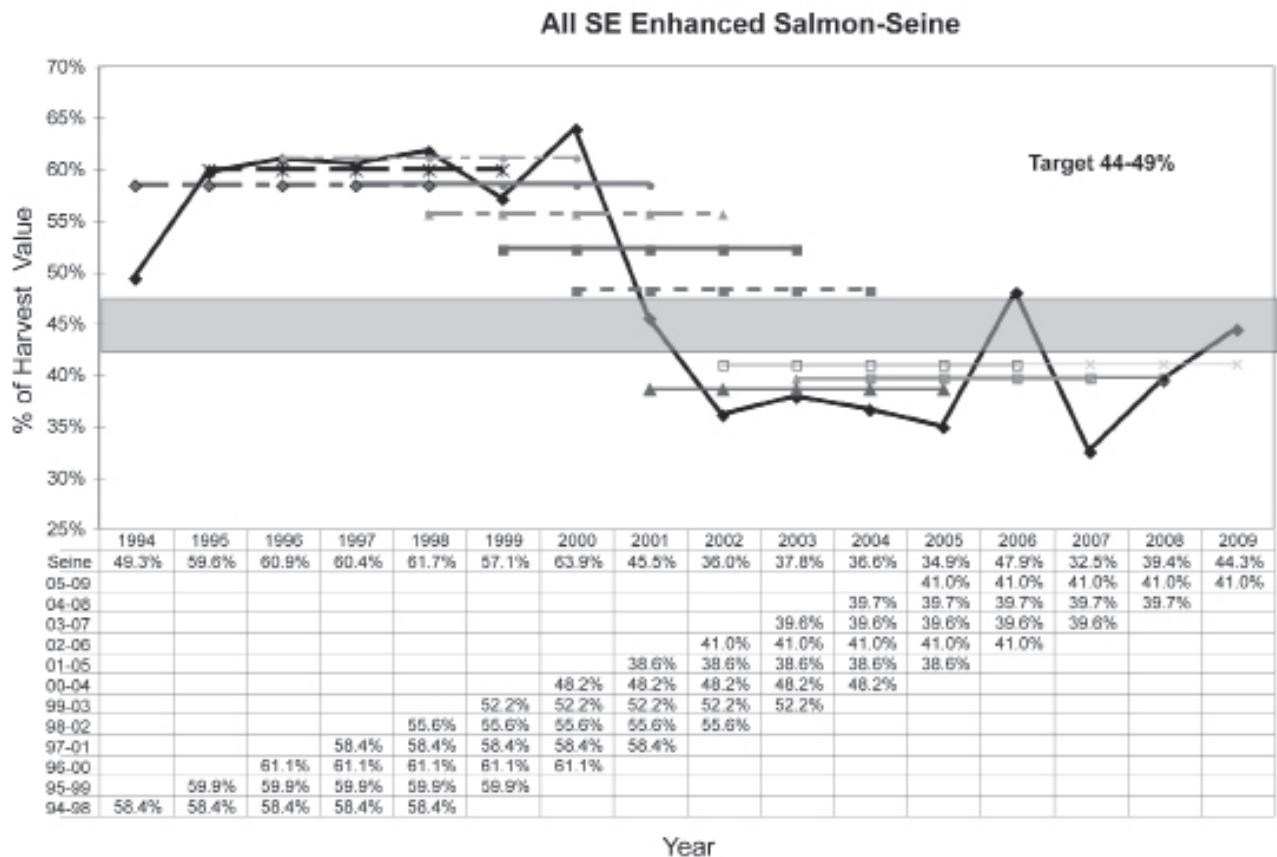


Gillnetters have been benefitting recently from the recent success of hatchery production primarily from the DIPAC hatchery on the north end, which has thrown off percentages based upon value of enhanced production for all gear groups, while pushing the gillnet fleet above the allocated range under the plan. For gillnetters, the issue has been both a blessing and a curse. While overall our incomes from enhanced fish have gone up, time and area have been taken away. Meanwhile in some areas, competition and numbers of boats have increased dramatically as wild stocks have seen a slide in recent years. Increasing our enhanced catch doesn't necessarily make up for poor catches on wild stocks, which in many of our areas are under or barely meeting escapement goals.

The issue is further exacerbated by the Salmon Enhancement Tax, which is given to regional associations to produce enhanced (hatchery) fish for different fleets and areas. Taxes are collected in all areas of Southeast with the revenues given to each regional association, Northern Southeast Regional Aquaculture Association (NSRAA) or Southern Southeast Regional Aquaculture Association (SSRAA). In recent years, regional associations have cut funding for

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gillnet projects due in part from the production by DIPAC which has helped put the gillnet fleet beyond the target range for gillnetters under the plan. DIPAC, a private not-profit hatchery, receives no enhancement tax money and thus is not obligated to produce fish for any particular gear group or another. Some gillnetters see this as a double-edged sword, losing time in one area while previously funded gillnet projects are also eliminated. As a seiner recently surmised, this is a north versus south gillnetter problem.



In reality, the problem is not just a gillnetter problem or cause for concern just within the gillnet fleet itself. The problem is southeast wide and affects all gear groups now and into the future. First, the salmon enhancement plan was originally formulated in 1991 when 85% of existing enhanced production didn't exist. Secondly, the original plan was based upon wild stock catches for different gear groups beginning in 1985. The target percentages specified within the plan likely will never be achievable. While the gillnetters are currently out of their target range (see accompanying graphs for better understanding), it just takes a couple of years of strong or poor returns in different areas and another gear group can quickly be above or below their range. As more information becomes available, it is clear that the original plan is not workable after twenty years.

This fall, USAG has had multiple board meetings to strategize and come up with long-term solutions regarding the future of enhanced salmon allocations. At this time, the board is unified in its approach to work together and to not allow any gillnet district to lose any fishing opportunities. USAG is also working towards regaining lost time in both Anita Bay and Deep Inlet. The issue may not be that gillnetters are above their range, but how to bring other fleets up in their target ranges.

Most recently USAG participated in a workshop within the RPT process. This process may allow for a greater understanding of the issue particularly the plan itself; however, there is resistance from the other gear groups to not make any changes, with regards to changing the plan. We are looking at all solutions and problems, but we are always open

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United Southeast Alaska Gillnetter's Association (USAG)
2010 Membership Form

Name: _____

Email (important): _____

Boat Name (if applicable) _____

Mailing Address: _____

City & State: _____ Zip: _____

Phone: _____

Individual Membership Fee: \$250

Business Membership Fee (8 employees or less): \$250

Corporate membership Fee: \$500

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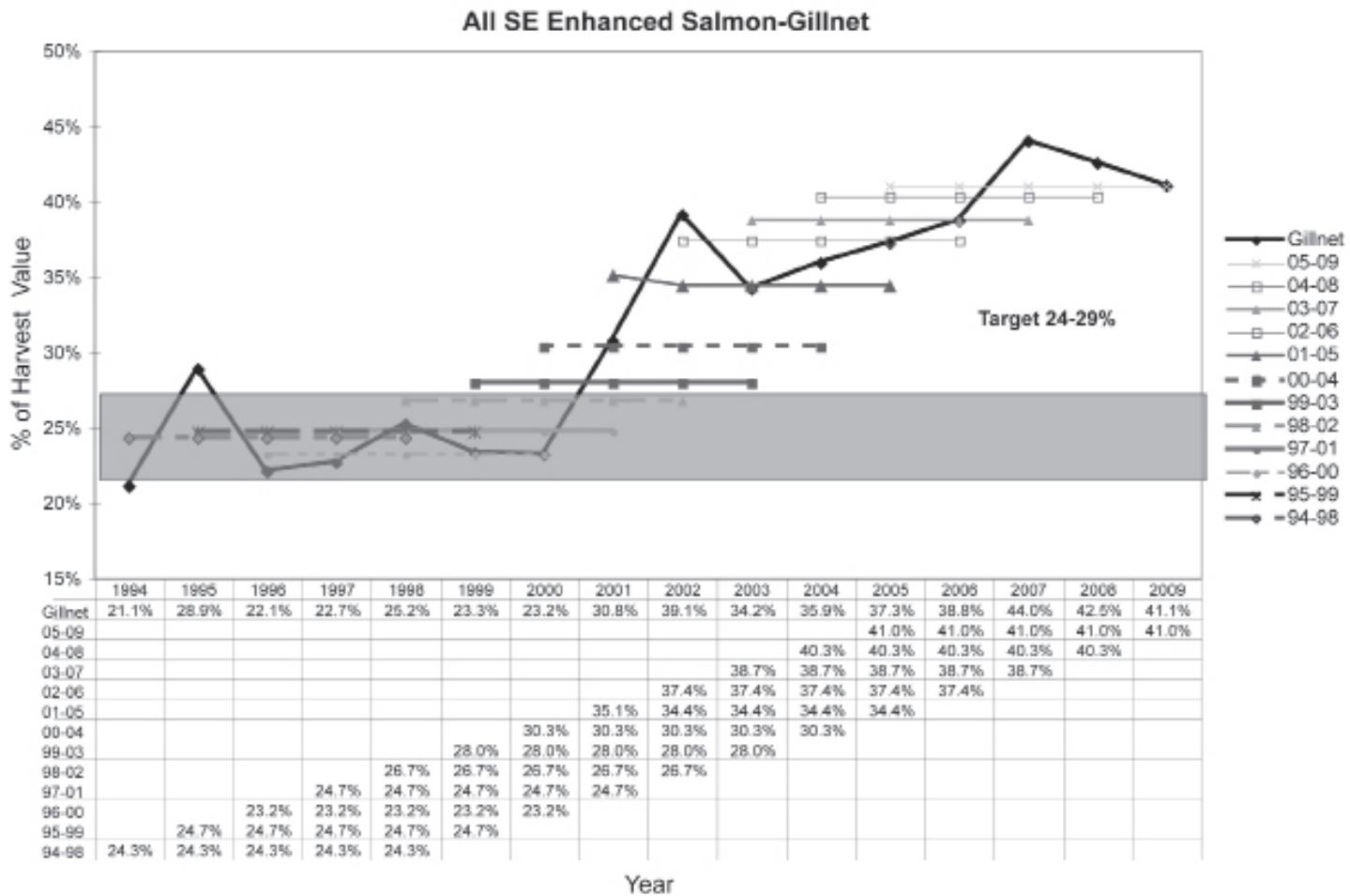
May we post your name or your business on our website as a member?: Yes / No

USAG's primary focus is to protect, serve and enhance the Southeast Alaska Drift Gill Fishery. USAG plays a prominent role in the Pacific Salmon Treaty, the Board of Fisheries process, United Fishermen of Alaska and within the various functions of state government including the administration and the legislature. USAG attempts to look out for your interests in all political arenas and provide representation in all areas of the commercial fishing industry and within the state of Alaska.

Additional donations are always welcome. Please feel free to visit our website at www.usagak.org or for news updates, links, and other information. Board member information is also available on our website. If you have any questions give us a shout at (907) 586-6550 or by email usag@alaskadr.net

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to new ideas and new ways of looking at things. USAG will be participating again in the spring workshop to review the southeast enhancement plan. In the meantime, we will continue to find solutions that most benefit the gillnet fleet. USAG will be vigilant in following the issue and we will make every attempt to keep you educated moving forward.



For more information on enhanced allocation, please refer to our website at www.akgillnet.org

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Stikine and Taku King Salmon Fisheries Unlikely for 2010

The Stikine preliminary forecast is 23,000 large king salmon, which does not allow for a US allowable catch this year on the Stikine. An in-season run estimate will be constructed and may produce a very limited fishery if the run comes in significantly stronger than forecast. The 2010 forecast is the second consecutive Stikine River king salmon pre-season terminal run forecast in the past six seasons that does not allow for directed fisheries. During the 2005, 2006, 2007, 2008 and 2009 seasons the pre-season forecasts were 80,300, 60,600, 37,400, 46,100 and 32,000 fish, respectively.

The 2010 pre-season terminal run forecast for large Taku king salmon is 41,328 fish. A terminal run of this size yields a U.S. Allowable Catch of 1,781 large Taku king salmon. Given the relatively small catch and taking into consideration forecast confidence intervals, commercial troll and gillnet fisheries in District 11 will not open unless in-season data, once available in late May, supports the pre-season forecast. The 2010 season would be the fourth season of directed fisheries on returning Taku River king salmon since these fisheries were re-established in 2005 through the treaty process.

President's message continued...

chikan. It was great to hear all the differing views and perspectives facing our industry, especially from us gillnetters. As we formulate a strategy to deal with enhanced allocation, which I see as the number one issue for gillnetters, we need additional viewpoints and support as we gillnetters and USAG move forward. If gillnetters aren't united in the allocation battle, we will not be able to regain what we have lost in Deep Inlet and Anita Bay already; and we could possibly lose more fishing time and opportunity in the future. We have to remember that each fishing district has something to lose, and if one area try's to trade off another we'll all lose by allowing ourselves to be divided and thus conquered. The other gear groups would only benefit by gillnetters not being able to work together. I encourage everyone to talk to your local USAG representative and/or call our office and get involved. Another Board of Fish meeting is just around the corner and the other gear groups are already lining up against us. We want to hear from you!

Gillnet Task Force continued...

fect upon the lost fishing time due to changes in allocation and rotation schedules. However, the few days Deep Inlet was open for harvest opportunities, the shortened schedule was certainly felt by the fleet as a whole. This year, fewer boats traveled to fish in Deep Inlet creating more competition for remaining fall stocks. Anita Bay had in general a poor return and it is unclear whether the change in rotation had much effect since there was a limited harvest effort on a poor return.

The preliminary forecasts for gillnetters to take advantage of hatchery production are: DIPAC, forecast 2.15 million chum, 198,000 sockeye; NSRAA, forecast 1.0 million chum to Deep Inlet, 23-26k Chinook; SSSRAA, Forecast 1.11 million chum Neets summer, 160k Neets fall chum; 19K Nakat summer chum, 7k Nakat fall, and 280k Anita Bay.

Escapement -- 7 of 13 sockeye stocks with an escapement goal were within range this year. Overall, the annual returns of sockeye for the region have been poor in recent years. Poor returns do effect fishing time in each

district and have contributed to shortened fishing weeks in district 1, 6, 8, 11 and 15. However, since sockeye returns fluctuate, multiple years of data are needed below an escapement goal, before the stock receives additional protection. There was some discussion about poor marine survivals for sockeye and chum particularly in the northern districts. The big issues for escapement, which ultimately effect fishing time and area, are McDonald Lake, Speel Lake, Chilkoot Lake, and to a lesser extent the Taku. McDonald Lake sockeye nearly hit the bottom range of the escapement goal and lake conditions maybe improving. More data is needed on lake conditions, while the existing corridors to escape McD Lake sockeye will be in place for 2010. Speel Lake has not met escapement in a couple of years and continued restrictions in District 11 concerning net restrictions and days will likely be increased for 2010 to escape more sockeye.

Chilkoot bound sockeye were again below the escapement goal for Dis-

trict 15. Expect more net restrictions and continued limited areas of fishing. USAG has asked for a doubling of effort from Fish & Game to get an accurate accounting of sockeye harvest in the District 15 chum harvest postage stamp. Our position is--- if there is limited or no harvest within this small area on sockeye, why not increase the time for harvesting chum. USAG will continue to work on this issue to see if we can't secure more time for harvest opportunities, while protecting sockeye escapement goals. One bright side though, lake conditions have improved substantially with good lake survivals expected in the future.

Many of our concerns particularly with regards to stocks of concern, additional harvest opportunities, adequate accounting of differing stocks, back planting of smolt in low escapement systems, treaty talks, future enhanced production, and other items, were met by ADF&G staff with earnest discussion. We are fortunate to have good personnel working for ADF&G. There is still much work to be done by USAG and the department in the future.

Executive Director's Report

Where are we going one might ask? What is USAG doing for me? Well like all things, people, organizations and our fishery are in a constant state of change. USAG has been going through some changes as well. The USAG board has expanded to add new vocal members. USAG has entered the computer age and has a running and functioning website with monthly (sometimes weekly) updates about our gillnet fishery and the issues surrounding our industry. Obviously, you are reading a newsletter with information about the gillnet fishery and USAG. We are working towards communicating more with the fleet and getting a better understanding of the issues surrounding each fishing district. This means taking the time to have local chapter meetings and working on local fish, environmental and allocation battles.

While we are working hard on the gillnet front, we also need your help and your involvement in the fishery. Our board works hard, not at just being fishermen and serving on the USAG board, but many of them serve the gillnet fleet in other ways. USAG board member Eliason has been working hard on the NSRAA board for 15 years while bringing board bember Blough, who also serves on the NSRAA board, along at the same time. Board

members Becker, Auger, and Enge fill seats on the Pacific Salmon Treaty-fighting every year for gillnet funded projects and stock issues between neighboring countries. Board Member Hughes and myself serve on the DIPAC board, constantly working towards paying the debt incurred while getting more fish out for fishermen to harvest.

It is a constant process for us at USAG and it should be a constant process for you to be involved. Doesn't mean you have to show up at every meeting or call every week, but take the time to read the information out there and to support the organizations that support our industry. Becoming a member of USAG helps provide the support for ongoing leadership while helping open the lines of communication. Even this newsletter costs money. USAG could have

sent this newsletter to only our paid membership, but the board made it clear that it was important to communicate with the entire fleet.

Each year we all buy our CFEC cards to go fishing, same thing should be applied to supporting your fishery organizations. It should be an every year kind of thing. Personally, I am a member of the Halibut Coalition, UFA, USAG and SEAFA. Each organization I support provides some angle or some level of support for the issues important to me as a commercial fisherman beginning at the local level. While there are benefits available for joining USAG- hats, more information, and an insurance program- the true benefit should be, that by joining you are in some small way making an effort to be involved even if it is just by making a financial obligation each year. Good winter to you all.

Pictured Above: Chris Knight, long-time fisherman (FV Sweetwater) and long-time political consultant, currently serves as the executive director for USAG. Knight and the organization can be reached by phone at (907) 586-6550 or by email through usag@alaska.net.



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John Long office: (425)822-1368

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