

Comments to the Alaska Legislature, House Fisheries Committee

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From Dan Dunaway

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Regarding HB 199:

I retired from the Alaska Department of Fish and Game as the Area Sport Fish Biologist for the Bristol Bay area. I spent a total of 22 years in ADFG with nine years managing commercial shellfish in the Bering Sea and Aleutians, and the remaining 12-13 years in the Bristol Bay sport fisheries.

I am opposed to HB199. It may be well meaning, but adoption of this bill would open the door to a myriad of problems and potentially threaten the prestige, health, and populations of Alaska's natural fisheries.

In the Bristol Bay area in 1990 the Board of Fish adopted a Bristol Bay Rainbow Trout Plan. This plan was the culmination of about two years of consultation with the stake holders of the area. A key point of the plan was to maintain NATURAL wild populations of rainbows. It was clear that anglers living in or coming to south west Alaska do not want artificially propagated fish. The Plan continues in force to this day.

Yet over the years, I got a few calls (typically newcomers to the state) suggesting the State stock various waters with Walleye Pike or other species. Non-native fish appeared in some lakes on the Kenai Peninsula.

During my Bristol Bay tenure, I believe a lodge may have surreptitiously transplanted rainbow trout into a system where they had not been known to occur naturally.

Many Alaskan anglers are aware of the very serious problem Northern Pike have become in the Susitna River drainage, regardless how they arrived.

I fear further enabling private hatchery boxes and small scale fish propagation could open a real Pandora's box for the state. There's always those few people who cannot resist the temptation to try to manipulate populations on their own. Allowing small hatchery boxes scattered across the state would be extremely expensive and difficult to monitor.

The potential for accidental introduction of disease, invasive species, genetic dilution and other problems would be greatly increased, particularly as we are seeing warmer weather.

This bill does not provide funding, staffing, or policing oversight of this program. Recent budgets cuts have significantly depleted staffing and some projects in the Department's Fisheries Divisions. Current staff is already expected to do more and more with less and less. I do not believe the Department could even begin to adequately monitor and manage this very unwise program.

By the time a problem or violation is detected, it might be too late and the damage done, or mitigation could be an even greater expense.

Please support responsible fish management and terminate this bill. Thank you.