

From: Peter Velsko
Subject: HB 220
Date: February 3, 2016

Support for HB220

My name is Pete Velsko and I live in Homer, Alaska. In 1976 I began a twenty year career as a Fish Culturist/Fisheries Biologist with the Alaska Department of Fish & Game's recently established Fisheries, Rehabilitation, Enhancement and Development (FRED) Division. From 1976 until the summer of 1991 I worked at the Tutka Bay state fish hatchery across the bay from Homer. In July of 1991 after the hatchery was transferred to Cook Inlet Aquaculture Association, I was transferred to Nome until 1997 when I retired.

In 1971 the Alaska State Legislature created the FRED division in response to serious declining salmon populations in the state. From a high of almost 130 million salmon in the 1930's the state witnessed a steady decline that hit an all time low in 1974 of under 30 million fish. Bond issues to build public hatchery facilities were passed overwhelmingly. By the mid 1980's Alaska's salmon restoration and enhancement efforts along with the growing number of newly established PNP Aquaculture programs made Alaska one of the top salmon producers of the world.

By the late 1980's budget cuts to FRED helped play a hand in the transferring of state hatcheries to the regional aquaculture associations. These PNP's hatcheries created by fisherman or transferred from the state to the PNP's now became the state's big producers of millions of salmon mainly for the commercial fishermen.

In the early 1990's FRED division was combined into the Commercial Fish Division. What remained of other restoration and/or enhancement projects once under FRED division control pretty much fell out of favor with the new Commercial Fish Division as FRED personnel were given other duties more directed toward managing salmon as opposed to actually producing more fish. At least that was my experience in Nome. In 1991 I was transferred to Nome as the FRED division NW Fisheries Coordinator responsible for developing, coordinating and implementing all fisheries rehabilitation and enhancement activities, including educational projects with local schools. My area of responsibility covered 15 villages in the Norton Sound area and mainly consisted of small projects testing the feasibility of using in-stream incubation boxes as a possible way of increasing chum salmon in local area streams. Although we were still in the testing phase, the project was showing good results, but to prove success we needed to go through several life cycles. With the new emphasis now focused more on "traditional" duties of the Commercial Fish Division these kinds of projects had become low priority or discontinued. We never got to fully evaluate this project because we barely completed one life cycle (3-4 yrs.) of a chum salmon before I was assigned other duties that was given a higher priority. Fortunately in the Nome area the local native corporation took up some of these projects.

The disappearance of the FRED division has over time left a large void not readily filled by the PNP Aquaculture Associations which are focused more of producing large numbers of fish for

their constituents, the commercial fishermen. Who's out there to assist the more rural or remote villages who might want some kind of help increasing fishing opportunities out in these outlying places? I believe neither ADF&G nor PNP Aquacultural Associations are in any position to really help these folks. This is the primary reason I support HB 220.

I hope this helps.

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