



February 26th, 2024

Senator Bjorkman
Representative Ruffridge

RE: KRSA letter of support SB82 / HB195

Kenai River Sportfishing Association is a 501 (c)3 nonprofit fishery conservation organization dedicated to sustainability of the Kenai as one of the world's greatest sportfishing rivers. Since 1984 KRSA has advocated for responsible angler access and meaningful opportunity for sport and personal-use fishermen.

We are writing today to express support for HB195 and SB82.

We share a concern for our neighbors and their livelihoods, concern for the health of our fisheries, and an honest desire to reduce tension between various sectors.

SB82/HB195 represent one of the best chances to reduce pressure on Alaska's iconic king salmon, while possibly allowing for sustainable commercial fishing. While KRSA is in support of this bill, I'd like to be clear that this effort came from our colleagues in the commercial sector as a way they've identified to solve problems they've recognized.

I will note that some of our members have expressed concern regarding the potential price-tag associated with retiring sites and the origins of the funding to support the buy-back. Regarding funding, it's our understanding that federal support would finance this effort. As far as the amounts, KRSA's concern is conservation of fishery resources – the appropriateness of the funding amount is up to the participants and the overseeing bodies.

KRSA has long held that one of the central challenges to fisheries management in Cook Inlet is that the commercial fishery is oversubscribed as a result of a management loophole exploited in the late 1980s, drawing numerous permit holders from the West Side over to the Peninsula.

SB82/HB195 has been designed so that no one can game the system, participation is completely voluntary, and retirement of qualifying sites is randomized making this program fair. With anticipated federal funding to support this program, SB82/HB195 appears to provide a respectful transition to a more efficient and conservative fishery.

Please feel free to contact our organization at (907)262-8588 if you have any questions.

Respectfully,

Shannon Martin, Executive Director

Testimony on SB 82 in the Senate Finance Committee, February 19, 2024

SB 82 by Senator Bjorkman is continuation of work advanced by former Senator Peter Micciche. I support it. It has broad support in the Cook Inlet setnet fishery.

My history in the fishery

I was raised in Ninilchik and have participated nearby in the set net fishery since statehood in 1959. Before that my father, Nick Leman, operated a fish trap in the same area. Traps were unfortunately outlawed when Alaska became a state. Just think about what we could do with selective harvesting and quality control if we still allowed them—of course, this time with local ownership. My grandfather, Joe Leman, fished an adjacent area with a set gill net before that. So it's fair to say that the Leman family has been fishing this area for most of the past 110 years.

During the past 40 years we have seen a reallocation of the salmon resource, which essentially has been a taking. Especially during the last six seasons we have been limited by gear reduction and early closure of the setnet fishery—ostensibly to protect the Kenai River kings, which we seldom, if ever, catch. And to add insult to injury our 2023 season didn't open at all—and the same is threatened for the 2024 season. Something needs to be done.

Qualified support

SB 82 is a bold approach to secure a voluntary reduction of gear—which will help with management and increase opportunity for those who continue to participate in fishing. Although I support it, I have personal reticence about full buyout for us because I know the importance of passing on this heritage to our grandchildren who are learning about discipline and hard work. Also, I do not like to see families go out of business and have their influence in the marketplace diminished. The bill allows us to make this choice.

Three generations of our family fish 6 permits and I anticipate we would enter the lottery to retire perhaps 2 of them to reduce the size of our operation and non-family crew—with the closure of the water where we fish the nets. We enjoy fishing and would still want to participate with a smaller crew. This program will need a funding source. By my calculation, $200 \times \$260,000$ is \$52 million. That's a lot of money, but that's about the economic impact last year of the closure of the sockeye setnet fishery. The proposed funding source is non-State GF.

Although most of the testimony offered was in strong support of this bill, you also heard from a few fishermen who oppose it. They don't believe the number of permits operating along the 60 miles of beach from Ninilchik to Nikiski is the issue. Rather, they assert that the real problem is misguided policies by the Board of Fisheries that have led to the disaster we have today. I agree with them about that, but if we do nothing our setnet fishery will soon be bankrupt—and become a sad relic of the past—like the fish trap. We need bold action—and soon.

Submitted by Loren Leman
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-----Original Message-----

From: Rod Arno <[REDACTED]>
Sent: Monday, February 19, 2024 11:39 AM
To: Senate Finance Committee <Finance.Committee@akleg.gov>
Cc: Sen. Click Bishop <Sen.Click.Bishop@akleg.gov>; Ken Alper <Ken.Alper@akleg.gov>
Subject: Re: Public Testimony Feb. 19 SB34

The Alaska Outdoor Council, whose members of 10,000 Alaskans regularly access the 222,000,000 acres of federal lands in Alaska support passage of SB 34 out of Committee and on to be signed into law as soon as possible.

There are numerous executive orders (EO) from the Biden administration, and new rulemakings from the US Departments of Interior and Agriculture regarding access and use of federal public lands in Alaska to make it advantageous that an Alaskan citizens commission (CACF) would go out to Alaska to inform and ask Alaskans who access federal lands what their interests are.

The Fiscal note for SB 34 is extremely conservative and would be well spent.

Tripling the funding for Travel would get the word out to rural Alaska where it needs to be heard.

Rod Arno
Alaska Outdoor Council