

September 1, 2020

RE: Board of Fisheries Nominations

Dear Members of the House Resources and Fisheries Committees,

Tanana Chiefs Conference is an Alaska Native non-profit corporation, organized as Dena' Nena' Henash or "Our Land Speaks." We are charged with advancing Tribal self-determination and enhancing regional Native unity for our 37 federally recognized tribes within 42 communities. Our Mission is to provide a unified voice in advancing sovereign tribal governments through the promotion of physical and mental wellness, education, socioeconomic development, and culture of the Interior Alaska Native people. Our communities have relied on Yukon River fisheries to sustain them for generations. We regularly engage in the Board of Fisheries (Board) process as decisions made by the Board directly impact the livelihoods of our communities.

The Yukon and Kuskokwim Rivers comprise the largest subsistence area in the state of Alaska. Hundreds of thousands of salmon are necessary – as outlined by Amounts Necessary for Subsistence (ANS) by the Board – and are harvested each summer for subsistence purposes. The lower Yukon supports a commercial fishery that provides some of the only economic opportunity to the region. The lower Yukon commercial fishery employs over 500 individuals in the region and, at times, over 100 commercial fishermen, amounting to millions of dollars injected in to the rural economy.

The complexity of these river systems – with overlapping species runs, mixed stocks, long salmon migrations and remote locations – present unique and challenging management scenarios for the Alaska Department of Fish and Game. While there is public opportunity to participate through the Advisory Committee (AC) process, we know that that process does not always work as well and efficiently as we hope for rural Alaska. Weather, distance between villages, and funding capacity make it challenging for our regions to meet in-person and to engage as fully and effectively as regions on the road system¹. Our regions lag behind in the number of AC meetings held (Figure 1). This is a clear disadvantage for our region, at no fault of our own.

For these reasons, we believe it is imperative that two of the Board of Fisheries appointees reside in or are extensively familiar with the Yukon region and the Kuskokwim region. Five of the seven Board members and appointees currently reside in or represent Southcentral Alaska. Living in Southcentral Alaska would not necessarily preclude support from our organization; however, none of the Board members or appointees have any experience with Yukon and Kuskokwim fisheries issues. While one nominee resides in the Interior, they have no education or experience that relates to any of the Yukon or Kuskokwim fisheries. Furthermore, as the largest subsistence region in the state, we are concerned that none of the

¹ Langdon, S., T Brelsford, and J. Fall. 2018. State of Alaska's Salmon and People (SASAP), Governance and Subsistence. Alaska Forum for the Environment, Session 1 AFE Salmon Track R1, Slide 38. Anchorage.

Board members or appointees is a self-identified subsistence user; most identify as a sport or commercial fisherperson first, and list subsistence secondarily, and none reside in rural Alaska.

We urge the Senate Resources Committee to respectfully request that the Dunleavy Administration replace two of the four Board appointees with experts from the Yukon and Kuskokwim region.

Sincerely,

Tanana Chiefs Conference



Victor Joseph
Chief/Chairman