



April 11, 2015

Senator Bill Stoltze
Senate State Affairs Committee, Chair
State Capitol Room 125
Juneau AK, 99801

Dear Senator Stoltze,

Kenai River Professional Guide Association (KRPGA) is a 501(c) 6 non-profit trade association of professional guides on the Kenai Peninsula who fish both freshwater and saltwater fisheries in Cook Inlet. **KRPGA is writing you to express our opposition to the confirmation of Mr. Robert Ruffner to the Alaska Board of Fisheries (BOF).**

The BOF plays a vital role in the management of our fisheries on the Kenai and Alaska. We feel that it is imperative to have a balanced board of both commercial and sport interests along with subsistence representation. The primary duty of the BOF is to allocate harvestable surpluses (above fishery conservation needs) of fish between these various user groups. The traditional 3 – 3 – 1 split (3 commercial, 3 sport, and 1 subsistence) has provided a stable format without giving any one sector controlling allocation influence on the BOF.

We believe that the confirmation of Mr. Ruffner to the BOF will upset the balance that has worked well over the years. Although Mr. Ruffner claims to be a personal use and sport angler, he has offered opinions in committee and public forums that seem to contradict this statement or at least shows a lack of understanding of sport fish issues. Locally, although Mr. Ruffner has worked for habitat conservation, he has not been a vocal or strong advocate for personal use and sport fishing access and opportunity for the hundreds of thousands of dip netters and sport anglers.

The seat being replaced has been a traditional personal use / sport fish advocate from Anchorage, the state's largest population center. Although not required by statute, geographic representation has been a hallmark on the BOF. Anchorage residents are a primary user on the Kenai Peninsula public fisheries. As he lives in Soldotna, Mr. Ruffner will not be accessible to residents of Anchorage and will also come under intense pressure from Peninsula commercial fishing interests who dominate local politics.

As such, we are concerned that during past public forums and the recent confirmation hearings, Mr. Ruffner's responses have borrowed thoughts commonly expressed by the members of the

Peninsula commercial fishing community. Specially, he has stated that:

- Recent BOF decisions for Upper Cook Inlet, including allocation actions, are questionable and need to be redressed;
- Cook Inlet commercial fisheries managers need additional flexibility to go outside established management plans to meet escapement goals (use Emergency Opening time to avoid large sockeye escapements regardless of resulting allocative impacts on other fisheries and conservation impacts on other fish stocks);
- Mandatory, weekly commercial set net closures in Cook Inlet fisheries do not provide substantial benefits to in-river personal use and sport fisheries; and
- In-river personal use and sport fisheries on the Kenai River contribute to cumulative habitat impacts that may warrant substantial fishery restrictions even where there is no measurable biological impacts.

The majority of public support for Mr. Ruffner has come from the commercial fishing community, statewide and especially from Cook Inlet. These interests have well known positions in support of severe restrictions of salmon allocations to the personal use and sport fisheries in Cook Inlet and the personal use fishery at Chitina, which are the state's largest personal use and sport fisheries. They have stated in public testimony that the highest value accruing from Cook Inlet salmon comes from maximizing commercial harvests.

It matters where people come from when appointed to the BOF. While Mr. Ruffner should be thanked for his public service on local boards and for his efforts to protect aquatic habitat, he lacks a fisheries background, has no track record of advocacy support for personal use and sport fisheries in Cook Inlet or elsewhere in Alaska, and has close connections to commercial fishing interests that actively works against the interests of the very group this seat has represented for years.

We strongly urge you to vote against confirmation of Mr. Ruffner to the Alaska Board of Fisheries.

Thank you for your time and attention on this matter.

Respectfully,



Steve McClure
KRPGA, President

cc: Alaska State Legislators

Dear Senator Stoltz,

Finding qualified candidates is not always easy, whether it be a new employee, someone running for office or filling seats on boards and commissions. With the later tending to be volunteer and thankless positions.

Having regional diversity on the B of F is critically important in a state the size and regionally diverse as Alaska.

Yes, you could have 7 qualified members from a single area of the state but the perception of the public wouldn't be good. And since the board process prides itself on being publicly driven, it only makes sense to be regionally diverse. Not only for the public perception but also to bring to the table the knowledge specific to their area. That in turn would help the other board members understand what's going on in that part of the state.

The Anchorage area holds about half of the population of the state. One could make the argument that half of the board members should come from there. That sounds ridiculous, right? But not finding a qualified individual from the largest pool of people in the state to choose from is not in the best interest of the people. Even though the legislature is not directed to be regionally diverse, I disagree about having a board without Anchorage area representation.

While we all should be sensitive to environmental issues, the B of F is not the place to push that agenda. Therefore an environmentalist should be not be considered. It is about managing the fisheries. There are other groups that watch and manage environmental issues. Yes, there are environmental factors that affect fisheries, as well as many other factors. The B of F depends on experts from all fields of study to provide data to help them make informed decisions. These groups should work together but the lines should not be blurred. They should be kept separate. Concentrate on what your appointed to do and listen to experts from other agencies on what they were hired or appointed to do.

A person can only do so much in a world filled with so much data to sift through. By having too many irons in the fire the quality of the end product suffers. Great managers surround themselves with different people that excel in different areas. When then happens, more often than not, good decisions are made and everyone wins.

Please do not put someone on the B of F outside of the Anchorage area and would have themselves spread too thin to be effective in the position they are being appointed for.

Sincerely,
Dan Ernhart

Daniel George

From: Andy Couch <fishing@fish4salmon.com>
Sent: Monday, April 13, 2015 1:19 PM
To: Sen. Bill Stoltze; Sen. Charlie Huggins; Sen. Bill Wielechowski; Sen. John Coghill
Subject: Board of Fish Confirmation Hearing in Senate Resources Committee

Senators,

I appreciate the questions you were asking in vetting BOF candidates today, and trust your judgement in how to best proceed. I believe you are doing a good job voicing the concerns of your constituents.

Thank You,

Andy Couch
Fishtale River Guides
(907) 746-2199
fishing@fish4salmon.com