



United Southeast Alaska Gillnetters

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John Jensen, Chair
Board of Fisheries
P.O. Box 115526
Juneau, AK 99811-5526 hand delivered

Dear Mr. Jensen:

The United Southeast Alaska Gillnetters (USAG) is an association of about 150 small business owners who catch salmon by drift gillnetting in Southeast Alaska and market salmon throughout the United States. USAG is a southeast, district-wide organization, representing all 475 drift gillnet permits in existence. Please find our positions on the respective proposals below as listed along with many of our concerns. In advance we appreciate the time and concern put forth by you and members of the board to carefully consider each proposal.

Proposal 236: Oppose

This proposal would require numeration of the numbers of fish in various systems required for subsistence purposes. The proposal is using the concept of “weak stock management”, but instead of applying the concept to escapement requirements, it applies it to subsistence needs. The concept is no more valid when applied to subsistence than it is when applied to escapement. We see the following problems with this proposal:

1. It is not possible to tell what portion of the subsistence eligible population in an area would take fish from and from which system. Therefore, it is impossible to say with any degree of precision how many fish are necessary for subsistence in a specific stream. The only way this would be even remotely possible is if the subsistence user had their permit for only one system and could take fish from only that system. If such a system was put into place, it would lead to overharvest during years of low escapement.
2. The Department of Fish and Game (Department) does not have the budget or manpower to monitor the number of streams involved to determine that the specific number of fish specified were present in excess of escapement needs.
3. The Department would have to restrict commercial and sport fishing until the numbers of fish were assured to be in the system as required rather than managing on a catch per unit effort, a management technique that has proven to be successful over the years. By the time the target numbers were reached, it would be too late to fish on those fish that are surplus to escapement and subsistence needs.

4. The quality of the commercial catch would be severely reduced as most commercial fishing would have to be conducted in inside waters only and near targeted systems.

Proposal 238: Oppose

Using a seine boat to catch subsistence fish is not using traditional means for harvest. This would also extend the federal subsistence criteria out into the off shore areas and perhaps extend their jurisdiction. No area is specified, so fish could be taken from any population that was nearby. We find it interesting that in proposal 236 they want a specific number of fish in each system, but in # 238 fish will take from any population that is available in the common property fishery. Who would oversee and regulate this program?

Proposal 240: Oppose

We believe it is necessary and appropriate that a permit holder must be present when their net is in the water fishing. How else would law enforcement determine that the net actually belonged to a specific permit holder? How else could the permit holder determine how many fish were being caught and adjust the gear accordingly? This proposal is plagued by enforcement issues and likely will be abused in some manner.

Proposals 244, 245, 246, 267, 268, 271, 273, and 274: USAG Supports recommendations in RPT report. These proposals are part of the Industry Consensus Report (RPT) dated 12/9/08. USAG at this time believes that adoption of the RPT report is in the best interest of the gillnet fleet when considering long term sustainability of the gillnet fisheries on the north end and on the south end. Adoption of the RPT report with associated recommendations on the above referenced proposals is the best alternative for gillnetters without giving up additional time or allocation in other areas. USAG understands the significant costs and lost opportunities associated with adoption of the RPT report; however until enhanced allocation is increased for other gear groups the gillnet fleet will continue to be outside of its enhanced allocation, thus potentially putting at risk fishing time and fishing areas in both the Northern and Southern gillnet districts of Southeast Alaska.

Proposal 246: Oppose as Part of the Industry Consensus Report(RPT) 12/9/08

When the folks of Coffman Cove were working to get the permits approved by the Department and the Regional Planning Team, they promised there would be no adverse impact on our existing commercial fisheries and now right out of the chute they want to close water that has traditionally been open to us. This is a betrayal of faith. If they wanted Coffman closed they should have included it in the original permitting documents so the issue could have been dealt with then.

Proposal 253 & 254: Oppose

These two proposals do effectively the same thing and will be addressed with one statement. Permitting seine boats larger than the existing 58 foot limit will probably upset the efficiency balance between the present salmon fleets. Larger boats will allow seiners to hold more fish and therefore catch more fish between deliveries. It will allow boats to stay on the grounds longer thus increasing their fishing efficiency. We are also concerned that larger boats will eventually lead to requests for larger seines to make the larger boat more economically feasible and efficient. The initial reason for the length limit on seiners and on gillnetters in Bristol Bay was

to limit their efficiency and make local fishermen or disadvantaged permit holder at least partially competitive with the generally more economically advantaged

Each salmon fleet knows how to increase its efficiency and catch more fish for each hour spent fishing or each gallon of diesel consumed. For troll fleets it would be to add additional gurdy lines. For the gillnet fleet it would be to increase gillnet depth or length. Just because these things could be done, does not mean they should be done.

Proposal 255 & 256: Oppose

These two proposals would grant additional privileges to gillnet fishermen who hold two (stacked) permits. While there is a wide range of opinion on these types of proposals, we are opposing them because we believe a large majority of the gillnet fleet is opposed. The most significant argument in support of the proposal is that it would provide an incentive for fishermen to purchase an additional permit, thereby reducing the size of the fleet and providing more opportunity for the fishermen remaining in the fishery. The major argument against the proposal is that it would create two classes of gillnetters. This would force current fishermen to recapitalize their fishery in order to remain competitive with those holding additional privileges. One often overlooked issue is that implementation of this concept would drive up the cost of entering the fishery making it harder for younger fishermen to enter the fishery. The State of Alaska through its various agencies has held seminars on the “graying of the fleet” and what can and should be done to promote younger people getting into the fishery. By driving up the cost of entry, acceptance of this proposal would aggravate an already widely acknowledged problem.

Proposal 257 & 258: Oppose

Proposal 257 and 258 address the same issue and this comment applies equally to both. This proposal would change the starting day for gillnet openings to Monday from Sunday. We do not support a requirement to change the opening day to Monday. We do support changing the language of the current regulation to make it similar to the purse seine regulation and say that openings will “generally” begin on Sunday. The requirement to begin on Sunday has been overridden by the special case of the management plan for the directed king salmon fishery on the Stikine and Taku rivers which requires an 8:00 AM Monday start for the fishing week. The addition of the word “generally” would remove this minor conflict and allow the Department to begin a fishery on another day by Emergency Order (EO) if warranted by circumstances.

Proposal 259: Oppose

This proposal would shift the gillnet sockeye openings from beginning on Sunday to a Monday beginning. The author indicates that because this was done in the king salmon management plan for the Stikine it should be done for the District 8 sockeye fishery. We do not agree that because this was done for the directed king fishery it should also be applied to our directed sockeye fishery.

Proposal 260: Oppose

This proposal would open a portion of District 7 to seining when gillnetting is open in District 8. We oppose this proposal for the following reasons:

1. To conserve wild stocks in the area, the area has not been open in the past.

2. The gillnet openings that take place in District 8 are a directed sockeye fishery and are predicated on the strength of the sockeye return to the Stikine River and other local systems. The hatchery chums caught in this fishery are incidental to the sockeye fishery.
3. To open this area for the exclusive purpose of harvesting hatchery stocks would violate the principal of not adjusting wild stock fishery patterns to harvest hatchery fish.
4. Gillnetters proposed at the 03 and 06 BoF meetings that a portion of District 8 be opened to common property fishing based on the strength of the return of hatchery fish to Anita Bay. The BoF did not approve these proposals during those meetings which represented the same situation being proposed here.
5. The sharing balance referred to in the proposal applies to the fish that are harvested in Anita Bay. It does not include the fish caught in common property fisheries as they make their way to Anita Bay.
6. The rotation between the seine and gillnet fleets in the Anita Bay terminal harvest area has demonstrated the capacity to harvest all the fish that return to Anita Bay.

Proposal 262: Oppose

This proposal would arbitrarily restrict the Northern Southeast Seine Salmon Management Plan regardless of the abundance of the specific salmon addressed by the specific proposed changes. This proposal is a good example of the federal subsistence fishery regime attempting to reach out into State of Alaska controlled waters and its common property fisheries to adjust those fisheries bases on unsubstantiated subsistence needs. It also attempts to force the Department into weak stock management for our salmon fisheries which would reduce the economic vitality and overall quality of the salmon harvest in Southeast Alaska.

Proposal 264 & 265: Oppose

This proposal would arbitrarily restrict the Southern Southeast Seine Salmon Management Plan and accordingly the District 4 seine season regardless of the abundance of salmon stocks or the strength of in-season returns. Like Proposal 262, this is another example of the federal subsistence fishery regime attempting to reach out into State of Alaska controlled waters and its common property fisheries to adjust those fisheries bases on unsubstantiated subsistence needs. It also attempts to force the Department into weak stock management for our salmon fisheries which would reduce the economic vitality and overall quality of the salmon harvest in Southeast Alaska.

Proposal 270: Oppose

This proposal requests that Herring Cove no longer be used as a salmon release site. The commercial fishing community and the sport fishing community in Ketchikan in conjunction with the Department wanted the king salmon production from the Whitman Lake Hatchery moved from the remote release site in Carol Inlet to Herring Cove. Prior to that action, the number of fish released from Herring Cove was tailored to return enough fish for brood stock only. No other release site provides the protection from straying that the Herring Cove site provides. The Herring Cove release point also provides the best opportunity for local sport and sport charters to access a significant number of king salmon on a consistent basis. There is an acknowledged problem with folks who want to fish using private lands without permission. In part, the fact that this problem exists demonstrates how popular the area is as a sport fishing location. Facilities should be improved in the area to accommodate public use and we would

encourage the state to take the initiative and develop such facilities. However, the number of people in the community who benefit from the fish returning to Herring Cove, both financially and recreationally suggests the location should not be moved.

Proposal 275: Support

We support the changes in operation and boundaries outlined in this proposal. The boundaries have been used the past two years and provide for improved terminal area harvest with very minimal impact on wild stocks in the area.

Proposal 284: Support

The Boat Harbor management plan as proposed by the Department in this proposal is consistent with prior year's management and we support its adoption.

Proposal 305: Support

This proposal would prohibit the use of felt soled shoes in Alaska's fresh water streams. If it is true that the use of felt soled shoes contributes to the spread of invasive species and diseases then we support this proposal.

Proposal 306: Support

This proposal prohibits operators or crew on charter boats from fishing while paying customers are on board. This corrects an area of long standing abuse where lines purportedly being fished by operators or crew were actually being fished by charter customers. It also prevents the operator or crew from "giving their fish" to paying charter customers such that they obtained more fish than they could catch under bag and possession limits. We strongly believe this should be approved into regulation.

Proposal 307: Support

This would prohibit charter boats from being used for subsistence or personal use within 30 days of being used for charter fishing. We support the concept of this proposal but believe charter boats should be subject to the same restrictions as other commercial boats. The time required between a break in activities between uses of commercial boats changing from one fishery to another is 14 days and with king crab it is one month. If the 14 day restriction is in fact the standard break required when changing from personal use to a commercial fishery then we believe that similar requirement should be applicable to the charter fleet.

Proposal 308: Support

This proposal will restrict a lodge or charter boat from having subsistence or personal use resources on site while paying customers are present. This corrects a long standing abuse by lodges and charter boats and should be adopted.

Proposal 325: Oppose

This proposal would extend the troll season from September 20 to September 30 with a closure by EO if warranted. We much prefer the present language that closes the season September 20 unless abundance permits a longer season by EO. This requires the Department to make an active assessment of the fishery to determine if an extension is appropriate rather than just extending the season without proper assessment. 10 of the past 13 years one or both districts

were extended for additional Trolling time. Why change the system if it already works when there is high Coho abundance? It will likely be more difficult to close the fishery early under low-abundance years as trollers would like put additional pressure on area wide biologists. We believe the current regulation language best protects the coho resource.

Proposal 327: Oppose

This proposal would open a portion of Behm Canal and Clarence Straight to September 30 to access coho. We oppose this change for the following reasons:

1. It modifies a wild stock fishery with the sole purpose of accessing hatchery fish. This is the same principal under which the BoF and the Department has refused to approve changes for wild stock fisheries to access hatchery fish for other commercial fleets in the past.
2. There are numerous wild stocks of coho in the area of the proposal that could be adversely impacted by the adoption of this proposal.
3. The Department can extend fishing in the area by EO if the abundance of coho warrants such an extension.
4. There would be no review of the potential impact on the cost recovery needs of SSRAA caused by increased interception of these coho.