

PROPOSAL 52

5 AAC 24.360. Copper River District Salmon Management Plan.

Reduce commercial salmon fishing opportunity in the Copper River District, as follows:

5 AAC 24.360 (x) Allow two Copper River District commercial salmon fisheries 12-hour openers during the week of May 15th, then delay openers by two weeks or until a daily management objective for fish passage is met at the Miles Lake Sonar.

What is the issue you would like the board to address and why? Protecting genetic diversity of salmon in the Copper River Watershed.

Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK) of Tribal citizens and accounts from local residents indicate the run timing of Copper River salmon has been delayed by about two weeks in recent years. These accounts are validated and quantified by various projects in the Copper River including radio telemetry studies, genetics and bioenergetics studies, Miles Lake Sonar passage, Tanada Creek Weir passage, and harvest data from subsistence, commercial, and sport fisheries. Local managers and biologists have stated when the Copper River has a late ice-out, and when stream temperature remains cool late into the historical return time, salmon “mill” in the sound where they are susceptible to disproportionately high catch rates. Among these cohorts are king salmon and sockeye salmon destined for the furthest reaches of the Copper River. TEK is science, and it has long documented that the earliest returning salmon are those that spawn furthest upstream. This knowledge is being reconfirmed by a multitude of studies around Alaska and in the Copper River Basin.

Uneven targeting of these specific stocks decreases the diversity of the Copper River salmon genetic portfolio. On top of this, the Gakona to Slana reach of the Glennallen Subdistrict Subsistence Area has failed to meet Amounts Necessary for Subsistence (ANS) 17 of the past 19 years. These are the early returning fish. By delaying the PWS commercial fishery by two weeks or until a daily management objective is met at the Miles Lake Sonar, we are taking a step in the right direction in protecting the diversity of Copper River salmon. If salmon returns are earlier than that of recent years (a daily management objective is typically met around June 1-4), and a daily management objective is met before this two-week period, then we would expect these upriver stocks to return in numbers and the ensuing commercial fishery will not be disproportionately impacting Chinook and upriver sockeye stocks.

Did you develop your proposal in coordination with others, or with your local Fish and Game Advisory Committee? Explain. Ahtna Intertribal Fish and Wildlife Committee and Ahtna Tene Nene’ jointly recommended this change to address Tribal concerns of sustainability of Chinook and upper Copper River sockeye stocks. This change in management will help prevent future restrictions and closures.

PROPOSED BY: AITRC Fish and Wildlife Committee (HQ-F24-102)
