

Prince William Sound and Upper Copper and Susitna Rivers Sport

PROPOSAL 30

5 AAC 52.023. Special provisions for seasons, bag, possession, and size limits, and methods and means for the Upper Copper River and Upper Susitna River Area.

Extend single-hook, artificial fly regulations in the Gulkana River to include the area under the Richardson Highway Bridge, as follows:

5 AAC 52.023 (9) is amended to read:

(A) from June 1 – July 31, only single-hook, artificial flies, with a gap that does not exceed three-quarters inch between the point and shank, may be used in that portion of the Gulkana River downstream **of** [FROM] the **upstream edge of the** Richardson Highway Bridge to an ADF&G regulatory marker located approximately 500 yards downstream of the confluence with the Copper River; additional weight may only be used 18 inches or more ahead of the fly;

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What is the issue you would like the board to address and why? A section of the Gulkana River downstream of the Richardson Highway Bridge allows for only single-hook, artificial flies to be used from June 1–July 31, while a section of the river upstream of the Richardson Highway Bridge allows for bait and artificial lures (including treble hooks) to be used from June 1–July 19. As written, the area under the bridge would fall under general area regulations (i.e., unbaited, single-hook, artificial lures) because it is neither upstream nor downstream of the bridge. Adding the language to include the area under the bridge in the artificial fly only area would reduce regulatory complexity and uncertainty on methods and means restrictions while fishing on the Gulkana River, specifically near the bridge, which is a popular fishing location.

PROPOSED BY: Alaska Department of Fish and Game (HQ-F20-144)

PROPOSAL 31

5 AAC 52.022. General provisions for season, bag, possession, annual, and size limits, and methods and means for the Upper Copper River and Upper Susitna River Area.

Increase the possession limit for sockeye salmon in the Upper Copper River, as follows:

In the upper Copper River, the sport Sockeye limit is three per day, three in possession. Elsewhere, like the Kenai, the possession limit is two daily bag limits. Especially in years with King restrictions, a Sockeye angler should be able to retain two daily bag limits, especially in areas like this where most anglers drive long distances or take multi-day float trips and would like to retain two daily bag limits without having to freeze the first day’s limit.

What is the issue you would like the board to address and why? Align Sockeye possession limits with similar regions.

PROPOSED BY: Fairbanks Fish and Game Advisory Committee (HQ-F20-034)

PROPOSAL 32

5 AAC 52.023. Special provisions for season, bag, possession, and size limits, and methods and means for the Upper Copper River and Upper Susitna River Area.

Allow harvest of rainbow trout 20 inches or less in a portion of the Gulkana River, as follows:

You can retain one rainbow/steelhead trout per day and only one in possession 20 inches or less from the tip of the nose to the fork of the tail. This should apply to all flowing waters of the Gulkana River excluding Middle Fork, from Dickey Lake to the confluence with the main-stem, where fishery should remain catch-release only.

What is the issue you would like the board to address and why? Currently rainbow/steelhead trout fishing is catch-and-release only throughout the entire Gulkana River drainage. I have been guiding on the Gulkana River for 40 years, and especially during the past 10 years, I have observed that rainbow/steelhead trout populations have grown dramatically. This creates problems because rainbow/steelhead trout prey on salmon row and smelt. Since 2015 the Gulkana Hatchery has been unable to obtain sufficient brood stock to meet its egg-take goals. This raises concern about the sustainability of wild salmon stocks in the Gulkana drainage, particularly in smaller streams.

PROPOSED BY: Kirk Wilson (EF-F20-010)

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Sport fisheries should be allowed to retain one rainbow or steelhead trout per day, measuring 20 inches or less from the tip of the nose to the fork of the tail. The possession limit should be one. This should apply to all flowing waters of the Gulkana River excluding Middle Fork from Dickey Lake to the confluence with the main-stem, where the fishery should remain catch and release only.

What is the issue you would like the board to address and why? Currently, rainbow/steelhead trout fishing is catch-and-release only throughout the entire Gulkana River drainage. Rainbow/steelhead trout populations have grown dramatically. Since 2015, the Gulkana Hatchery has been unable to obtain sufficient brood-stock to meet its egg-take goals. This raises concern about the sustainability of wild sockeye and Chinook stocks in the Gulkana drainage, particularly

in smaller streams. You haven't been able to keep rainbow/steelhead for a long time. If you catch fish even with a fly, if the fish takes the fly deep or good on gill then they will die anyways. Keeping 1 rainbow/steelhead, especially one hooked badly will not hurt the population as they would die anyways. We also feel this will allow for more salmon eggs which will be good for the salmon populations.

PROPOSED BY: Copper Basin Fish and Game Advisory Committee (EF-F20-034)

PROPOSAL 33

5 AAC 52.023. Special provisions for season, bag, possession, and size limits, and methods and means for the Upper Copper River and Upper Susitna River Area.

Allow harvest of rainbow trout 18 inches or less in the Gulkana River, as follows:

There are approximately 13,000 rainbow trout in the Gulkana with 7,000 greater than 18 inches. Allow anglers to retain 1 rainbow trout under 18 inches. If not on the entire Gulkana, then at least above the "No bait" marker on the mainstem above the West Fork confluence, an area of high abundance usually only accessible by floaters, who should have the opportunity to eat a normally hooked rainbow trout instead of releasing it dead or dying.

What is the issue you would like the board to address and why? Inability to retain any Rainbow Trout in the Gulkana River, even those fish caught on King gear that have died, or will likely die, upon release.

PROPOSED BY: Fairbanks Fish and Game Advisory Committee (HQ-F20-033)

PROPOSAL 34

5 AAC 52.023. Special Provisions for seasons, bag, possession, and size limits, and methods and means for the Upper Copper River and Upper Susitna River Area.

Remove the 14-inch size limit for Gulkana River Arctic grayling, as follows:

5 AAC 52.023 is amended to read:

(9) (C) in waters upstream of Paxson Lake and those waters of Paxson Lake within a 100-yard radius of the mouth of the East Fork at the north end of Paxson Lake upstream to Summit Lake,

(iii) the bag and possession limit for Arctic grayling is two fish, with no size limit[OF WHICH ONLY ONE MAY BE 14 INCHES OR GREATER IN LENGTH];

(D) in all flowing waters from 100 yards upstream from the narrows at the Paxson Lake outlet downstream to the confluence with the Middle Fork;

(iii) [THE BAG AND POSSESSION LIMIT FOR ARCTIC GRAYLING IS FIVE FISH, WITH NO SIZE LIMIT OF WHICH ONLY ONE MAY BE 14 INCHES OR GREATER IN LENGTH;]

(E) in all waters of the Middle Fork of the Gulkana River from the outlet of Dickey Lake to an ADF&G regulatory marker located approximately three miles downstream, including Hungry Hollow Creek and Twelvemile Creek,

(iii) [THE BAG AND POSSESSION LIMIT FOR ARCTIC GRAYLING IS FIVE FISH, WITH NO SIZE LIMIT OF WHICH ONLY ONE MAY BE 14 INCHES OR GREATER IN LENGTH;]

(F) in all other waters of the Middle Fork of the Gulkana River not specified in (E) of this section,

(iii) [THE BAG AND POSSESSION LIMIT FOR ARCTIC GRAYLING IS FIVE FISH, WITH NO SIZE LIMIT OF WHICH ONLY ONE MAY BE 14 INCHES OR GREATER IN LENGTH;]

(G) all waters downstream of the confluence of the Middle Fork,

(iii) [THE BAG AND POSSESSION LIMIT FOR ARCTIC GRAYLING IS FIVE FISH, OF WHICH ONLY ONE MAY BE 14 INCHES OR GREATER IN LENGTH;]

(H) in all flowing waters of the West Fork of the Gulkana River upstream of an ADF&G regulatory marker located one-half mile upstream of the confluence of the West Fork and mainstem of the Gulkana River,

(iii) [THE BAG AND POSSESSION LIMIT FOR ARCTIC GRAYLING IS FIVE FISH, OF WHICH ONLY ONE MAY BE 14 INCHES OR GREATER IN LENGTH;]

(18) in Paxson Lake,

[(E) THE BAG AND POSSESSION LIMIT FOR ARCTIC GRAYLING IS FIVE FISH WITH NO SIZE LIMIT, OF WHICH ONLY ONE MAY BE 14 INCHES OR GREATER IN LENGTH;]

(20) in the Summit Lake drainage,

(F) the bag and possession limit for Arctic grayling is two fish, **with no size limit**[OF WHICH ONLY ONE MAY BE 14 INCHES OR GREATER IN LENGTH];

...

What is the issue you would like the board to address and why? Based on a study of Gulkana River Arctic grayling, a one fish over 14-inch size restriction was imposed in 1989 to preserve the size structure of the Arctic grayling populations in that system. Subsequent assessments have been conducted since that time, including a comprehensive study completed in 2019. Based on these studies and recent harvest trends, it was determined that the 14-inch restriction is no longer needed to maintain the desired population size and structure.

PROPOSAL 35

5 AAC 52.023. Special provisions for seasons, bag, possession, and size limits, and methods and means for the Upper Copper River and Upper Susitna River Area.

Amend bag and possession limits for Arctic grayling and methods and means in Moose Creek, as follows:

Moose creek: sport anglers may use baited or unbaited single hook artificial lures. Bag limit is 2 and 2 in possession. Season is open year round. Only catch and release fishing is allowed from April 1 to May 31.

What is the issue you would like the board to address and why? Fishing regulations for Moose Creek in the Copper River Basin do not provide for the protection of the Grayling spawning run. What was once a plentiful fishery has noticeably declined. Along with that loss, is the loss of the symbiotic relationships between Grayling and Mink/Otter, King Fisher, Seagulls and Eagles that has altered where this wildlife is no longer seen hunting the creek. Sport fishing in Moose Creek by youth and adult is now seldom participated in.

Adequate management of this fishery includes (1) Creation and implementation of fishing regulations for Grayling that protect the spawning run and provide for healthy future populations of Grayling in Moose Creek in the Copper River Basin. And, (2) Restoration or reintroduction of Grayling in Moose Creek, in the Copper River Basin, allowing for recreational fishing and the return of the symbiotic relationship between Grayling and other wildlife.

PROPOSAL 36

5 AAC 52.023. Special provisions for seasons, bag, possession, and size limits, and methods and means for the Upper Copper River and Upper Susitna River Area.

Increase the bag and possession limit of lake trout in Crosswind Lake, as follows:

3 lake trout one over 30” per year in Crosswinds Lake

What is the issue you would like the board to address and why? Overabundance of lake trout in Crosswinds Lake. PWSA has been planting up to 10 million sockeye salmon smelt each year over 20 years. This has increased the trout population 10-fold & in some cases the big fish are starting to get skinny. Small fish are taking over lake. There May need to be more liberal limits in the future or big fish will start to diminish due to competition from small fish. This number of trout is starting to diminish the smelt fry to the point the Gulkana Hatchery can’t meet their egg take goals since 2015. If the stocking doesn’t keep smelt coming at a regular rate you will see skinny lake trout in all size ranges & big fish could starve out. It only makes good since to let fishers take more fish when there is so many fish available. This regulation will promote a healthy sport fishery. Due to cost of flying there are less and less fishermen participating in this fishery.

PROPOSED BY: Kirk Wilson

(EF-F20-020)

PROPOSAL 37

5 AAC 55.022. General provisions for seasons, bag, possession, and size limits, and methods and means for the Prince William Sound Area.

Establish sport bag and possession limit for lake trout in the Prince William Sound area, as follows:

5 AAC 55.022. is amended to read:

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(a)

(12) lake trout; may be taken from January 1 - December 31; bag and possession limit of 2 fish; no size limit;

What is the issue you would like the board to address and why?

The department plans to begin stocking lake trout in Blueberry Lake in the Prince William Sound Management Area in 2020. In addition, wild lake trout occur naturally in at least one other lake within the Prince William Sound Management Area. Lake trout are not specified under general provisions in 5 AAC 55.022; therefore, they fall under “Other finfish” and may be taken January 1 - December 31 with no bag, possession, or size limits. This would align regulations and management strategy with lake trout life history and with other management area regulations for lake trout.

PROPOSED BY: Alaska Department of Fish and Game

(HQ-F20-133)

PROPOSAL 38

5 AAC 55.023. Special provisions for the seasons, bag, possession, and size limits, and methods and means for the Prince William Sound Area.

Establish restrictions in the Copper River Delta coho salmon sport fishery based on the number of days the commercial fishery is closed, as follows:

Adopt a trigger to share the burden of conservation between commercial and sport users in the Copper River Delta.

New regulatory language to be added under 5 AAC 55.023:

(XX) In the Copper River Delta, if the Copper River gillnet fishery is closed for more than seven consecutive days, then catch and release will be prohibited and fishing with bait will be prohibited. If commercial fishing is closed for fourteen consecutive days, then the bag limit will be reduced to one coho, catch and release will be prohibited, and fishing with bait will be prohibited.

What is the issue you would like the board to address and why? There are years with weak coho runs, such as fall 2019 when the Copper River coho gillnet fishery was shut down for the entire season due to a weak run. When the commercial fleet sees reduced fishing time and closures

in years of low coho abundance and conservation concerns, a trigger for a shared burden of conservation will help to ensure healthy future returns for all user groups.

PROPOSED BY: Cordova District Fishermen United (HQ-F20-012)

PROPOSAL 39

5 AAC 55.023. Special provisions for the seasons, bag, possession, and size limits, and methods and means for the Prince William Sound Area.

Extend the area closed to sport fishing in Ibeck Creek, as follows:

Closing the spawning beds closer to the road system will protect additional spawning and rearing habitat, and protect spawners from additional stress during this critical life stage.

Draft regulatory language:

5 AAC 55.023 Special provisions for seasons, bag, possession, and size limits, and methods and means for the Prince William Sound Area. Prohibit sport fishing Coho salmon more than ¼ of a mile north of the Copper River Highway as follows:

(9) Ibeck Creek is closed to sport fishing in the waters upstream from ADF&G regulatory markers located approximately **one-quarter (¼) mile** [THREE MILES] upstream from the Copper River Highway Bridge;

What is the issue you would like the board to address and why? The existing regulation of 3 miles upstream does not adequately protect spawning Coho in this system. Ibeck Creek is the most popular and heavily fished of all the Delta coho runs. Ibeck Creek receives considerable and increasing pressure from coho anglers. It is important to protect the upstream spawning beds and spawning salmon from the stress of being targeted by fishermen. There is considerable fishing area available both below the highway and just above it, and the majority of fishing pressure occurs in these other areas. It is unnecessary to have the spawning areas beyond ¼ mile above the highway open to sportfishing as well. It is important to sustain this popular run for continued and sustainable harvest by all user groups into the future.

PROPOSED BY: Cordova District Fishermen United (HQ-F20-017)

PROPOSAL 40

5 AAC 55.023. Special provisions for seasons, bag, possession, and size limits, and methods and means for the Prince William Sound Area.

Close 18 Mile or Silver Creek to coho salmon fishing August 1 to November 1, as follows:

18 Mile system or Silver creek will be closed to harvest of coho salmon 1/4 mile above the confluence of Alganic Slough and 18 Mile system from August 1 to November 1.

What is the issue you would like the board to address and why? 18 Mile system or Silver Creek lack of spawning coho salmon. This system is very susceptible to harvest of spawning salmon. It is one of the few systems with coho spawning area below the Copper River Highway.

PROPOSED BY: Copper River/Prince William Sound Fish and Game Advisory Committee
(EF-F20-077)
