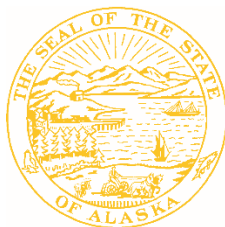


Alaska State Legislature

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Senator Donald C. Olson

SENATE BILL 128

“An Act temporarily closing the commercial salmon fishery in a portion of the Alaska Peninsula and Aleutian Islands; and providing for an effective date.”

Sponsor Statement

Over the last three years, Western and Interior Alaska have faced detrimental collapses in salmon runs along the Yukon River and Kuskokwim River. This collapse has led to fishery closures along the rivers and their tributaries for all fishing types, which has had a severe impact to the subsistence and personal use harvests that residents rely on for their cultural, financial, and physical wellbeing.

In 2021, there was a return decrease for Yukon Chinook and summer Chum of nearly 90%, which left residents along the Yukon and Kuskokwim struggling to make ends meet and put food on the table for their families. At the same time, however, commercial fisheries in the Alaska Peninsula and Aleutian Islands have had record high harvests with 1,168,601 Chum bycatch. Historically, much of this bycatch happens in Area M, a mixed stock intercept fishery in the Alaska Peninsula, Aleutian Islands, and Atka-Amlia Islands.

In February, the Board of Fisheries had the opportunity to address this issue and protect the people and salmon of the Arctic-Yukon-Kuskokwim (AYK) region, they failed to do so by not passing Proposition 140. Proposed by the Fairbanks Advisory Fisheries Sub-Committee, Proposition 140 called to reduce the commercial salmon fishing time in Area M. Due to the failure of the Board to act in accordance with their constitutional obligation under the “sustained yield principle” and statutory obligation to provide reasonable subsistence fishing opportunities under AS 16.05.258(b)(4)(A) I am introducing this legislation.

Senate Bill 128, TEMPORARY CLOSURE OF ALASKA PENINSULA MAMANGEMENT AREA M TO COMMERCIAL SALMON FISHING; directs a temporary closure for commercial fishing in Area M from June 10th, 2023 through June 30th, 2023. This closure allows those fish bound for their natal streams in Western and Interior Alaska to have a fighting chance to reach their spawning grounds.

Furthermore, while Senate Bill 128 addresses concerns about the State and Board of Fisheries constitutional, statutory, and treaty obligations; it also opens the conversation of how the State of Alaska can better manage our fisheries with current science, data, policy, and traditional ecological knowledge from Indigenous communities across the State. As a testifier from Kwethluk said at the Board of Fisheries meeting this last February, “I am asking on behalf of my village and the residents of the Kuskokwim and Yukon rivers, that you make decisions that will benefit all Alaskans- no matter how small it seems to be. We are asking to give a chance for some salmon to return to our rivers. We are asking because we want to see some salmon in our smokehouses and freezers. We are asking not for money... it’s just that we want to eat our food.”