

**2018 SESSION OPERATING BUDGET AMENDMENT PROPOSAL**

**OFFERED IN:** House Finance Department of Fish and Game Budget Subcommittee

**TO:** HB 285 / HB 286

**OFFERED BY:** Representative Dan Ortiz

**DEPARTMENT:** Department of Fish and Game

**APPROPRIATION:** Commercial Fisheries

**ADD:** \$997.0 of UGF (1004) to the following allocations for the projects specified in the below tables. All funding items are in the personal services line.

**ALLOCATION:** Southeast Region Fisheries Management

| Region | Project                        | UGF (1004)      | Inc Type |
|--------|--------------------------------|-----------------|----------|
| SEAK   | Herring assessment/ management | \$ 81.0         | IncOTI   |
| SEAK   | Sablefish assessment           | \$ 50.0         | IncOTI   |
|        | <b>Region Total</b>            | <b>\$ 131.0</b> |          |

**ALLOCATION:** Central Region Fisheries Management

| Region | Project                   | UGF (1004)      | Inc Type |
|--------|---------------------------|-----------------|----------|
| CEN    | PWS Tanner crab survey    | \$ 50.0         | IncOTI   |
| CEN    | Togiak herring assessment | \$ 61.0         | IncOTI   |
| CEN    | Alagnak Tower             | \$ 50.0         | IncOTI   |
|        | <b>Region Total</b>       | <b>\$ 161.0</b> |          |

**ALLOCATION:** Arctic-Yukon-Kuskokwim Region Fisheries Management

| Region | Project                                   | UGF (1004)      | Inc Type |
|--------|---|-----------------|----------|
| AYK    | Norton Sound King Crab Trawl Survey       | \$ 80.0         | IncOTI   |
| AYK    | Yukon Mainstem Sonar Operations Extension | \$ 85.0         | IncOTI   |
| AYK    | Juvenile Chinook Northern Marine Survey   | \$ 300.0        | IncOTI   |
|        | <b>Region Total</b>                       | <b>\$ 465.0</b> |          |

**ALLOCATION:** Westward Region Fisheries Management

| Region | Project                      | UGF (1004)      | Inc Type |
|--------|------------------------------|-----------------|----------|
| WW     | Kodiak weirs                 | \$ 100.0        | IncOTI   |
| WW     | Chignik weir                 | \$ 100.0        | IncOTI   |
| WW     | Kodiak aerial salmon surveys | \$ 40.0         | IncOTI   |
|        | <b>Region Total</b>          | <b>\$ 240.0</b> |          |

**EXPLANATION:**

**SEAK - Southeast Alaska Herring Assessment/Management (\$81.0)**

The department has historically conducted full assessment on nine herring spawning aggregates in Southeast Alaska. In recent years due to budget cuts the number of areas that have been assessed has been reduced to two areas (Sitka Sound and Craig-Klawock). There are three basic requirements for full assessment for a given herring spawning aggregate. They are aerial surveys to map spawn, biological sampling, and dive surveys that collect egg density information. This increment would reinstate aerial surveys for seven areas (West Behm, Kah Shakes Cat-Island, Ernest Sound, Seymour Canal, Tenakee Inlet, and Hoonah Sound), reinstate dive spawn deposition surveys for two areas that were deemed to be most likely to be above the minimum threshold required to provide for fisheries, and reinstate biological sampling (age-weight-length) data for two areas. Herring fisheries cannot be opened in Southeast Alaska unless the spawning aggregates are assessed.

**SEAK - Chatham Strait Sablefish Assessment (\$50.0)**

Chatham Strait sablefish assessments are currently funded entirely from test fish receipts. The receipts are collected during stock assessment longline surveys that are a critical part of our understanding of the sablefish biomass. Three commercial vessels are chartered to conduct the survey each year. The charter costs are paid using revenue generated from the survey. Fish taken during the survey are deducted from the total allowable harvest which is ultimately divided equally to permit holders. If the department had general funds to support the survey we could allow more fish to be provided for commercial harvest.

**CEN - Prince William Sound Tanner Crab Survey (\$50.0)**

The Prince William Sound Tanner crab population has historically been monitored using a trawl survey but funding for the project was cut in FY2017. The Alaska Board of Fisheries recently adopted a new Tanner crab management plan for Prince William Sound. The plan provides for commercial fishing opportunity when the estimated biomass of legal sized males exceeds 200,000 crab. The fishery cannot be opened unless the population is assessed. This increment would restore funding for the survey and allow the department to determine whether a commercial fishery is allowed (the fishery has been closed since 1999 due to poor stock health).

### **CEN - Togiak Herring Assessment (\$61.0)**

The Togiak herring fishery is the largest herring fishery in Alaska. There is currently no dedicated funding for the Togiak herring assessment. This increment would provide funds for complete aerial surveys used to document spawning biomass and full biological assessment which provides for the most accurate estimates of abundance.

### **CEN - Alagnak River Tower (\$50.0)**

The Alagnak River is a major tributary of the Kvichak River. It produces significant numbers of sockeye salmon (2018 forecast is for return of 4.4 million fish) and is a very important part of the overall salmon production in Bristol Bay. There is currently no dedicated funding to operate the counting tower in the drainage. The Alaska Board of Fisheries adopted a special harvest area (SHA) management for the Alagnak that requires tower counts as a trigger for potential fishery in the SHA in years when salmon abundance in the river is above the escapement objectives.

### **AYK - Norton Sound Red King Crab Survey (\$80.0)**

The Norton Sound RKC trawl survey is conducted by the department research vessel R/V Pandalus and has historically been completed in July every three years. There is currently no dedicated funding for this survey. With stable annual funding, the survey would be done annually which would significantly improve stock assessment. Given the current stock assessment frequency, federal regulations require more conservative management and lower allowable catch to accommodate the data uncertainty. Less restrictive allowable catches may be possible under federal regulations if stock assessment uncertainty is improved using more frequent surveys.

### **AYK - Yukon River Mainstem Sonar Operations Extension (\$85.0)**

The Pilot Station sonar project is deployed and counting fish by approximately June 7 each year (river conditions dependent) and operated through August 31. With additional funding, the Pilot Station sonar project would start counting fish a week earlier (June 1 target date) and continue counting fish a week later (September 7 target date). This is expected to provide more accurate Chinook salmon abundance and run timing information (anecdotal information suggests timing in recent years has been earlier than average) and provide more accurate abundance and run timing information on the latter portions of the fall chum and coho runs into September (in some years a small proportion of these species are likely to have continued passing the sonar site after operations have ceased given observed counts on the final day of sonar operations). This increment would also be used to start counting earlier at the Eagle sonar project located just below the Canadian border on a July 1 target date instead of the current July 5 target date. Similar to the benefit of an earlier target start date at Pilot Station sonar this would help to ensure more accurate abundance and run timing information on Chinook salmon passage into Canada, particularly in years with earlier run timing.

### **AYK - Juvenile Chinook Northern Marine Survey (\$300.0)**

The juvenile Chinook trawl survey takes place in the Bering Sea from Nunivak Island north to the Bering Strait in September each year. For this northern Bering survey, the department charters a large commercial fishing vessel, which costs ~\$13,000 a day. Department staff who are on board examine trawl catch for biological data. Catch data are used to estimate abundance of juvenile Yukon River and Norton Sound salmon, as well as diet, size, condition of the fish, and other factors. These data are used to accurately forecast adult Yukon Chinook run size up to 3 years into the future, enabling better management precision for Yukon salmon during the summer season (Chinook and summer chum), and particularly transboundary stocks under Pacific Salmon Treaty.

### **WW - Kodiak Weirs (\$100.0)**

Karluk: Currently fish tight ~ May 23 and pulled ~9/14. Right now there is a crew of 2 with a part time FB-I. With increment weir would be fish tight May 23 but pulled **9/24** and back to a crew of 3 technicians. This would the FB-I to move around between weirs and ensure consistent field camp operations. This could provide more late-run sockeye and coho opportunity.

Dog Salmon: Currently fish tight ~ May 25 and pulled ~8/7. Right now there is a crew of 2. With increment weir would be fish tight May 23 but pulled **8/20**. This could provide more sockeye, pink, and coho salmon opportunity.

Ayakulik: Currently fish tight ~ May 24 and pulled ~8/24. Right now there is a crew of 2. With increment weir would be fish tight May 23 but pulled **9/15** and back to a crew of 3 technicians. This could provide more late-run sockeye and coho opportunity.

Upper Station currently fish tight ~ May 24 and pulled ~9/11. Right now there is a crew of 2. With increment weir would be fish tight May 23 but pulled **9/20**. This could provide more late-run sockeye and coho opportunity.

### **WW - Chignik Weir (\$100.0)**

The Chignik River weir is the most important salmon stock assessment project in the Chignik Management Area. Daily weir counts are monitored inseason and used directly to determine commercial fishing opportunity. There is currently no dedicated funding for late season operation of the weir. The department does have soft-funding (AKSSF) to cover late season operations for the 2018 field season. Future funding options beyond 2018 are uncertain at this time and as of right now in 2019 weir operations would cease August 1<sup>st</sup>. With the increment, the weir would remain in operation an additional month. The month of August can be a productive part of the run (an average of approximately 1.0 million pounds of sockeye salmon harvested).

## **WW - Kodiak Aerial Salmon Surveys (\$40.0)**

The current aerial survey budget for the Kodiak Management Area (KMA) is \$20.0. It takes 20 hours to fly the entire KMA or \$11.0 (\$550/hr). With additional \$40K in aerial survey budget the department would be able to fly more early sockeye salmon buildup surveys. This will allow more opportunity on local sockeye systems in June. The department would also be able to fly the KMA more frequently. Specifically, there could be more surveys flown on the Alaska Peninsula mainland streams later in season. This could provide additional fishing opportunity on chum and coho salmon later in the season.