

2014 Board of Fisheries Testimony

Support proposals 135,136,137

The sockeye stocks of **yield** concern identified in the Mat-Su region are proved by the Department of Fish and Game (Dept.) to be a **production** problem rather than a **harvest** problem. Please see: "**A COMPREHENSIVE INVENTORY of IMPAIRED ANADROMOUS FISH HABITATS in the MATANUSKA-SUSITNA BASIN, with RECOMENDATIONS for RESTORATION, 2013 by ADF&G staff, Oct 2013.**" Therefore, the drift fleet cannot be blamed and should not be restricted for the depleted sockeye or any other stock of salmon.

In the mixed stock fishery of Cook Inlet the harvest of the drift fleet is evenly distributed among all stocks present, and that harvest is consistent and random. But, the situation existing today in the Mat-Su is not consistant, for example, we find several natal streams entering the Susitna River that have robust sockeye runs and escapement goals are achieved while other streams in the same river are not making escapement goals and some lakes in that same Susitna river system are depleted of sockeye. Again, the cause of this situation is not the commercial harvest or the sport harvest rather its production. The Dept report shows the major causes appear to be pike predation, disease, fish passage to spawning grounds (culverts), unrestricted wetland development, and off road ATV habitat destruction.

Historical harvest data and new test boat genetic information help track stock migration and distribution during the summer run of sockeye and seem to indicate what all drifters have always known. More than enough escapement for spawning and sport/subsistance harvest occurs every summer. Regulation closures add up to five days of unrestricted escapement of salmon during their migration through Cook Inlet.

Expressed in hours, escapement amounts to six days since the fleet fishes two 12 hour days.

Proposals 135,136 and 137 when taken together and modified will return the drift fleet to its historical, designed time and area and end the confusing and conflicting rules and regulations extant today. The department's management responsibility will be achievable and the huge number of salmon stocks in Cook Inlet will grow to their full potential of maximum sustained yield.

I encourage the Board to amend and pass Proposals 135, 136, and 137 to return the drift fishery to a consistent, random harvest in the mixed stock fishery of Cook Inlet.

Bob Merchant



Commercial drift fisherman