



Southeast Alaska Guides Organization

March 3, 2020

The Honorable Louise Stutes
House Special Committee on Fisheries
State Capitol Building, Room 406
Juneau, AK 99801

Re: HB 247 Sport Fishing Enhancement Surcharge

Dear Representative Stutes and members of the Committee,

Southeast Alaska Guides Organization (SEAGO) is a non-profit entity representing the interests of fishing charter and lodge operations across Southeast, Alaska. We promote sustainable fisheries and fair management, with the goal of a healthy recreational fishing industry which benefits Alaskans and their communities.

We support HB 247, Sport Fishing Enhancement Surcharge.

In Southeast Alaska, sport enhancement money is primarily allocated to king salmon production. Roughly 50% of Southeast sport king harvest for inside waters is of local hatchery origin. Hatchery contribution to inside harvest averaged 17,000 fish for the sport fishery, and 22,000 fish for the commercial troll fishery for the years 2005-2016. These numbers represent substantial economic and personal benefits to Alaskans and coastal communities.

Alaska sport fishing businesses attract customers willing to pay thousands of dollars per angler for opportunities to catch kings alongside other species. Residents regard kings as a valuable source of both food and recreation. The commercial troll fleet benefits from hatchery production in-season, and during winter and spring when kings often fetch a premium price (kings drew \$12 per pound for the recent winter opening).

King hatchery production supplements the common property fishery for each of these groups. As you're likely aware, commercial fishermen self-tax to provide revenue to hatcheries to grow fish. The sport fishery does not have a similar ability to tax itself. It's important sport fishermen share in the costs of raising these fish, and the license enhancement surcharge is an effective vehicle to do that.

Eighty percent of funds collected from surcharges come from non-residents, though Alaskans and their communities enjoy much of the benefit. The surcharge is a natural way of collecting outside money to boost state economies and provide fishing opportunity to Alaskans as well as visitors.

Some stigmatize hatchery enhancement, arguing that hatchery strays mingle with wild stock and weaken genetics. In the case of king salmon, studies done by the Department of Fish and Game show less than 2% straying (0.5% on average) by hatchery reared kings, which suggests little chance of genetic impact on local wild stocks. The number of hatchery king releases are also minor relative to releases of other salmon species, and are not likely a primary threat to ocean carrying capacity.

As the state fish, chinook are an important piece of our culture, and a valuable economic driver. We should continue to subsidize our fisheries through hatchery production, particularly as natural returns face cyclical struggles in our current environment. We encourage the committee to pass HB 247 to allow continued collection of the sport fishing enhancement surcharge to aid production. We would support an amended bill that keeps the original surcharge amount for non-residents, with the additional revenue aimed at increasing production and/or marking of hatchery chinook.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Forrest Braden', with a stylized, flowing script.

Forrest Braden
Executive Director, SEAGO
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