

MATANUSKA-SUSITNA BOROUGH Fish & Wildlife Commission

350 E Dahlia Ave., Palmer, Alaska 99645

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O Meeting
May , 2025

Supplemental Handout – Table of Contents

- 1 = MSB FWC Response Letter

Physical Location of Meeting: Assembly Chambers
DSJ Bldg, Palmer. Remote Participation: See
agenda.

Planning and Land Use Department - Planning Division

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THE STATE
of ALASKA
GOVERNOR MIKE DUNLEAVY

Department of Fish and Game

Division of Commercial Fisheries

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May 5, 2025

Matanuska-Susitna Borough Fish and Wildlife Commission
350 East Dahlia Avenue
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Dear Chairman Probasco,

Thank you for your letter concerning the status of Alaska Department of Fish and Game salmon assessment projects operating in Upper Cook Inlet. We have experienced challenges related to funding, staffing, and logistics in recent years and appreciate your continued support. Below are our responses to your questions.

- 1) Will the department be running a commercial test net fishery project during the 2025 season?

The department does not have funds to operate the Offshore Test Fishery project and will not operate in the future, unless funding is restored. We see limited utility in this project, especially since we no longer manage the EEZ fishery, and that fishery is now managed based on a preseason catch limit and opening schedule. This said, there are third parties that are pursuing funding and a cooperative agreement with the department to operate the project this year, but this process is still in progress and has not yet been finalized.

- 2) Will ADF&G be running the coho salmon genetic study project of fish harvested in the Upper Cook Inlet commercial fishery during 2025? Does the department still have sufficient funds to operate this project for 5 years?

Yes, the department is proceeding with operating the coho genetics study of fish harvested in the UCI commercial fishery during 2025. Due to last year's funds not being available in time for sampling, there are funds to operate this project for 4 years.

- 3) Does the ADF&G plan to operate each of the 3 sockeye salmon weirs within the Susitna River drainage (Judd, Chelatna, and Larson) during 2025? Is there currently sufficient funding to continue each of these projects 5 years into the future?

No, in 2024 Judd Lake funding was eliminated as a component of an unallocated general fund reduction beginning in FY25 and will not operate this year or in the future, unless funding is restored. The Larson and Chelatna weirs are planned to be operated in 2025. Project preparation and hiring are in progress. These two projects are expected to be operated for the next 5 years.

- 4) Does ADF&G plan to continue operating Jim Creek and Fish Creek weirs through the

duration of the coho salmon return in 2025? Is there currently still sufficient funding to continue operating these projects annually through 2028?

Yes.

- 5) Does the sport fish division still intend to operate salmon counting weirs at Deshka River for (duration of the Chinook and coho salmon returns) and Little Susitna River (for the duration of the Chinook and coho salmon returns) during the 2025 season?

Deshka River Chinook and coho salmon weir projects will run for the duration of both seasons.

Little Susitna River Chinook salmon will be assessed via aerial survey for 2025, and we will be attempting to test sonar in-season for feasibility. The weir will be moved during Chinook salmon season from river mile 32.5 to river mile 39. The weir is planned to be utilized at the new location to count coho salmon. This said, counting coho salmon can be challenging and while the weirs will be operated, counts may be compromised due to weather events.

- 6) How does the Department intend to manage commercial and sport fisheries that harvest Northern Cook Inlet bound coho salmon stocks to better achieve spawning escapement goals and to also better maintain fishing opportunities throughout the entire 2025 fishing season?

The department will manage commercial fisheries of UCI in compliance with the established management plans that contain specific and general stipulations that guide the department's management of coho salmon in UCI. Given recent year's performance of Northern District coho salmon stocks, the department will be monitoring inseason data closely and will be prepared to implement conservation-based management actions are necessary.

- 7) Will State of Alaska drift gillnet openings in Drift Gillnet Area 1 (seaward from the Expanded Kasilof and/ or Expanded Kenai Section) only occur on the same weekday(s) as drift gillnet fishing in the Federal EEZ waters throughout the season?

The department is not planning to modify the regular days (Monday and Thursday) for the drift gillnet fishery that are specified in 5AAC 21.353 Central District Drift Gillnet Fishery Management Plan. Depending on the time frame and size of Kenai late-run sockeye salmon run, the availability of Area 1 outside regular days would change. Larger Kenai run sizes may allow for an additional period in addition to the regular days. But that will be balanced against inseason information pertaining to Coho salmon run strength.

- 8) During the portion of the season when the Northern District set gillnet fishery may be restricted to 3, 2, or 1 set gillnet, how many nets does the department intend to start the restriction(s) at?

The level of restriction deemed necessary for the Northern District set gillnet fishery will be determined based on inseason indicators of run strength. The Commissioner has issued guidance to management staff to be precautionary in our inseason management and responsive to inseason coho salmon metrics.

The department will follow the guidance in the Northern District Salmon Management Plan (5 AAC 21.358(c)) “From July 20 through August 6, if the department's assessment of abundance indicates that restrictions are necessary to achieve the escapement goal, the commissioner may, by emergency order, close the commercial set gillnet fishery in the Northern District and immediately reopen a season during which the number of set gillnets that may be used is limited to the following options selected at the discretion of the commissioner, except that from July 31 through August 6, the commissioner may allow the use of two set gillnets in that portion of the General District south of the Susitna River”.

Sincerely,



Samantha Oslund

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