



February 24, 2025

State of Alaska Legislature

House Special Committee on Fisheries

Juneau, Alaska

SEAGO Support for House Concurrent Resolution 1: Establishes a Joint Legislative Task Force to evaluate the sport fishing service industry in Southeast Alaska

Southeast Alaska Guides Organization (SEAGO) represents Southeast Alaska’s 300 plus charter fishing operations, roughly half the State’s guided saltwater fishing activity. Southeast guided anglers brought an estimated \$202 million outside dollars into the Southeast economy in 2024, supporting 1,750 jobs and \$11 million in local tax revenue. This revenue-intense industry benefits Alaskans as a primary driver of local transportation, supply, service, and accommodation businesses.

As market demand grows for self-harvest of wild Alaska seafood through sport fishing, managing participation and resolving conflicts among user groups has become increasingly controversial. To address these challenges, SEAGO sought help from Rep. Rebecca Himschoot to draft a resolution establishing a legislative task force to address participation in the sport fishing service sector with a goal to support the long-term stability of all fishermen, and the economics of established fisheries.

A structured and well-regulated sport fishing service sector would benefit all stakeholders, including Alaska sport anglers, commercial operators, independent guides, local communities, and visiting anglers. SEAGO urges state leadership to take decisive action in forming this task force to develop a balanced and practical approach to industry management.

Proactive leadership is crucial to ensure that the sport fishing service industry remains economically sustainable and continues to drive the small but powerful economic engine that Southeast has come to rely on while minimizing unnecessary burdens on other users. Now is the time to implement a solution that provides clarity, stability, and strategic direction for the future of sport fishing services in Southeast Alaska.

Forrest Braden: Southeast Alaska Guides Organization Director Forrest@seagoalaska.org

Kim Landeen: Southeast Alaska Guides Organization Kim@seagoalaska.org



February 24, 2025

To: Members of the Alaska State Legislature

From: Joshua Badder (Owner) Wild Strawberry Lodge in Sitka, Alaska

Members of the Alaska State Legislature,

I am writing you this letter to make you aware of the challenges we sport fishing lodge owners in SE Alaska have been facing today, tomorrow, and in the near future. Our lodge is family owned and has been in operation in Sitka, Alaska for over 34 years now.

As more and more regulations are imposed on the sport fishing service industry, it is making it ever more difficult to attract sport fishing anglers to our region because of the constant changes and constant reduction in daily / annual limits, size restrictions, and now some closures on the most popular targeted species. These species include Salmon (King), Rockfish, Lingcod, Sablefish, and Halibut.

We have observed a small but noticeable decline in return customers to our area each season. With most clients/customers stating that higher cost, and less fish allotment is driving them to fish elsewhere. It appears that the sportfishing charter industry seems to take the largest loss when new regulations/limits are announced each time. Even though the sportfishing charter industry collectively brings huge amounts of revenue to the State of Alaska, and our local communities.

Please keep in mind the value that sportfishing lodges contribute to local economies in SE Alaska, when you vote and remember your decisions will affect a lot of business owners. I hope that my voice as a fishing lodge/charter operation will be heard in support of HCR 1, as proposed by SEAGO.

Thank you,

Joshua Badder

Owner, Wild Strawberry Lodge, LLC

Toll Free: 1-800-770-2628

Email: info@wildstrawberrylodge.com



02/23/2025

W. Scott McKelvey
PO Box 1218
Craig, Alaska 99921

State of Alaska Legislature
House Special Committee on Fisheries
Juneau, Alaska

Subject: Establishing the Joint Legislative Task Force on Sportfishing Providers in Southeast Alaska (known as HCR 1)

To whom it may concern:

My name is W. Scott McKelvey, and I am the General Manager for the sportfishing operation known as Waterfall Resort. I am writing you all today to express our strong support to HCR 1.

For many years, there has been outcry from within all user groups within the fishing industry, as well as from local residents of many communities around Southeast Alaska, to have a sustainable entry program for the charter sportfishing industry in Southeast Alaska. The issue that is at hand, is presently there is uncontrolled growth opportunities that is putting tremendous pressure on the precious Salmon, Halibut, and other bottom fish species that are in our Alaskan waters. The result of this continued growth and pressure is making it more difficult to manage these fisheries in a manageable way conservation-wise, that will also have huge economic impacts on the both the State of Alaska and local communities. If sportfishing industry growth is allowed to continue at the rate it is, restrictions will require fewer and fewer fish to be retained by both resident and non-resident sportfisher people. This reduction will cause the sportfishing industry to start to wane, and not only will it hurt the businesses in this industry, but will result in a loss to those involved indirectly as well. In 2024, there was an Economic Impact Study completed by the McKinley Research Team on how much the charter sportfishing industry impacts the state, local communities, and businesses directly and indirectly. This reports shows that there was a total of \$202,000,000 in related spending from the Guided Sportfishing Industry. Of this amount, there was \$11,200,000 paid in select taxes, licenses, and fees in 2024. This is meant to show the impact the guided sportfishing fleet provides. Without control on the growth of this industry, we will reach a tipping point where fewer opportunities will be had, and these economic numbers will start to decline, and all will start to suffer from the result.

It is for these reasons that we are strongly in favor of HCR 1, and encourage you all to act before it is too late.

Respectfully,


W. Scott McKelvey
General Manager
Waterfall Resort
scott@waterfallresort.com



February 24, 2025

To: Members of the Alaska State Legislature

From: Justin Karleski (Owner) Wild Strawberry Lodge in Sitka, Alaska

Members of the Alaska State Legislature,

I am writing to you as a concerned small business owner, of a family-owned sport fishing lodge, located in Sitka, Alaska that has been a part of the community for the past 34 years.

Our line of business has been put in the crosshairs, as the regulations seem to always be aimed at the sportfishing service industry. Every year the restrictions on size, quantities of species allowed to be retained, number of closure days, etc., have gotten worse. These increasingly restrictive regulations have been specifically targeting the saltwater sport fishing industry the hardest.

We have noticed a steady decline in trip marketability due to increased regulations which create less and less opportunity. We don't sell fish in a box. We sell the opportunity to catch fish and take them home to share with family and friends. The sport caught species I am referring to are King Salmon, Lingcod, Rockfish, Halibut, and Sablefish.

Towns like Sitka succeed economically from having tourism, and as a fishing community a large part of tourism here is sportfishing. The strict and constant changes in regulations which reduce opportunities (including future in-season management changes), are putting the sport fishing industry at risk. Sportfishing lodges are significant taxpayers, contributing to local economies by bringing in hundreds of millions in revenue from out of state individuals and companies.

I am writing in support of HCR 1 as proposed by SEAGO, because we see that a joint legislative task force is the correct path towards stabilizing the sportfishing service industry in the future.

Thank you,

Justin Karleski

Owner, Wild Strawberry Lodge, LLC

Toll Free: 1-800-770-2628

Email: info@wildstrawberrylodge.com

February 24, 2025



To: Members of the Alaska State Legislature

From: Theresa Weiser (Owner) Alaska Premier Charters, Inc. in Sitka, Alaska

Members of the Alaska State Legislature,

I have been a lodge owner and operator in the saltwater guided sportfishing industry in Sitka, Alaska since 1990, fishing for King Salmon, Halibut, Lingcod, Rockfish and Sablefish. I have seen the guided charter sportfishing industry moderately grow and expand over the years as more and more non-resident folks have made SE Alaska their sportfishing destination. We have also seen significant growth of non-guided fishing entities, particularly during the last four years competing for these same species. Both guided and unguided increased fishing effort over the years has created an imbalance between the number of sport fishing service providers and angler allocations. Available resources are being more than fully utilized!

As a result, the charter industry has been specifically targeted with increasingly restrictive regulations each year, including the future in-season disruptive management for King Salmon, now approved by the Board of Fish in the ADFG toolbox. Each spring we wait for announcements of the upcoming regulations, and we wonder what bad news we will have to tell our clients; and what next will be snipped away this season! And when the new regulations are announced, each year there is ALWAYS something more snipped away – every year! Examples are reduced bag limits, reduced annual limits; fish sizes reduced, slot limits and reverse slots both become more restrictive, closures for some species – for part of or for all of a season; day of the week closures for part of a season - has now become a day of the week closure for the full season - first time this year! We say to ourselves: “They put another nail in the coffin!” And it is usually more than one nail going into the coffin! When does this stop? As it now stands, the unpredictability of the regulations each season creates uncertainty and instability for our businesses as we keep trying to market what has become less and less opportunity to attract clients.

This increased fishing activity over the years, combined with dwindling fish stocks of several species, has resulted in harvest opportunity for our guided fishing clients being significantly less and is now affecting the marketability of trips. If these restrictions continue to get worse and worse each year, and nothing is done to stabilize our industry, existing and future businesses will likely experience economic distress and could stop being viable.

The guided sportfishing industry (lodges) has been a strong continuous economic contributor for coastal communities over the years. The economic data has proven this. Reducing opportunities each year has now put the guided sportfishing industry (lodges) at risk. We all have large economic investments in our vessels and lodge businesses! It is very scary to see our sport service industry specifically being targeted and penalized. Something must change. Either increase the allocations for sport fishing resources, which we know is next to impossible! Or effectively implement a limited entry program for our industry - such as has been done for every other fully utilized fishery in Alaska over the years!

I support HCR 1 in the hopes of putting some controls on the unguided sportfishing services, and stabilize our guided sport fisheries, by creating a controlled entry system for the purposes of resource conservation and to prevent economic distress for all our sportfishing lodge businesses and those that depend on guided sportfishing services for a livelihood. *Plus, we want to keep access to the resources viable to all the public that choose to sport fish from charter boats as their way to put amazing seafood on their tables, while making forever memories with their families and friends. As I always say to our guests: “Nobody can take away your memories ever!”*

Thank you,

Theresa Weiser

Owner / Alaska Premier Charters, Inc.
726 Siginaka Way, Sitka, AK 99835

Phone: 907-738-3879

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CASCADE CREEK LODGE

Dear Members of the Alaska State Legislature:

My name is Nathan Kraft and I'm a part-owner of Cascade Creek Lodge LLC in Sitka, Alaska, along with my brother and sister-in-law. We operate a multi-day guided fishing and lodging business during the summer months, and all three of us live in Southeast Alaska year-round. The 2025 season will be our tenth year in business.

We love what we do and are concerned with the long-term stability of the sport fishing industry. During my time as a charter fishing operator in Sitka, I have observed a steady increase in guided operators alongside increasingly strict regulations for non-resident anglers. Over the years, these decreasing harvest opportunities have made it increasingly difficult to fill bookings. Figuring out a way to correct this disparity through a managed entry program is essential.

As the discussion over sport fishing allocation continues, a managed entry program could benefit the industry. The limited-entry charter halibut permit program has flaws, particularly with the leasing of non-transferable permits. Additionally, the disparity in halibut regulations between guided and non-guided anglers needs to be addressed.

The Southeast Alaska sport fishing industry is a major economic driver, and we must do everything to ensure its continued success.

Sincerely,

Nathan Kraft

Cascade Creek Lodge



P.O. Box 116
Klawock, Ak

Members of the Alaska State Legislature,

My name is Josh Anderson, owner and operator of the Fireweed Lodge located on Prince of Wales island in Klawock Alaska. I am a second-generation owner of the Fireweed Lodge, which I operate alongside my wife and two children. During the summer season we operate 11 Guided fishing vessels, providing world-class fishing experiences to visitors while prioritizing sustainable fishing practices.

As an owner and operator of a long-standing sport fishing business in southeast Alaska, I recognize the growing need to implement a program that regulates the number of sport fishing providers in our fisheries. The increasing pressure on fish stocks, coupled with the rising number of charter operators, has created challenges in maintaining sustainable fisheries for future generations.

Without proper management, we risk overcapitalizing, which can lead to increased competition, resource depletion, and diminishing the vitality of our businesses. Ultimately destabilizing the industry and harming the local economies that rely on sport fishing tourism. A well structured regulatory program would help ensure the long term health of our fisheries while supporting operators who prioritize conservation and sustainability.

Thank you,

Josh Anderson

Alaska Rainforest Adventurers, Inc.

PO Box 19568
Thorne Bay, AK 99919
arainforesta@yahoo.com

Representative Rebecca Himschoot
State Capitol Building, Room 411
Juneau, AK 99801

February 24, 2025

Dear Representative Himschoot,

I am writing to you today as the President of a charter fishing business on the east side of Prince of Wales Island in Thorne Bay. I am a one boat, one operator operation. I am also the Secretary of the Thorne Bay Fisheries Association and a member of the East POWAC. The purpose of my letter is to support HCR1.

In the past twenty years I have been able to see changes in fish stocks and not for the better. There has been a general decrease in salmon, halibut and other preferred species. At the same time there have been moderate increases in the sport-fishing effort.

I am seeing decreased opportunity for clients that come to fish with me in Clarence Strait. Bag and possession limits have been steadily reduced to protect the stocks which is good, but it has reduced the interest of many potential clients. Compound all of that with unrestricted entry into the sport-fishing service industry and there is potential for serious challenges for all existing and potential businesses in the future.

I believe it is time to have a serious discussion about putting limits on entry into the industry to protect it's future viability.

Thank you for your time,



David Egelston
President