

Juneau, We have a Problem

RC 69



Salmon abundance by nature is cyclical, but numbers returning to Northern Cook Inlet streams are almost universally in decline.

King salmon numbers have dropped to record lows. Sockeye salmon numbers and harvests have spiraled downward in the Susitna River for two decades. Once identified by ADF&G as the second largest freshwater coho salmon sport fishery in Alaska, the coho minimum spawning escapement level was not even achieved four years in a row on the Little Susitna.

So discouraged this season, many sports fisherman didn't buy fishing licenses. Northern Cook Inlet anglers used to enjoy 314,435 angler days in 2007. In 2012, angler days sank to the lowest level in 37 years.

In the last five years, the personal use fishery has become an economic force with more than 35,000 Alaskan households participating. The decline in fishing occurred at the only personal use fishery in the state. The decline in sockeye in Fish Creek is more a surprise than a tragedy.

Too many Northern District salmon stocks are in decline. Seven stocks of concern out of the State's 11 stocks are in the Northern District.

Northern District salmon fail to pass through the conservation gauntlet in sufficient numbers. Conservation elements in the management plan are based solely on the abundance of Kenai sockeye, not on plummeting returns of northern-bound salmon. Escapement goals—the bedrock of fisheries management—have met chronic failure in Northern District streams, while to the south, the commercial harvest often has continuous emergency openings to catch more fish. ADF&G already has the authority to manage the commercial drift gill net fishery more conservatively than what is practiced during a strong Kenai red run.

It takes fish to make fish. Please help us reverse this decline.

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