



The Nature Conservancy in Alaska
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April 12, 2017

Louise Stutes
Representative District 32
Alaska State House of Representatives
State Capitol Room 406
Juneau, AK 99801

Dear Representative Stutes and House Fisheries Committee members:

I am writing on behalf of the Nature Conservancy Alaska Chapter to show our support for an update to Title 16 - Alaska's fish habitat protection and permitting law, and appreciation for the legislature's initiative in working to modernize the law through refinement of House Bill 199.

The Nature Conservancy in Alaska has been working to address conservation of fish habitat throughout Alaska for several decades. This has included leadership and participation in Alaska's four fish habitat partnerships, surveying streams for inclusion in the Anadromous Waters Catalogue (AWC), seeking to secure instream flow for high value streams, and mapping and quantifying the extent and quality of freshwater salmon habitat in Bristol Bay, the Mat-Su Basin, and Southeast Alaska. This extensive experience informs our support for an update to Title 16.

We are pleased to see language in the bill that takes a precautionary approach to the AWC by presuming all streams are important for anadromous fish. Currently, the fundamental conservation tool to protect salmon and their habitats in Alaska is the Anadromous Fish Act (16.05.871), and in order to receive this protection streams must be surveyed and nominated to the AWC. Alaska Department of Fish and Game has estimated that less than 50% of Alaska's anadromous water bodies are currently listed in the AWC. According to the Mat-Su Basin Salmon Habitat Partnership's Strategic Action Plan, as of 2013 only 4,500 miles of the known 23,900 miles of streams mapped in the Mat-Su basin are in the catalogue. This is less than 20% of the streams in the region. Over the last 7 years, an average of 63 stream miles have been added to the catalogue annually in the Mat-Su; at that rate it will take many years to survey all the potentially anadromous waters. Efforts that we undertook in Bristol Bay to catalogue anadromous habitat demonstrated how expensive this work can be in remote areas; in 2014 and 2015, we helped add 110 miles of stream to the catalogue, at a price tag of near \$550,000.

Salmon are critical to Alaska's economy, ecology and cultures, and if managed properly are an invaluable sustainable resource. The future of our salmon depends upon what happens to them during each life stage, and it is well-known that freshwater habitat loss and fragmentation have been some of the primary drivers in the decline of anadromous fish. Billions of dollars are spent each year in the lower 48 restoring salmon runs that are still intact in Alaska. Here, we still have an opportunity to get it right the first time utilizing responsible development practices to balance the people's needs for salmon with other uses of Alaska's lands and waters.

We appreciate the challenging balance this legislation seeks to achieve between near-term economic growth and sustaining the long-term productivity of Alaska's salmon resources. HB-199 strikes this balance in a way that provides both protections for our fishery resources and clarity for resource developers. Thank you again for taking on the great task of working with stakeholders in updating Title 16 after nearly 60 years, ensuring it will continue to support a healthy Alaskan economy and wild salmon runs for generations to come. Please feel free to contact us if we can assist in this work.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Randall H. Hagenstein", with a long, sweeping horizontal line extending to the right.

Randall H. Hagenstein
State Director, The Nature Conservancy Alaska Chapter