

Submitted by Board Member Chamberlain

February 5, 2025

Statement:

In the interests of time during deliberations and advance notice to the public, I wanted to build the record regarding the threats Alaskans are facing regarding the Environmental Species Act (ESA) and the Species at Risk Act (SARA), the Canadian equivalent of the ESA. There has been some concern expressed at this meeting around the effects of a potential ESA listing in Gulf of Alaska, and none around the same on the Yukon and Kuskokwim, or the potential SARA listing on the Yukon. The public has expressed concern on these topics but in my opinion, not nearly enough. I am thus providing this written testimony to illustrate my position better than I could in deliberations.

I'll start with a discussion of a SARA listing and its relevance to Southeast fisheries. In 2024, ADF&G imposed a 7-year moratorium prohibiting chinook fishing through the entirety of the Yukon River. This closure came after Canadian representatives insisted that a SARA listing would follow if widespread action did not happen. A SARA listing would trigger limitations substantially similar to an ESA listing in the Yukon River, targeting all potential sources of salmon decline. The recent Alaska Salmon Research Task Force identified as a priority for research the effects of food competition from hatchery fish in the Bering Sea and Gulf of Alaska. As such, if a SARA listing were to take place, hatchery production would likely come under increased scrutiny.

With respect to an ESA listing, there has been widespread concern across Alaska on the devastating economic effects an ESA listing would have, but the threats of an ESA (or SARA listing for that matter) are far greater than most people imagine. It is important to note preliminarily that even in the result of a negative finding, which I am confident will happen, there is nothing to stop Wild Fish Conservancy or any other party from initiating a new petition in any of the rivers throughout Alaska. As many are aware, Chinook are going through the largest crash since statehood, and several rivers have had alarming returns in recent years. In response to Wild Fish Conservancy's petition to list Gulf of Alaska Chinook Salmon I engaged in a call with NOAA as part of a tribal consultation to discuss the effects of such a designation on the affected communities. Central Council Tlingit & Haida Tribes of Alaska's 2nd Vice President, Clinton Cook was also on the call with me. This was as disheartening as any conversation I've been on in recent years. Nearly every aspect of Alaskan life will be adversely affected by an ESA listing. With an ESA or SARA Listing comes a designation of critical habitat which carries a substantial administrative and regulatory burden for nearly every development project along the affected coastlines and watersheds. In my discussion with

NOAA, their representation was that the regulatory burden would be considerable, adding at least a year to permitting that would not otherwise have been necessary, and adding roughly 6 figures in administrative costs to meet the regulatory burden. Throughout Alaska but particularly off the road system, construction projects - including essential infrastructure - operate on increasingly low margins. The additional regulatory burdens associated with an ESA listing and associated designation of critical habitat will not be measured in the millions of dollars in added costs and lost opportunities, but in billions or tens of billions of dollars. A designation of critical habitat can affect projects as small as building a dock or boat ramp, and as large and fundamental as laying fiberoptic cable in rural Alaska. An ESA or SARA listing will set back infrastructure and rural development in Alaska by decades.

Even the hatcheries will be substantially affected by an ESA listing. This last year, I had the pleasure of visiting Lummi Nation's hatchery in Northwest Washington. One of the primary discussion points with the hatchery managers were concerned with was the regulatory burdens associated with multi-layered and sometimes conflicting obligations. Even with better access to infrastructure, the costs to produce the salmon to fulfill their treaty obligations are many times higher than in Alaska.

Finally, it should be noted that Alaska prioritizes its independent management of its fisheries. The imposition of an ESA or SARA listing would provide another avenue for federal agencies to insert themselves into management of Alaska's precious resources.

For the reasons stated above, an ESA or SARA listing would have devastating impacts on all Alaskans and in all facets of life. In my tenure with the board, I intend to take all steps necessary to prevent this from happening. I take the Southeastern Alaska Resident concerns on their economies to heart but want to be transparent in my decision-making process.