

April 9, 2017

Dear Members of the House Fisheries Committee,

We are writing to you on behalf of the Peninsula Rivers Conservancy, a non-profit organization dedicated to the conservation and protection of all rivers and fish therein but specifically those of the Kenai Peninsula and Southcentral Alaska. Our purpose for reaching out to you today is to express our organization's support for House Bill 199, which proposes important changes to Alaska's fish habitat permitting law. There is a growing need to update this law, and HB 199 could finally set clear standards to protect one of Alaska's most valuable resources: our salmon.

First and foremost, we would like to thank Louise Stutes for introducing House Bill 199, which seeks to update Title 16. Alaskans across the board, from commercial to sport fishing, have weighed in to the Board regarding this matter, and the updates provided through HB 199 take those into consideration, as well as responding to the letter from the Alaska Board of Fisheries. As Title 16 has not been updated since statehood, it is long overdue and necessary to update the current protections surrounding our salmon and fisheries, to ensure it responds to contemporary issues.

Significant concern has been raised over the past ten years or so regarding development projects that could impact salmon habitat. While the Alaska Department of Fish & Game has the authority under Title 16 to issue permits for development projects that may impact fish habitat, the law lacks specific criteria that defines what is or isn't an acceptable level of development activity within anadromous fish habitat. It is because of this that there is little to no faith in the permitting process, from the public point of view, and ensuring that all points are considered and potential significant impacts explored prior to development occurring. HB 199 seeks to strengthen and clearly define the habitat considerations.

We wholeheartedly support and are grateful for the work of the Alaska Department of Fish & Game. However, at this time, Title 16 does not currently mandate public input and involvement in the permitting process, nor does the law as written provide the ADF&G with scientific clarity or certainty to stand up to development efforts that put Alaska's fisheries at risk. The updates within HB 199 would allow the Alaska Department of Fish & Game to deny projects that would cause too much harm to Alaska's salmon rivers and waterways, by creating commonsense standards for mitigation that a developer must meet to protect wild salmon before a project can move forward. In doing so, Alaskans are given a clear voice and opportunity to stand up for the future of our fisheries. As salmon are the lifeblood of Alaska and Alaskans, it is imperative that we be given the chance to weigh in on decisions regarding any potential impact to this.

Additionally, House Bill 199 would create clear scientific and enforceable standards for ADF&G to identify important habitat characteristics, like water quality, instream flow levels, fish passage, and riparian areas that need to be maintained to protect and support the sustainability of Alaska's fisheries, which our current system fails to provide. It will also update the state's anadromous catalogue to include any waterways that produce salmon, which ensures we are not leaving important salmon waters unprotected.

The salmon of Alaska provide food, recreation, tens of thousands of jobs for Alaskans, and hundreds of millions of dollars in economic activity each year. It is essential that we take this opportunity to protect our wild salmon, and in doing so, provide a healthy fishery for many generations of Alaskans to come.

It is for these reasons that the Peninsula Rivers Conservancy fully and strongly supports House Bill 199.

Thank you for your time and attention to this matter,.

Sincerely,

David Lisi

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