

ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE

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Session

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SB 69 – CHINOOK RESEARCH & RESTORATION ENDOWMENT SPONSOR STATEMENT

SB 69 creates the Alaska Chinook salmon research and restoration endowment fund. Grants from the fund would be issued to qualifying organizations. A 7- member board, including the Commissioner of Fish & Game and 6 public members from across the state, would administer the grants.

Chinook salmon, the state fish of Alaska, is an important staple food for Native villages of Alaska. Moreover, they are an economically important species for a number of commercial fisheries and a prized sport fishery resource. Nowhere else are wild Chinook salmon stocks more valued and essential to the basic way of life than in Alaska.

Chinook salmon populations in Alaska have undergone significant shifts in abundance during the past 40 years, yet little is known about the factors influencing these shifts. Eight of the 14 currently listed “stocks of concern” are Chinook salmon stocks.

Recent declines of salmon abundance have caused severe hardship in some areas and anxiety for the fishery-dependent communities of Alaska. Limited commercial fishing on Chinook salmon has occurred in recent years and earnings have deteriorated sharply. Poor Chinook salmon returns can exacerbate allocation tension and conflict between fishery user groups competing for a fully allocated fishery resource.

Over the past twenty-five years, there has been considerable variability in Yukon Chinook salmon population dynamics. Available harvest data show a thirty-six year period of sustained abundance early on, with significant declines during the past fifteen years.

To understand the trends and causes of variation in abundance of Chinook salmon, information concerning biology, freshwater ecology, marine ecology, and population

dynamics are needed to understand the variables controlling population abundance and trends.

Knowledge gaps remain across the State of Alaska indicating that a multi-disciplinary research effort is needed to investigate the role of physical habitat, climate induced environmental variability, and biological response in Chinook salmon populations if we are to meet the needs of Alaskans that depend upon this resource.

This legislation would create a stable, long-term source of funding to support high quality interdisciplinary research. The Alaska Chinook Salmon Research and Restoration Endowment Fund stakeholder board would, along with the Alaska Department of Fish & Game, direct research monies to priority areas and topics based on an adopted Chinook Salmon Action Plan.

These funds may also be used to leverage additional funding by providing necessary matching funds.

With this legislation, Alaska can demonstrate we have the best-managed resources in the world. I urge your support.

