

## **PROPOSAL 242**

### **5 AAC 34.111 Section 11-A Red and Blue King Crab Management and Allocation Plan.**

Allocate 100% of the Section 11-A red king crab guideline harvest level to the personal use fishery, 70% for summer harvest and 30% for fall/winter harvest.

We propose that the Board of Fish repeal and readopt 8 AAC 34.111 as follows:

#### **5 AAC 34.111**

(a) The Board of Fisheries (Board) finds that red and blue king crab in Section 11A of the Southeastern Alaska Area shall be allocated at 100% to personal use. The Board finds that commercial red/blue king crab harvest in Southeastern Alaska has led to severe reductions in red/blue king crab stocks since the 2005/06 season, such that personal use and commercial seasons for red/blue king crab have been closed or significantly restricted for multiple seasons following a commercial season. The Board finds that commercial red/blue king crab seasons in 2005/06 resulted in a 4-year commercial closure, in 2011/12 resulted in a 4-year commercial closure, and in 2017/2018 resulted in a 4-year commercial closure as of 2023/24. The Board finds that commercial red/blue king crab season in 2005/06 led to personal use red/blue king crab season closures in Section 11A for 2007/08 Winter, 2008/09 Summer/Winter, and 2009/10 Summer/Winter and that the commercial red/blue king crab season in 2011/12 led to personal use red/blue king crab season closures in Section 11A for the 2012/12 through 2016/17 seasons. The Board finds that 13 of the red/blue king crab commercial permit holders fished for 24 hours in Section 11A in 2017/18 and that the commercial harvest reduced crab stocks such that there has been zero economic benefit from red/blue king crab harvest in Section 11A or anywhere else in Southeastern Alaska through the 2023/24 season. The Board finds that, particularly when measured over the years of closure following the last two openings, that the commercial red/blue king crab fishery in Section 11A is not economically significant and that due to the demand for personal use harvest in Section 11A, the section can no longer support both a personal use and commercial red/blue king crab fishery. The Board finds that significant portions of Section 11A have been completely closed to commercial red/blue king crab harvest (i.e. Auke Bay, Gastineau Channel, etc.) with little to no economic impact. The Board finds that many personal users residing in the vicinity of Section 11A do not have capabilities to safely fish for king crab outside of Section 11A (particularly in winter) and that commercial vessels and gear allow safer king crab fishing outside Section 11A in any season. The Board finds that nearly 100% of brown king crab in Southeastern Alaska are primarily harvest by commercial permit holders and that other species of king crab should be prioritized for personal users over commercial permit holders. The Board finds that protecting red/blue king crab stocks from commercial harvest in Section 11A will help to simplify management and ensure a more sustainable resource for personal users.

(b) When managing red/blue king crab in Section 11A, the Board authorizes the department to conduct the personal use fishery as follows:

1. July 1 through September 30 (Summer Season) - 70% of the red/blue king crab guideline harvest level
2. October 1 through March 31 - 30% of the red/blue king crab guideline harvest level

(c) The personal use red/blue king crab fishery should be conducted so that the established seasons last as long as possible within the allocation plan described in (b) of this section. To accomplish this, the commissioner may close, by emergency order, a personal use red/blue king crab season,

an immediately reopen a personal use red/blue king crab season, during which any of the following restrictions, selected at the discretion of the commissioner, are in effect:

1. The daily bag and possession limit is between one and three male king crab per person
2. No more than one pot per personal use permit holder may be used to take king crab
3. No more than two pots per personal use permit holder may be used to take king crab
4. No more than three pots per vessel may be used to take king crab
5. A seasonal per household limit for king crab is established by the commissioner

**What is the issue you would like the board to address and why?** We would like the Board of Fish to provide enhanced protection of red and blue king crab stocks in Section 11A of Southeastern Alaska by prohibiting commercial fishing in Section 11A. Section 11A is the area immediately surrounding the community of Juneau and is subject to limited personal use seasons of just a few days with extremely limited daily and seasonal bag limits. Based on data presented in the Alaska Department of Fish and Game in Fishery Management Report No. 21-08, "Management Report for Southeast Alaska and Yakutat Red and Blue King Crab Fisheries, 2017/18 - 2019/20" (copy attached), commercial red/blue king crab openings in Southeastern Alaska have historically (starting with the 1984/85 season) led to closures in the year(s) immediately following the commercial opening (see Table 1.1, p. 13). The impact of commercial red/blue king crab fisheries has become even more clear over the past two decades, as each commercial opening has been followed by multi-year closures after the 2005/06, 2011/12 and 2017/18 seasons. In fact, the commercial red/blue king crab fishery has not opened since the 2017/18 season and personal use red/blue king crabbing has also been closed or severely restricted in areas throughout Southeastern Alaska since that season.

Personal use limit reductions following commercial openings have been the most severe in Section 11A. Shortly after the 2005/06 commercial red/blue king crab season, personal use limits were reduced from 40 per household per year for the summer and winter seasons to 26 in 2006/07, 10 in 2007/08, 10 in 2008/09, and then to zero for two years until 2010/11 when the season was reopened with a 4 crab per year household limit (see Table 1.4, p. 16). Then the personal use annual limit for red/blue king crab was reduced to zero for four seasons following the 2011/12 commercial red/blue king crab opening. The annual household personal use limit for red/blue king crab has remained dismally low to the present date in Section 11A. This data illustrates the devastating impact of commercial red/blue king crabbing in Southeastern Alaska.

It is also noteworthy that the economic impact of the commercial red/blue king crab fishery has been significantly reduced since the 2011/12 commercial season. Only 7 commercial permits were fished in 2011/12 with a catch representing about 6% of the total harvest and just 13 permits were fished in 2017/18 with a catch representing about 19% of the total harvest. Nearly all of the harvestable brown king crab stocks in Southeastern Alaska are taken by commercial interests and it is unlikely that this will change due to limitations in sport gear/vessels to effectively participate in brown king crab fisheries.

With the increased personal use demand in Section 11A, the waning economic value of the red/blue king crab commercial fishery in Section 11A, and the need to provide improved protection for red/blue king crab stocks, it makes sense to restrict commercial king crabbing in section 11A and manage it solely for personal use.

This proposal does not aim to shut down commercial red/blue king crabbing in Southeastern Alaska. All of the remaining sections will be eligible for commercial blue/red king crab harvest in the event the crab populations meet the guideline harvest levels.

Another aspect of this proposal is to change the way the commissioner limits the number of pots that can be fished. Current regulation directs the commissioner to restrict the number of pots per vessel. It should be based on the permit holder. Restricting the number of pots based on the vessel forces unnecessary inefficiencies and reduced catch rates. It would be more cost efficient if a few friends who each have a household permit were allowed to coordinate their resources on a single vessel. Not only would this allow for savings associated with fuel, vessel wear and tear, etc., it would increase safety by reducing the inherent risks of having each household permit holder run their own boat out to check a single pot. If the pot gets flipped on its side, as many lightweight sport pots do, the trip is wasted. The personal use annual limit has been set at one or two crab per household; why not allow for the most cost-efficient harvest? This proposal aims to allow each personal use household permit holder to fish a pot while maintaining a reasonable 3-pot limit per vessel. ADF&G staff may say that having more pots would be difficult to police and that there are stories of personal users calling friends to come out with their permit when they get a good haul of king crab, but ADF&G staff have also said that Section 11A has some of the best numbers for new recruits of anywhere in Southeastern Alaska, so the management is working. If personal use was having a major impact on crab populations, Section 11A, which has the highest number of personal users anywhere in Southeastern would not be such a success story.

**Did you develop your proposal in coordination with others, or with your local Fish and Game Advisory Committee? Explain.** This proposal is submitted via Territorial Sportsman Inc.

**PROPOSED BY:** Territorial Sportsmen Inc

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