

## **PROPOSAL 133**

### **5 AAC 29.140. Size limits, possession, and landing requirements.**

Allow for king salmon of 26 1/2 inches snout to fork length be retained in District 13 spring troll fisheries.

**In the District 13 spring troll fisheries, the minimum size limit for Chinook shall be 26-1/2” from snout to fork. Permit holders must offload all Chinook salmon that are less than 28 inches prior to fishing in areas where retention of Chinook salmon less than 28 inches is prohibited.**

(Or, if ADF&G data shows a different fork length to be the equivalent of 28” overall for immature kings, use that length).

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

1. There are two issues that can be addressed with a single solution. In recent years more than half of NSRAA Chinook that are returning to the Sitka area have spent only 2 years in saltwater. About 30% of these young kings are less than the troll fishery minimum size limit of 28” as measured from snout to tip of tail. However, about half of these “shakers” are within an inch of meeting the minimum length. The 28” minimum is a conservation measure intended to allow immature kings to grow bigger before being harvested, but it is an imperfect tool since a small mature NSRAA king that is released in May or June will not live long enough to grow significantly larger.

Maturation changes Chinook in many ways. One of the physical changes is that the “vee” in the Chinook’s tail fills in and the previously forked tail becomes nearly “square”. In other words, an immature king that is 28” in overall length would measure about 26-1/2” from snout to the fork of the tail, but a mature 28” king will be nearly 27-1/2” in fork-length. So, changing the minimum size limit from 28” overall to 26-1/2” from snout to fork of tail would allow trollers to keep more mature NSRAA kings while continuing to protect the small immature Treaty fish.

This should increase the spring troll catch of NSRAA Chinook by about 15% without increasing the catch of Treaty Chinook since the Treaty kings in the Sitka spring troll districts are immature at that time of year.

The spring troll fisheries targeting NSRAA Chinook are isolated from other spring Chinook troll fisheries by nearly 100 miles. In the last three years, 18,783 kings caught in the Sitka spring fisheries were sampled by ADFG personnel. Only 5 of these fish were landed at a port other than Sitka. Similarly, of the 18,778 spring kings sampled by ADFG in Sitka in the past three years, none of them were caught outside of Districts 12 or 13. Hence there should be no enforcement issues with having a different minimum length measurement in the Sitka area.

The Sitka area is also over 100 miles away from the nearest wild Chinook system, so there should be minimum concern for SE wild stocks; furthermore, even if a mature SE wild Chinook was caught due to this Proposal, it would be a “medium”, not “large” size fish and hence would not have counted towards escapement goals even it had not been caught.

The second issue that this proposal addresses is that the flexibility of a king salmon’s tail creates inconsistent measurements. Some fish naturally point their tails so that they are longer than 28” when they come aboard, but measure short after they have died and their muscles relax. Fishermen, plant workers, and Wildlife troopers can measure the same fish and each get slightly different lengths depending upon how the tips of the tail lay on the table. These inconsistencies are not an issue when measuring to the fork of the tail since the fork length doesn’t change when the fish’s

tail changes posture. Thus, crew and skippers landing king salmon have a much quicker and consistent measurement resulting in less handling and higher survival of those released.

**Did you develop your proposal in coordination with others, or with your local Fish and Game Advisory Committee? Explain.** The Sitka AC is sponsoring this proposal. We have previously endorsed the concept of changing the spring fishery to fork length multiple times in the past 4 years, most recently on January 17, 2024.

**PROPOSED BY:** Sitka AC

(EF-F24-021)

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