

RC45

Jan. 29, 2014

Dear Alaska Board of Fisheries,

When the cruelest of Alaska winter days bends me to the ground, and I consider leaving permanently this great state of Alaska for the "normal life" of strong sunlight, it is the fish that keep me here.

Dipnetting in Alaska is such a gift, that I bet few other Americans enjoy. It is our reward for outlasting winter.

There is nothing more fulfilling than catching your own dinner—a silver thrashing beauty in the net, still vibrant from the ocean. During my 14 years of dipnetting, I've hauled fish out while 6 months pregnant, I've stood in flat waters waiting for the elusive fish with toddlers on the beach, I've seen my now teenage son, at age 9, pluck his first sockeye from the net.

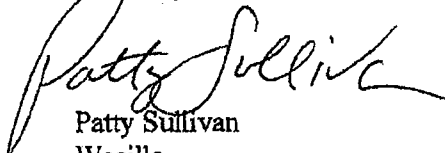
Have you been there, elbow to elbow with fellow Alaskans whom you'd never cross paths with except here in waist-high salt water. People of all ethnicities—Samoan, Hmong, African American, white, Yup'ik, Thai, Russian—sharing a joyful camaraderie and in pursuit of the same thing, a fish. It's truly Alaska unique. It's beautiful. Add in the electricity as shouts of excitement run up and down the beach when a school moves through, and everyone is breathless and catching some.

In recent years, dipnetting has become more of a gamble. There's so many emergency openings for the commercial fleet that almost any day a family picks to drive to Kenai and make an expensive commitment is the wrong day. The commercial fleet mops up the fish, while dipnetters stand for hours catching next to nothing.

I'm now considering going to a more dangerous dipnetting ground, near Chitna. But because men annually fall in swift cold water and drown, because bears paw open ice chests, because you need to tie yourself off to a tree to fish, I will not be bringing any kids, and I will be happy to return in one piece. If I do this it will be more for the harvest, and I will be losing the dipnetting way of life I had as an Alaskan.

Can you Board Members see a way to set policy that manages the commercial drift fleet more conservatively during a strong Kenai red run? Not enough fish are going upstream, and yet the professional fishermen are making record catches.

Sincerely,



Patty Sullivan  
Wasilla