

May 22, 2008

Joint Legislative Cook Inlet Salmon Task Force
State of Alaska

Committee Members:

I was unable to attend your meeting at the Soldotna Sports Center on May 22, 2008 as I have a bad case of the flu. But, I do wish to offer testimony to the committee and hope that this will be an acceptable alternative based upon my illness.

The task force was formed to hear the concerns of upper Cook Inlet Salmon users about inequitable apportionment of the salmon resources. But, Kenai Peninsula residents have concerns also. We hope you can incorporate our concerns into your consideration of possible remedies.

I firmly believe that all fish and wildlife resources should be managed by “Professional” biologists. When they refuse to do their jobs, or are swayed by political influences, then the Legislature needs to step in and dictate formal direction for them. The very worst option is to apportion these resources from the ballot box by referendum(s). The State of Alaska Constitution has numerous citations that should be strictly adhered to.

Specifically:

In Section 1.23 Resident Preference, the Constitution allows preference to Alaskan residents over non-residents.

In Section 8.1 Statement of Policy, the Constitution makes its’ resources available for MAXIMUM use consistent with the public interest.

In Section 8.2 General Authority, the Constitution requires the Legislature to make sure all natural resources are available for the MAXIMUM benefit of its people.

In Sections 8.3 and 8.4 the Constitution provides for common and beneficial users of the resources.

In Section 8.15 No Exclusive Right of Fishery, the Constitution specifically does not allow any exclusive right to the fishery resources.

So, what are my, and fellow Kenai Peninsula residents, concerns? Somehow, the commercial salmon fishery has slowly swung into an exclusive fishery. The rationale seems to hinge on “over escapement” into spawning areas. My question is this – How did the salmon fisheries manage to survive before the arrival of professional biologists? It seems that we must have numerous back to back emergency openings to curb this “over escapement” into rivers. These openings were to the detriment of Alaskan dip netters on the very last weekend of the season last year, to the detriment of resident bank fishermen (some who can only fish on weekends), to the dismay of thousands of tourists who spend a great deal of money to fish on the Kenai River, and to the loss of future tourism when the fishermen return home and report their experiences of barren rivers over several days until a few fish are allowed into the river for the non-commercial fishing interests..

I, and many others, closely monitor the local commercial fishing recording. We do this to determine whether we will have a “good, fair or bad fishing day.” When we dial up this recording and listen to a recording from the commercial fisheries biologist paraphrased to say the following: “we will not be extending the emergency opening at the end of this fishing period as we must let some fish into the river or we will have a riot on our hands.” This apparent bias to commercial fishing interests totally violates all of the Constitutional citations given above. He needs to be asked why there are more “emergency openings on weekends when working Alaskans have an opportunity to fish. He needs to be asked why an extra effort can not be made to ensure that Alaskan dip netters have a fairly good chance of harvesting their fish – especially this year with the high cost of fuel to travel to the Kenai Peninsula. My guess is that he has absolutely no concerns whether Alaskan sportsmen have any allocation at all. He also apparently does not care if the local tourism suffers as a result of his back-to-back emergency openings. His only concern is to appease the commercial fishing interests. If he can’t eliminate his bias, then he should be replaced by someone who can do the job in accordance with the Constitution of Alaska.

You, as Legislators, have the Constitutional power to fix all of the allocation questions – once you have heard the evidence and testimony. You do not need to enter into the “Biology” – just provide direction to the biologists/agency as to what is expected. They can do their job. I hope that you will debunk the “over escapement” issue as part of your direction.

Alaskans deserve a fair share of the fishery resource – whether they dip net them, fish for them, or buy them from a commercial fisherman. Let’s make that the priority and make sure that weekends are not a barren desert on the rivers.

Thank you for your time,

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