

ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE

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SENATOR PETER A. MICCICHE

SR 5 CHINOOK BYCATCH LIMITS

DISTRICT 0

Sponsor Statement

Anchor Point

Clam Gulch

Cohoe

Diamond Ridge

Fox River

Fritz Creek

Funny River

Halibut Cove

Happy Valley

Homer

Kachemak City

Kachemak Selo

Kalifornsky

Kasilof

Kenai

Nikolaevsk

Ninilchik

Razdolna

Ridgeway

Seldovia

Soldotna

Voznesenka

Alaska's recreational, subsistence, and commercial fisheries have faced dramatic shortfalls of Chinook salmon in recent years leading to fisheries closures and hardship for Alaska residents. In the summer of 2012 Governor Parnell issued a disaster declaration for the Yukon-Kuskokwim and Cook Inlet regions due to low Chinook returns.

In the fall of 2012, the Department of Fish and Game convened a Chinook Symposium in Anchorage to identify king salmon knowledge gaps in order to maintain sustainable stocks. This is one of many efforts to learn more about this important fish and why there has been low abundance in certain areas. While long-term research is underway, it is essential to begin dealing with the problems facing Chinook salmon that we do know about.

One of these problems is salmon bycatch in the Bering Sea and Gulf of Alaska trawl fisheries. According to a 2013 report by the North Pacific Fisheries Management Council, the 5-year average for Chinook salmon bycatch in these fisheries was 40,621 fish. If not intercepted, many of these king salmon would have returned to Alaska waters and provided harvest opportunities as well as much needed escapement.

This resolution asks the North Pacific Fishery Management Council to take action to reduce the level of Chinook salmon bycatch in Bering Sea and Gulf of Alaska trawl fisheries to at least half of the current limits. In this time of low king salmon abundance, it is critical that unintended mortality be reduced. This resolution is an attempt to address a known cause of substantial mortality and help restore strong king salmon runs to our rivers.