

PROPOSAL 22

5 AAC 67.022. Special provisions for seasons, bag, possession, and size limits, and methods and means in the Bristol Bay Area.

Close Big Creek to sport fishing for salmon, as follows:

We propose Big Creek to be closed from June 1 to July 31 for all salmon. This would eliminate the possibility of anglers catching kings while “targeting” other salmon species.

New regulation:

5 AAC 67.002 (11) in the Big Creek drainage, upstream of its confluence with the Naknek River, **shall be closed to sport fishing of all salmon June 1 though July 31** [KING SALMON MAY NOT BE RETAINED OR POSSESSED; KING SALMON MAY NOT BE REMOVED FROM THE WATER AND MUST BE RELEASED IMMEDIATELY]

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What is the issue you would like the board to address and why? We would like the board to address the catch and release fishery of king salmon on Big Creek. Big creek is a vital tributary to the Naknek River drainage with king salmon numbers that are 30 to 40 percent of the total aggregate run of the Naknek River drainage. It is also one of two main tributaries of the Naknek River drainage that is significant to kings, along with King Salmon Creek. Current regulations call for a complete year round closure of fishing for king salmon in both Pauls Creek and King Salmon Creek in order to protect the species. However, Big Creek remains open to catch and release of Kings. Why are Pauls Creek and King Salmon Creek afforded more protection than Big creek? All three tributaries provide vital spawning habitat for king salmon. With the king runs at historic lows, all three should be protected.

Kings are easier to target in smaller water. Over the years as the king numbers declined, boat traffic and fishing pressure up Big Creek has significantly increased. The horsepower on jet boats has increased, causing more erosion and altering spawning habitat. All these factors put additional, unnecessary stress on already precarious survival rate. It is also important to note that the mortality rate for catch and release is approximately 6.5 – 10%. However, there are no current studies indicating what the mortality rate is when the fish are caught over and over again both commercially and on rod and reel. As is the case with big creek, fish move with the high tide and settle in holes for the low tide. In a small creek it is easy to target the school of fish as they move upriver with the tide, catching them multiple times. Additionally, these same kings have been stressed from commercial nets and run a gauntlet of sportfishing hooks before they even reach Big Creek. When these remaining kings miraculously make it to the final leg of their journey we should protect them just as we have done on the other tributaries of the Naknek.

PROPOSED BY: Naknek Kvichak Advisory Committee

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