

Native Village of Eyak
110 Nicholoff Way
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10,000 years in our Traditional Homeland, Prince William Sound, the Copper River Delta, and the Gulf of Alaska

April 3, 2015

Honorable Cathy Giessel
Alaska Senate
State Capitol Room 427
Juneau AK, 99801

Dear Senator Giessel,

The Native Village of Eyak's Traditional Tribal Council is disturbed by the speed and momentum with which SB42 has been pushed through the legislative process, with severely limited opportunities for comment, participation in drafting, or amending the bill. We oppose the passage of SB42 in the strongest possible terms. For our local commercial fisheries, especially the Copper River Drift Gillnet fishery, this could create unnecessary and unproductive losses of fishing opportunity should personal use be prioritized ahead of commercial fisheries.

Extensive radio tagging programs have discovered Copper River salmon take 8-33 days to migrate from the Gulf of Alaska to the first personal use fishery on the Copper River above Haley Creek. Thus, there is a substantial temporal disconnect between the personal use fishery and the commercial fisheries 162 km downriver; therefore, a harvestable surplus can have come and gone from the commercial fishing grounds before arriving at the personal use fishery, and to deny the commercial fleet access is unnecessary and onerous.

The current management strategy for the Copper River is based on data collected from the section of river that lies between these two fisheries, at Miles Lake (Sockeye) and at Baird Canyon/Canyon Creek (Chinook). With the commercial fishery already limited to fishing outside the barrier islands, this substantially reduces the ability of the commercial fleet to target Chinook salmon, such that SB42 is largely relevant only to Sockeye salmon. Currently, the methods used by ADF&G Commercial Fisheries for management of the Sockeye spawning escapement goal already ensures that if an inadequate number of fish are suspected in the river the commercial fishery will close. Thus the Personal Use fishery already has the protections it seeks in the current management plan, and can only cause unnecessary loss of income and revenue to Cordova's commercial fishing families. Moreover, the recent history of Sockeye escapement into the Copper River indicates that this management strategy results in more Sockeye salmon in the system than escapement goals indicate, and thus an abundance of harvestable sockeye available for upriver fisheries.

Further, all state residents can participate in subsistence fisheries, which already supersede commercial fisheries in priority, and so access to the same fish is assured during times of scarcity. Subsistence fisheries already exist on the Copper River, and so this would amount to nothing more than a de-prioritization of commercial fisheries, with no real benefit to users of this resource upriver. While this strategy may be suitable for other parts of the state, it is simply a poor fit statewide.

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As we all know, Alaska's economy is largely built upon resource extraction for profit, whether it be minerals, oil, gas, or fish. All of these contribute to the state economy, which is presently suffering greatly from reduced revenues from the oil and gas sector. Commercial fishing represents Alaska's only truly sustainable commercial activity, and to undermine one of the state's most important commercial fishing fleets, completely outside of the Board of Fish process, and with such urgency and unnecessary speed, abbreviated opportunity for comment, is an affront so egregious that we cannot abide the passage of SB42 and urge you NOT to adopt this bill into law.

Respectfully,

Robert Henrichs

President

Traditional Tribal Council