

**ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE  
HOUSE SPECIAL COMMITTEE ON FISHERIES**

Anchorage, Alaska

October 19, 2011

2:42 p.m.

**MEMBERS PRESENT**

Representative Steve Thompson, Chair

Representative Alan Austerman

Representative Bob Herron

Representative Scott Kawasaki

Representative Bob Miller

**MEMBERS ABSENT**

Representative Craig Johnson, Vice Chair

Representative Lance Pruitt

**OTHER LEGISLATORS PRESENT**

Representative Paul Seaton

Representative Alan Dick

Representative David Guttenberg

**COMMITTEE CALENDAR**

PRESENTATION: SALMON MANAGEMENT ON THE ARCTIC-YUKON-KUSKOKWIM REGION

- HEARD

**PREVIOUS COMMITTEE ACTION**

No previous action to record

**WITNESS REGISTER**

CORA CAMPBELL, Commissioner  
Alaska Department of Fish & Game (ADF&G)  
Juneau, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Gave opening remarks on behalf of ADF&G during the presentation on salmon management on the Arctic-Yukon-Kuskokwim Region.

JEFF REGNART, Director

Division of Commercial Fisheries  
Alaska Department of Fish & Game (ADF&G)  
Anchorage, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Presented information and answered questions during the presentation on salmon management on the Arctic-Yukon-Kuskokwim Region.

JOHN LINDERMAN, Central Region Supervisor  
Division of Commercial Fisheries  
Alaska Department of Fish & Game (ADF&G)  
Anchorage, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Presented information during the presentation on salmon management on the Arctic-Yukon-Kuskokwim Region.

TIMOTHY ANDREW, Director of Natural Resources  
Association of Village Council Presidents (AVCP)  
Bethel, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Testified during the hearing on salmon management on the Arctic-Yukon-Kuskokwim Region.

ROSE FOSDICK, Vice President  
Natural Resources Division  
Kawerak, Inc.  
Nome, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Gave a presentation entitled, "Resource Management Concerns and Allocations of Management Resources."

JILL KLEIN, Executive Director  
Yukon River Drainage Fisheries Association (YRDFA)  
Anchorage, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Gave a presentation on community involvement in management decisions and monitoring.

KAREN GILLIS, Executive Director  
Bering Sea Fishermen's Association (BSFA)  
Anchorage, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Gave a presentation entitled, "Cooperative Research & Monitoring: Fisheries Management Begins at the Local Level."

ORVILLE HUNTINGTON, Director  
Wildlife Parks  
Tanana Chiefs Conference  
Huslia, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Testified regarding salmon management on the Arctic-Yukon-Kuskokwim Region.

LOUIS GREEN  
Nome, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Testified regarding salmon management on the Arctic-Yukon-Kuskokwim Region.

VERNER WILSON  
Dillingham, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Testified regarding salmon management on the Arctic-Yukon-Kuskokwim Region.

STAN ZURAY  
Tanana Village, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Testified regarding salmon management on the Arctic-Yukon-Kuskokwim Region.

FRED W. ALEXIE, SR.  
Kaltag, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Testified regarding salmon management on the Arctic-Yukon-Kuskokwim Region.

TIM SMITH, President  
Nome Fishermen's Association  
Nome, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Testified regarding salmon management on the Arctic-Yukon-Kuskokwim Region.

BRYAN MARACLE, Director  
Natural Resources  
Council of Athabascan Tribal Governments  
Fort Yukon, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Testified regarding salmon management on the Arctic-Yukon-Kuskokwim Region.

ROY ASHENFELTER  
Nome, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Testified regarding salmon management on the Arctic-Yukon-Kuskokwim Region.

#### **ACTION NARRATIVE**

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**CHAIR STEVE THOMPSON** called the House Special Committee on Fisheries meeting to order at 2:42 p.m. Representatives Thompson, Herron, Kawasaki (via teleconference), and Miller (via teleconference) were present at the call to order.

Representative Austerman arrived as the meeting was in progress. Representatives Joule, Dick, Seaton, and Guttenberg, and Senator Hoffman were also present.

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Presentation: Salmon Management on the Arctic-Yukon-Kuskokwim Region

**Presentation: Salmon Management on the Arctic-Yukon-Kuskokwim Region**

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REPRESENTATIVE HERRON stated that the Arctic-Yukon-Kuskokwim (AYK) Region encompasses 40 percent of Alaska geographically, but some of his constituents wonder if the region is getting its share of attention in terms of subsistence and commercial fishing management practices by the state. He expressed his hope that this hearing would lead toward improvements in those areas.

REPRESENTATIVE HERRON listed the following factors affecting AYK's wild salmon: the conditions of the North Pacific Ocean; high profile, high seas illegal fishing; climate change; regulated intercept fisheries, both on the high seas and rivers; the competition between subsistence, commercial, and personal use consumption fishing; and the new threat of a flu-like virus on salmon.

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CORA CAMPBELL, Commissioner, Alaska Department of Fish & Game (ADF&G), stated that the department pulled together a considerable amount of information in response to the questions by the committee's staff, and she expressed appreciation for the ongoing interest that the legislature has had on this topic. She spoke of the dependency of people in the AYK Region on fish species for survival, both in terms of subsistence and commercial fishing, and she said necessary restrictions, particularly on subsistence, have led to hardship in the region. She said the investment made by the state and legislature has allowed the department to procure the necessary tools to improve its assessments, to provide additional certainty about salmon runs in the region, and to provide more adaptive assessment and management in an attempt to provide as much opportunity during times of "low abundance." She said this does not eliminate the hardship endured by those in the region when subsistence

closures are necessary, and she said the department still has additional work to do.

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REPRESENTATIVE HERRON asked for comment regarding the "emotional threat" of [the recent infectious salmon anemia (ISA) virus of salmon in British Columbia].

COMMISSIONER CAMPBELL said the department's pathologist has been studying that virus since its discovery. She deferred to Jeff Regnart for further response.

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JEFF REGNART, Director, Division of Commercial Fisheries, Alaska Department of Fish & Game (ADF&G), stated that it is known that salmon can carry ISA, but it is yet unknown whether the virus can be detrimental to the fish; more work needs to be done with the samples to make that determination.

REPRESENTATIVE DICK suggested that it would be good for those in the AYK Region to receive the information he recently received from Craig Fleener in Bethel. He said he thinks that would improve the relationship between those people and the department, and allow the people to apply that information and to ask pertinent questions.

REPRESENTATIVE SEATON said the House Special Committee on Fisheries worked to get reports done to show the reasons why "over-escapement" was taking place, and to address fish runs where there was a deficit and money was lost to the local economy due to foregone harvest. He asked if the department has continued its work on the reports of monitored streams, and if the results of that work are being reported back to the legislature.

MR. REGNART said the department has continued the process of determining whether it met its escapement goals and whether additional measures could be used to affect those areas where there was foregone harvest.

CHAIR THOMPSON asked if the department has a time frame in mind when the report will be completed.

MR. REGNART said this process has been done by the department for some time now, and he recollected that the reports are usually available by mid-January.

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REPRESENTATIVE HERRON requested information regarding the age of returning Chinook salmon in the AYK Region. He explained that there is concern that there are no more eight- or seven-year-old Chinook salmon, but there is information that there are six- and five-year-old Chinook salmon.

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JOHN LINDERMAN, Central Region Supervisor, Division of Commercial Fisheries, Alaska Department of Fish & Game (ADF&G), stated that the AYK Region extends from the Alaska Range to the North Slope and from the Canadian border to the Bering Sea coast, at least north of the Bristol Bay area. He said it is broken up into the following fisheries management areas: the Arctic area, comprised of Kotzebue Sound, the Port Clarence area, and the Norton Sound area, inclusive of St. Lawrence Island; the Yukon northern area, comprised of the U.S. portion of the Yukon River drainage, and the North Slope from Point Hope to the Canadian border along the Beaufort and Chukchi Seas; and the Kuskokwim area, comprised of the Kuskokwim River drainage and Kuskokwim Bay areas, including both southern and northern Kuskokwim Bay and Nunivak Island.

MR. LINDERMAN said the AYK Region is one of the most remote in the state, comprised primarily of small, remote communities, with the exception of Fairbanks, Bethel, Nome, and Barrow. He said there is a large Alaska Native population throughout the region, particularly in the small rural communities. Most of the communities are detached from the road system and are accessible only by air or water. Mr. Linderman said subsistence is prevalent throughout the region.

MR. LINDERMAN said the AYK Region's subsistence fishery harvests all species of salmon - Chinook probably being the most desired, as well as herring, shellfish, crab, halibut, whitefish, burbot, and char. He said commercial fisheries within the AYK region are small compared to other commercial fisheries in the state. The majority of those commercial fisheries are focused on harvesting salmon, but there are also king crab, herring, and halibut, and non-salmon, freshwater fisheries. The latter are primarily specific to the Yukon River drainage for whitefish and

lamprey. He said the majority of the commercial activity occurs in remote areas of the region, and the majority of participation in those fisheries is at the local level thus the fisheries are small in scale, but great in economic impact. He explained that there is limited economic activity in these remote areas of the state. He said there is a strong connection between commercial and subsistence fisheries in the AYK Region because much of the income gained through commercial fishing activity is put back into subsistence fishing and hunting.

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MR. LINDERMAN stated that sport fisheries within the AYK Region are also small in scale compared to the rest of the state, and they are focused primarily on salmon and resident species, including trout, Arctic grayling, sheefish, and pike. He relayed that sport fishing occurs in urban, non-subsistence areas, such as Fairbanks, but that there are "guiding operations as well as private sport activity" throughout the AYK Region. Harvest from sport fishing is fairly low compared to the subsistence and commercial fisheries that occur throughout the region.

MR. LINDERMAN next gave an overview of the 2011 AYK Region salmon fishery, broken down by the previously described management areas. In the Norton Sound area, he reported, Unakaleet Chinook abundance was poor, which required restrictions and a late season closure in order to achieve adequate escapements within the drainage. However, opportunity was provided for subsistence fishing of other species, such as chum and Coho salmon. He said the Nome sub-district chum run has improved from its historical lows; since 2005, that run has been operated under a Tier I fishery. Overall, he related, Norton Sound commercial salmon fisheries realized some of the highest commercial harvest and participation that ADF&G has seen in decades, and fishermen benefited from a record high ex-vessel value in that fishery in 2011. He said the summer red king crab fishery in Norton Sound achieved its quota earlier than expected this year, and fishermen benefited from a record ex-vessel value in that fishery in 2011.

MR. LINDERMAN said the Kuskokwim area experienced a second consecutive year of poor Chinook salmon abundance, which resulted in periodic closures to the Lower Yukon-Kuskokwim subsistence fishery and reduced commercial opportunity in Kuskokwim Bay areas within the month of June. Area chum runs were above average, sockeye runs were highly variable depending

on the system in the area - average to below average - and Coho runs were average. He said this allowed for adequate subsistence opportunity and harvest of these species. He stated that although commercial activity was reduced or delayed in response to Chinook conservation measures, overall commercial harvest in the Kuskokwim area was average and participation and value was above average in 2011.

MR. LINDERMAN said the Yukon River Chinook run was poor in 2011, resulting in reductions to subsistence fishing time throughout the drainage, reduced sport fishing bag limits, no directed commercial Chinook salmon fishery, and barring of the sale of Chinook salmon caught incidental to other fisheries - specifically summer chum salmon. He said management actions taken this year resulted in achieving the Canadian border objectives for Chinook salmon, while still maximizing the U.S. harvest opportunity on surplus fish in excess of Canadian objectives, and overall drainage-wide escapement needs. He specified that the border objectives are established by the Yukon River panel with a range of 42,000 to 55,000, with provision for a border passing agreement, which is approximately 5,000 fish. The estimated border passage this year was 49,780. Mr. Linderman said the summer chum run was well above average in 2011, although ongoing conservation measures directed at Chinook salmon did limit commercial harvest opportunity on available surpluses of summer chum. Fall chum abundance was also above average, which provided for unrestricted subsistence fishing, and Canadian border objectives were also achieved. Furthermore, an above average commercial harvest was achieved, he noted.

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REPRESENTATIVE SEATON, regarding a situation in which there is a surplus of chum and a Chinook restriction, asked if the department has been talking with local populations to come up with any other strategies for harvest, other than gillnetting, so that the foregone harvest could be taken without jeopardizing Chinook salmon.

MR. LINDERMAN answered yes. He said the department has been considering gear strategies, and "time and area" strategies. He said there is the ability, especially through lower Yukon River test fisheries, to determine when high abundance of chum may be present in certain districts in concurrence with a low abundance of Chinook salmon. He said the department has even split districts into sub-districts to take advantage of the numbers of chum and Chinook and minimize the impact of incidental harvest

on those species. He said there is also experimental work being done to determine whether fish wheels would be feasible in those districts. Traditionally, he explained, fish wheels have not been feasible in that area, because specific conditions are needed to make them effective. If fish wheels are viable, they offer two potential benefits: they usually don't catch many Chinook, but do catch more chum, because they are close to shore; and fish wheels make it possible to "live release" Chinook salmon that may be caught in them. He said the department is open to ideas.

MR. LINDERMAN, in response to a follow-up question, said there would be no restrictions to using fish wheels. He said this year the department has the ability to have time and area openings and closures. He indicated that the department has strategies that it could put in play, but may need statutory change.

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REPRESENTATIVE GUTTENBERG asked if the department foresees any other conservation measures other than just managing the salmon coming up the river.

MR. LINDERMAN said that is a difficult question to answer. He said the ability exists to change district boundaries and allow for more flexibility in management. Much of that can be done independent of regulation, given the authority of the department with respect to time and area. He cautioned that "going down those roads" might confuse users, but suggested that having users get used to regulations in the process of adopting them might be useful. He said there are several approaches and strategies that can be taken, but they revolve around the gear, and time and area, as "broad topics of the tools that are available to management."

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REPRESENTATIVE DICK said he lives on headwaters and is always thinking about spawning grounds. He said the sheefish follow fry down river and consume them, and he suggested the department do a study about predatory fish. He said he thinks attention should be given to ways to get the salmon "down to the mouth" and into the ocean.

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MR. REGNART directed attention to a handout [included in the committee packet], which shows a summary of the FY 01 - FY 12 budgets. For the Division of Commercial Fisheries, the numbers for the general fund and special projects ran from \$44.7 million to \$67.4 million. The general fund and special projects amounts for the AYK Region ran between \$9.5 million and \$6.7 million during the same time period. The AYK Region sport fish totals ran between \$24.9 and \$49.1 million, but at this point are a little less than that, he said.

MR. REGNART said the department has portions of operating revenue and capital that go toward stocks that have been of concern since FY 07. He said the amount spent in the overall region to study those stocks of concern has increased from \$2.2 million to \$4.2 million since FY 07. He gave a breakdown of the increase in dollars spent by area: Norton Sound, \$260,000 to \$500,000; the Yukon, just over \$800,000 to approximately \$2.2 million; Kuskokwim, \$540,000 to \$640,000.

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MR. REGNART said when the current assessment programs were looked at for the overall area, managers in the area felt it would be beneficial to have additional sonar programs at the tributary level. He said recording tributary salmon passage would do the following: provide total passage of the system and escapement estimates; allow for the assessment and/or the establishment of escapement goals; provide in-season and post-season ability to manage the terminal fisheries if they do exist in those tributaries; and feed into the general understanding of stock status. The cost for a small system would be \$150,000 for start-up and \$150,000 annually. The cost for a system with sonar in a large river environment, he said, would cost approximately \$400,000 for start-up and \$400,000 annually.

MR. REGNART said that between FY 00 and FY 11, the Alaska Sustainable Salmon Fund (AKSSF) has funded about 68 individual state, federal, and nongovernmental organization (NGO) projects at a total of just over \$7 million. Many of those projects were in collaboration with ADF&G and included: research, large riverine, radio telemetry, run reconstruction, mark and recapture, marine, and juvenile study programs. He noted that the AKSSF funding source is the same as the Pacific Coastal Salmon Recovery Fund (PCSRF) - the name changed over the years.

MR. REGNART said enhancement work is being done in the Norton Sound area. The department has a statewide private nonprofit

(PNP) office that assists the Regional Planning Team (RPT) with its long-range enhancement program effort. He said the department also has the ability to review and monitor different enhancement programs through the permitting process and is also working on how to get access to chums when Chinook are low in abundance, such as the opportunities given to users for fall chums in the Yukon River. He said the department is working with locals and NGOs to gain access to local resources. He invited Mr. Linderman to talk about stocks of concern and actions.

CHAIR THOMPSON said he thinks everyone present wants to know when there will be positive results.

MR. REGNART agreed there have been millions of dollars spent over the last ten to twelve years, and the department has learned a lot. It now understands more stock-specific information, can build total runs, and can come up with more accurate tables. He opined the department is in a better position to more accurately demonstrate to the public, the Board of Fisheries (BOF), and the legislature, what the goals should be in the systems. He said it is a matter of getting the right number of spawners and letting Mother Nature take her course. At this point, because of what the department has learned through its projects, it is staged to take full advantage of production, and although Chinook production has been poor, there has been an indication that that is turning around, as the department hopes.

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REPRESENTATIVE HERRON questioned why areas of stock concern still exist and what tool the department is missing or has not utilized.

MR. REGNART said he cannot point out a tool that the department does not have; in fact, the department has a greater understanding of productivity, but that does not change environment. He said there have been changes, some stock-specific and some species-specific, however, the department does not have the answer regarding Yukon River Chinook as many of the changes are being driven by the marine environment. It is very difficult to garner information in a marine environment.

MR. LINDERMAN, in response to Representative Herron, agreed there has been a decline since the mid-'80s of 8-year-olds in the Yukon. However, 7-year-olds are still seen, and the

predominate age class in the Chinook population in the Yukon [River] has always been 5- to 6-year-olds. He further noted that 4-year-olds are less frequently seen. There has been a recent decline in the number of 7-year-olds, but there has been a "stabilizing to some extent" of the current trends in age class within a short time frame of 5-plus years. Mr. Linderman opined it is too early to determine whether that is a trend that is going to remain or change.

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REPRESENTATIVE AUSTERMAN asked if the department needs, and is anticipating, money coming in from sustainable salmon funds that can be used toward further study on the Yukon. He queried as to whether the stocks of concern of '07, and the department's stocks of concern of today, are the same.

MR. REGNARD answered that the concern is partly the same. He said ADF&G is going to "touch on stocks of concern," including "what was started in 2000 when the designation actually came into existence," what has changed, and where the department currently is. Regarding the dollars spent on studies, he said the department is constantly looking for ways to improve its data. He related that when there is a stock of concern there is a higher level of expectation that the department can "learn something that we haven't known before."

REPRESENTATIVE AUSTERMAN asked what proposals currently are coming forth from the department regarding "the marine aspect."

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MR. LINDERMAN said a study through the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) in Juneau, which focuses exclusively on Yukon River Canadian orange and Chinook salmon, is an example of the recent increase in ADF&G's collaboration with NMFS and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA). He said this project involves genetics evaluation - Chinook salmon of Canadian origin are genetically distinct - and stated, "These are essentially fish just after they've entered into saltwater in their first year." He said the department sees this project as one through which to gain insight into that specific stock and, by extension, into the Yukon River stock in general. In response to a follow-up question, he confirmed that the department does work with multiple agencies with respect to genetics.

MR. LINDERMAN responded to further questions from Representative Austerman. He specified that while the Yukon River Canadian Chinook salmon are genetically distinct, others species are not. He stated that achieving escapement of those Yukon River Canadian Chinook salmon is critical to the sustainability of the overall stock; approximately half of the entire Yukon River Chinook run is produced by fish that spawn and rear within Canadian waters. He said 47,000 is the number of fish that historically have made it across the border; it is not the escapement number.

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CHAIR THOMPSON asked if the changes in abundance and age class are irreversible.

MR. LINDERMAN answered that this is an issue that ADF&G has studied, specifically as it relates to the Yukon River, and it plans to continue investigation on the Kuskokwim River, as well. He talked about the involvement of the BOF in multiple studies conducted over a decade to determine the causes and history of the age class. He said the result of the board looking at that issue was a mesh size restriction in 2011. Prior to that restriction, both subsistence and commercial fisheries were unrestricted when targeting Chinook salmon using gillnet mesh gear. He said a 7.5-inch mesh size allows other species, including chum, to swim through the net. He said the expected result is to have the escapements mimic the same age, sex, and size class that the return was prior to harvest occurring, and the department will continue its monitoring.

CHAIR THOMPSON asked how accurate the bycatch counts were for offshore commercial fishing of salmon.

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MR. REGNART replied that the department feels that the bycatch number in today's offshore fishery is a fairly accurate representation of what's being caught, in large part due to some of the changes that have occurred there with 100 percent observer coverage.

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MR. LINDERMAN listed the four current stocks of concern within the AYK Region: Norton Sound sub-district 1 chum; Norton Sound sub-districts 2 and 3 chum; Norton Sound sub-districts 5 and 6

Chinook; and Yukon River Chinook. The year 2000 - just after the sustainable salmon policy was put into regulation - was the first year that stocks of concern were established within AYK. At that time there were a total of nine stocks of concern, including Yukon fall chum, Kuskokwim River Chinook, and Kuskokwim River chum salmon. He said there have been improvements in several of those runs, in the Kuskokwim River in particular.

MR. LINDERMAN, regarding implications of stocks of concern to users, stated that salmon are primarily managed to achieve adequate escapements to sustain the runs indefinitely. If escapements are not achieved, then harvest is typically reduced in order to increase the number of fish that are making it to the spawning grounds. He said the specific impact to users is variable, depending upon the type of stock concern designation, of which there are three: a yield concern, which is primarily focused on not achieving the same level of harvest surplus; a management concern, which means the result of management on harvest levels; and a conservation concern, which relates to not achieving adequate escapements, even if all fisheries, by function, were closed.

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MR. LINDERMAN said current stocks of concern are focused on yields. He said there is a refocus on ensuring that adequate escapements will be achieved before allowing unlimited harvest. The primary effect on that, he said, is on the commercial fisheries. He acknowledged that in recent years there have been additional restrictions "within the Yukon Chinook fishery to the subsistence fishery and a complete closure." He indicated that restrictions will be evaluated over a number of years, through the AYK board cycle, to see whether that stock of concern designation warrants change. Mr. Linderman said the one stock of concern for which restrictions have been listed in regulation is Nome district chum salmon. He said the Tier II fishery was actually put in place prior to that designation because it predated the sustainable salmon policy. He stated, "We haven't seen a Tier II fishery in [the] Nome area, given increases in abundance of those Nome area chum salmon since ... mid 2000." He said the numbers have not increased to the point that would support a commercial fishery, but it is encouraging to have seen an increase in abundance so that the effect on subsistence users is not as great.

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REPRESENTATIVE SEATON asked if all the department's stocks of concern are those that failed to meet escapement goals instead of those that are exceeding escapement goals.

MR. REGNARD answered yes. He said the department has discussed the concept of goals that may be exceeded routinely for a number of years, and whether that would be designated as a yield concern or a management concern. He said trying to figure out the effects of excess stock is more difficult.

REPRESENTATIVE SEATON suggested that the definition needs to change.

REPRESENTATIVE HERRON concurred with Representative Seaton that there may need to be another level of concern. He expressed fear that current management of the Kuskokwim will result in going to Tier II, which he said would be disastrous.

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TIMOTHY ANDREW, Director of Natural Resources, Association of Village Council Presidents (AVCP), noted that he was speaking in place of Myron Naneng, president of AVCP, who could not be present. Mr. Andrew stated that the AVCP Region encompasses the lower Yukon River and much of the Kuskokwim River, and the people there are dependent upon salmon. He said the people who reside in this region consume about 664 pounds per capita of wild food, 60 percent of which is fish, and approximately 80 percent of that is salmon. He said the Chinook fishery on the Yukon and Kuskokwim Rivers makes up 80 percent of the subsistence utilization in the state of Alaska. In the last three years, the subsistence harvest of Chinook salmon on the Yukon River fell near or below the minimum necessary for subsistence. He remarked that within the department's presentation he had not heard mention of the amounts necessary for subsistence. In 2011, he said, it is likely that those numbers will fall lower still.

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MR. ANDREW stated that the commercial ex-vessel value fell from \$9,957,002 in 1992 to \$20,970 in 2009, and he said in 2011 that number likely will have dropped further. The commercial fishing permits on the lower Yukon River have dropped from 798 down to 379 during the period between the 1970s and 2011. Mr. Andrew said the commercialization of Chinook salmon has dropped from

158,018 in 1981 to only 316 in 2009, and it is expected to drop further in 2011. The subsistence utilization of Chinook salmon dropped from 63,915 in 1993 to 32,977 in 2009, and would likely be the same or less [in 2011].

MR. ANDREW said Yukon River Chinook salmon have been listed as a stock of concern because of chronic lower returns. He said that although its assertions are anecdotal at this time, AVCP believes that the quality of escapement is a current issue for both rivers. During both the Kuskokwim Interagency meeting held in Anchorage in spring of this year, and the Kuskokwim River Salmon Management Working Group meeting in summer of this year, AVCP recommended the utilization of six-inch gear to allow subsistence opportunity to harvest and target jack salmon and improve the quality of escapement on the Kuskokwim River. He said ADF&G responded that all kings are necessary to meet the escapement goals. He said, "It appears to us that quality of escapement is not a concern, but managers' ability to meet the escapement goals is the ultimate goal." He said salmon girth and weight are important in improving escapement quality.

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MR. ANDREW stated that it is AVCP's opinion that if the pilot station sonar is going to be used as a major management tool, then there needs to be a protocol to increase data accuracy during high-debris, high-silt, and high-water years. He explained that it is in these years that subsistence restrictions to include absolute subsistence closures are endured. He said ADF&G has years of run reconstruction data from testing variances and questionable operational years, and AVCP believes that that data can aid in developing protocol. He said despite the conservation measures instituted by ADF&G and the Office of Subsistence Management, since the crash of salmon resources in 1998, there have not been any appreciable improvements in the run.

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MR. ANDREW said another issue, which is controversial on the Yukon River, is quantifying the harvest. He said the salmon harvested in the customary trade fisheries must be a priority. The reallocation of a legitimate commercial fishery to an unquantifiable customary trade fishery is dangerous for resource management. He said during his testimony to the federal subsistence board, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Special Agent Stan Pruszenski, chief law enforcement agent for Alaska, indicated

that 80 percent of the customary trade harvest of salmon occurred in state waters. No one on the state side of the fishery management arena is concerned about this, he said. Mr. Andrew offered to answer questions.

MR. ANDREW, in response to Representative Dick, said in 2009 and 2011 there were high waters on the Yukon River, with high amounts of silt and debris. During those years, the most restrictive subsistence regulations were in place. He said data from sonar shows a conservative count, not the total number of salmon that went upriver to spawn. He clarified that it was the department that said it was counting conservatively. He explained that AVCP would like the department to do some run reconstruction to minimize the impacts of restrictions on subsistence and commercial users of Chinook salmon on the Yukon River.

MR. ANDREW, in response to Representative Herron, said he has been fishing since he was 11, and there have been years of low chum salmon returns, and years of low Chinook salmon returns. He said his concern regarding 7.5-inch gear is that when there is a low abundance of summer chum salmon, which run concurrently with Chinook salmon, the closure will be on both species.

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MR. ANDREW, in response to Representative Seaton, relayed that customary trade is allowed under federal statute, through the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act (ANILCA), which allows a person to process salmon and sell it to anybody. He offered his understanding that it is illegal under state law, but that law is unenforced.

CHAIR THOMPSON announced that the committee would hear a presentation by Rose Fosdick.

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ROSE FOSDICK, Vice President, Natural Resources Division, Kawerak, Inc. ("Kawerak"), gave a presentation entitled, "Resource Management Concerns and Allocations of Management Resources." She referred to a handout listing fish numbers in surrounding rivers, and she said Kawerak has kept track of the following rivers in 2003 and 2011: Snake, Nome, Eldorado, Noatak, Pilgrim, North, and Quinhagak. She said Kawerak is a regional nonprofit organization serving 15 communities located on the Seward Peninsula, St. Lawrence Island, and Diomedes

Island. She said the Norton Sound and Bering Strait Regions are concerned and request that the legislature direct attention and funding toward failing regional salmon stocks.

MS. FOSDICK said Kawerak supports salmon bycatch limits and additional conservation measures for Bering Sea trawl fishers and the South Peninsula False Pass sockeye salmon fishery to prevent the loss of valuable subsistence salmon resources. She said Kawerak requests that the legislature appropriate money to fund salmon research and restoration efforts in Western Alaska to the Alaska Sustainable Salmon Fund (AKSSF).

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MS. FOSDICK said despite the fact there is mandated subsistence priority at both the federal and state level, commercial fishing interests have been favored by government fisheries managers at both the state and federal level. She said management of Western Alaska salmon falls under the jurisdiction of ADF&G and NMFS, on which the North Pacific Fisheries Management Council (NPFMC) has a lot influence on decisions. Ms. Fosdick said NMFS manages salmon caught incidentally by offshore and trawl fisheries, and attempts to minimize the impact on large-scale pollock fisheries, without regard to the annual fluctuations in salmon returns, or state management measures.

MS. FOSDICK said Inupiaq, Yupik, and St. Lawrence Yupik cultures and traditions are based on hunting, fishing, and living off the land. She said the people there want to maintain their subsistence practices and prefer subsistence food over store-bought food. She stated, "Our subsistence needs are no less important than offshore fisheries." She indicated that she would be giving charts to the committee that show decreasing escapements in Bering Strait and Norton Sound, and the increasing bycatch of salmon by trawl fishermen. She said NPFMC is preparing a chum salmon bycatch management plan for the Bering Sea pollock fishery. She stated that Kawerak supports a meaningful bycatch cap and additional measures which may actually reduce chum salmon bycatch in the region.

MS. FOSDICK talked about ADF&G's management of chum salmon fishing, noting that the department has tried Tier II fishing measures, which have not been well-received or successful. She said whenever harvest is allowed after the run begins, it is for only two open periods per week in the marine waters. She said Kawerak believes that the managers are out of options to preserve Nome sub-district chum salmon stocks, and she opined

that the burden should be shared with False Pass sockeye salmon fishermen and the federally managed pollock industry.

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MS. FOSDICK listed the following numbers of species that were counted at the weir at Pilgrim River in the summer of 2011: 8,449 sockeye salmon, 269 Coho salmon, 44 king salmon, and 3,364 pink salmon. She said it is becoming apparent that filing an Endangered Species Act (ESA) petition is an option to consider, realizing that NOAA funds the Pacific Coastal Salmon Recovery Fund (PCSRF) and AKSSF obtains its funding from that fund. She stated that Alaska does not have "listed species of salmon," so the focus of projects and funds has been on salmon enhancement and harvest management. She said Kawerak also believes that ADF&G has at its discretion the ability to make funding available to the AYK Region so that programs could result in funding research needs similar to the needs that were identified in the AYK Sustainable Salmon Initiative (SSI) research and restoration plan. She said Kawerak believes that part of the reason the state has funneled money to the AKSSF and avoided making funds available to the AYK Region is because by doing so, it is able to direct funds to its own preferred projects, with less rigorous scientific review. She said through its actions, ADF&G has excluded the AYK stakeholders from participating in the decision-making process. The Bering Strait and Norton Sound Region has experienced drastic fish decline since the 1990s, and fish returns continue to decline.

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MS. FOSDICK, reading from a handout, listed stipulations in the AKSSF call for proposals for FY 11 funding, and named criteria that must be met in order for projects to qualify as being of high strategic importance. She then described the strategic focus for the AYK Region stock assessment. She said the strategic concerns identified in the AYK Region have no relevance to what is going on in the Bering Strait or Bethel Regions. She said Kawerak is concerned about the survival of stocks and gave examples to support her previous statement that ADF&G treats the AYK subsistence fisheries as being of lower importance than commercial fisheries, evidenced by the allocation of staff, resources, and research, the decision of the BOF to remove chum salmon caps, and the decision of NMFS to set a high Chinook cap. She said NOAA's PCSRF report shows that there is an overwhelming need for research in the AYK Regions.

MS. FOSDICK concluded by listing Kawerak's recommendations as follows: funds be set aside by ADF&G for AYK Region research; a process be used wherein the recommendations of rural Alaskans are solicited and incorporated into plans; a review be done by the House Resources Standing Committee of the unique collaboration, research, communication, and efforts of the Alaska Yukon Kuskokwim Sustainable Salmon Initiative (AYK SSI) Steering Committee; that the legislature send letters to the Secretary of Commerce to request protection of chum salmon through a low bycatch cap; that meaningful salmon bycatch limits be established for the South Peninsula False Pass sockeye salmon fishery; and additional research and restoration funds be made available to address fishery concerns in the Norton Sound Region.

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MS. FOSDICK, in response to Representative Seaton, indicated that the information on the charts to which she previously referred came from ADF&G, and she confirmed that no goals are established for the Pilgrim and North Rivers. She said a point of frustration has been that when there are no escapement goals, the perception that follows is that there is no problem to address.

MS. FOSDICK, in response to Representative Austerman, said Kawerak appreciates the fact that funds have been spent on the AYK Region, but she said a closer look will show that most of that money is being spent on ADF&G projects. In further response to Representative Austerman, she clarified that a possible ESA would involve chum salmon.

[4:12:15 PM](#)

The committee took an at-ease from 4:12 p.m. to 4:25 p.m.

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CHAIR THOMPSON announced that the committee would hear next from Jill Klein of the Yukon River Drainage Fisheries Association, regarding community involvement in management decisions and monitoring.

[4:26:26 PM](#)

JILL KLEIN, Executive Director, Yukon River Drainage Fisheries Association (YRDFA), stated that YRDFA is an association of

subsistence and commercial fishermen with a mission of promoting and protecting all healthy fisheries and cultures within the Yukon River drainage. She said the association was formed in 1991 in response to disastrously low salmon runs. In addition to its mission, YRDFA's goal is to foster and improve communication among fishermen and between fishermen and managers. She said the board is comprised of 30 delegates - 16 members and 14 alternates - representing each community along the Yukon River, and meets annually to discuss fishing issues. She said clearly the rapidly declining salmon runs are the issue of utmost importance on the Yukon River.

MS. KLEIN said Chinook salmon are a critical source of food, and the subsistence fisheries and the salmon are a key component to the indigenous cultures of the region. She stated that recent reductions in subsistence Chinook salmon fishing times and changes to gillnet fishing gear have greatly impacted the Yukon River communities. Furthermore, the lack of commercial Chinook salmon fisheries necessitated by the Chinook salmon shortages has also had a dramatic effect on income on the small rural communities where commercial salmon fisheries are one of the only sources of income.

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MS. KLEIN said research into the causes of the declines and improved management tools are critical to the issue. She stated that YRDFA fully supports the upcoming testimony of the Bering Sea Fishermen's Association (BSFA), as well as the testimony made on behalf of Kawerak. She emphasized that support for addressing economic development, including alternative commercial fisheries, sustaining rural communities, and reducing other sources of mortality is important. The association has worked for years to reduce salmon bycatch in the pollock fishery, and while numbers have been low in recent years, the YRDFA is continually monitoring the trends. She said YRDFA is also working through the council process to ensure management measures are in place to reduce chum bycatch, as well.

MS. KLEIN said YRDFA's niche is community involvement in fisheries monitoring and decision-making, which is critical for the following reasons: managers gain insight and knowledge from those "on the ground" who have long-term knowledge about their particular areas; hiring locals builds the capacity of those people and makes it possible for them to be involved in management. Incorporating traditional ecological knowledge into

management decisions is also critical, and has been a key component of YRDFA's programs for more than 10 years.

MS. KEIN stated that in the past, YRDFA received funding through direct appropriations via the PSCRF to conduct some of its monitoring work. Projects from the past included: hiring local people to work on ADF&G and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Services (USFWS) fisheries monitoring projects; working with ADF&G and USFWS to develop an in-season harvest survey program; documenting traditional ecological knowledge about natural indicators of salmon abundance and arrival; partnering with ADF&G and USFWS to contribute funds, resources, and capacity for running successful projects in the Yukon River watershed. Federal appropriations helped YRDFA to ensure there were projects on the Yukon River directly aimed at engaging local people and fisheries monitoring. Ms. Klein said while there are projects with those aims, they are largely funded through competitive processes, and there is no assurance that the projects will continue. She opined that engaging local people in monitoring should be a priority for the state and one that is consistently funded.

[4:31:54 PM](#)

MS. KLEIN stated that engaging local people and tribes directly in the decision-making of fisheries is also critical. Communities are directly affected by fisheries management decisions, and - more so in the AYK Region than anywhere else in the state - those decisions can have a deep and profound impact on people's lives and livelihoods. Locals can help craft decisions with the least negative impact on the resource and community, while also making the jobs of the state and federal entities easier. Ms. Klein said YRDFA's board structure is designed to facilitate input from local people. She offered further details.

MS. KLEIN continued to explain that this year - with funding from the legislature - YRDFA is undertaking a process specifically aimed at Chinook salmon management to develop a larger-picture plan for managing Chinook salmon under their current states of abundance. This process will involve a group of stakeholders, agencies, and technical experts. A proposal can be submitted April 2012, with a plan submitted to the BOF at its January 2013 meeting. She thanked the state for funding this work, and urged support for additional funding for the travel and staff time that is critical to maintain community involvement in fisheries monitoring and decision-making.

CHAIR THOMPSON announced that the committee would next hear from the executive director of the Bering Sea Fishermen's Association.

4:35:12 PM

KAREN GILLIS, Executive Director, Bering Sea Fishermen's Association (BSFA), relayed that in 1979, 150 fishermen from over 30 communities united to build BSFA, an organization concerned with helping fishermen gain full economic benefit from local commercial fisheries. Currently, she said, BSFA is governed by a 13-member board comprised of local fishermen from Bristol Bay, Kotzebue, Kuskokwim, Norton Sound, the Yukon [River], and St. Paul. She listed accomplishments of BSFA: participating in developing a high seas driftnet ban through the United Nations (UN); playing a leading role in creating the Community Development Quota (CDQ) program; helping Yukon River residents organize the Yukon River Drainage Fisheries Association; creating and implementing the Bristol Bay Buyback Coalition; facilitating and assisting in negotiations for the U.S.-Canada Yukon River salmon agreement; conducting niche marketing in Western Alaska salmon; initiating resource surveys and fisheries feasibility studies in the Chukchi Sea; working closely with regional Native associations to construct the AYK SSI. Ms. Gillis said BSFA also administers and directs salmon monitoring and scientific research.

MS. GILLIS stated that BSFA's concern is the health and condition of marine and freshwater ecosystems and the resources they support, which must survive the influence of human activities, climate variations, and interactions between species. She said what once looked like short-term decline in the populations of salmon is now looking like it might be long-term. More alarming is the realization that there are massive knowledge gaps, and she advised it will take time to find answers to explain the declines, to work on strategies to prevent them in the future, and to create tools to manage them in the interim. Ms. Gillis emphasized that those managing fisheries must improve their interaction with rural Native residents and communities. She talked about the difficult decisions made by managers, and residents' response to those decisions, which include adopting confrontational postures, practicing civil disobedience, and engaging in outright sabotage - all forms of communication developed after more constructive attempts of communication have failed. These abrasive forms of communication are more costly than bringing people together into

data gathering, analysis, and the decision-making process. She pointed out that BSFA wants to see effort on the part of the legislature to ensure the long-term viability of programs such as the following.

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MS. GILLIS stated that in the summer of 1993, many chum salmon runs in Western Alaska unpredictably failed to return in expected numbers. The U.S. Department of Interior provided funds to monitor the runs, with the stipulation that communities and residents be full partners. She said BSFA managed the funds between 1994 and 2006; however, since that time the program has gone unfunded at the federal level. She explained that the greatest benefit of the program was that projects implemented with the funds were coordinated with ADF&G or USFWS. She said BSFA encouraged community-based organizations, regional Native organizations, and individual fishermen to partake in all projects in order to increase participation and engagement between regional residents, organizations, and federal entities. She said it was the first AYK Region-wide effort to involve rural communities and individuals in salmon monitoring projects. The funding provided up to 175 seasonal jobs, including training and mentoring programs providing opportunities for youth to engage in scientific research in their own communities. Ms. Gillis said the model for this program remains in place, and it was an investment in constituents that built credibility and trust.

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MS. GILLIS said since 1997, the unexpected decline in AYK salmon runs warranted 16 disaster declarations in different watersheds, resulting in harvest restrictions which have created tremendous hardships for the communities in a region with both the highest subsistence dependence on salmon and the lowest incomes in the state. In response to these declines, BSFA and regional Native organizations invited state and federal agencies to create the AYK SSI - a proactive science-based program to identify and address critical salmon research needs facing the region. She said the AYK SSI includes: the Association of Village Council Presidents, Tanana Chiefs Conference, Kawerak, Inc., Bering Sea Fishermen's Association, ADF&G, NOAA Fisheries, and the USFWS. The AYK SSI is governed by an eight-member steering committee and advised by a six-member technical committee. The U.S. Congress and the State of Alaska have appropriated \$21.7 million to support the AYK SSI, which she described as a unique research

program dedicated to understanding the declines of salmon across both the freshwater and marine ecosystems of the region, advancing research across the entire lifecycle of salmon, and as one of the largest collaborative efforts of its kind on the North Pacific Coast.

[4:43:09 PM](#)

MS. GILLIS listed the following AYK SSI accomplishments: development of the AYK SSI Research and Restoration plan - a strategic salmon science plan providing a roadmap to guide requests for proposals; a partnership with the North Pacific Research Board and the Exxon Valdez Oil Spill Trustee Council to establish a rigorous, external peer review process overseen by a scientific technical committee; development and application of a regional capacity-building program, creating a new model by which rural communities and organizations can directly engage in fisheries research activities; organization of a salmon research symposium, with the subsequent publication of a book, entitled, "Pacific Salmon Ecology and Management of Western Alaska's Populations." Ms. Gillis said the AYK SSI remains focused on harnessing research to understand declines and support sustainable management of these stocks. The research plan's core focus is on the development of new fisheries management tools and the synthesis of information for improved forecasting.

[4:44:23 PM](#)

MS. GILLIS highlighted three projects currently underway. The first project is escapement goal-setting to ensure sustainable fisheries. She said escapement goals and management strategies for salmon stocks throughout Alaska have been the subject of controversy. Traditional methods are hampered by limited information. She told of new initiatives and an expert panel that offers advice to the state toward "the most appropriate research approaches." Ms. Gillis said the second project addresses human systems and sustainable salmon. Another expert panel was created to design a model using quantitative data and assumptions to predict salmon harvest for subsistence, commercial, and sport uses. The model predicts harvest by use categories at the levels of drainage, major area, and stock, and also predicts future harvest under various scenarios, including human populations, salmon abundance, numbers of dog teams, and monetary income. Ms. Gillis said the third project addresses research priorities for AYK Chinook salmon, and it identifies priorities for future research. She said BSFA is working to determine the variables that account for long-term declines -

and shorter episodic declines - and to figure out whether the declines are occurring primarily in the freshwater phase or the marine portion of the Chinook salmon lifecycle. The project will describe a research pathway through a series of projects to answer these questions.

MS. GILLIS said the AYK SSI Chinook salmon subcommittee requested a compilation of evidence for long-term declines and periodic low returns of AYK Region Chinook populations. For the Yukon River, the analysis indicated that the most recent period of low abundance, which began in 2007, resulted from the low productivity of the 2002-2004 brood years, which was one return per spawner. This meant that in the absence of any fishing, the population is barely able to replenish itself. She related that for the Kuskokwim River, with the exception of the unusually strong "recruit:responder" ratio from the 2000 brood year," the analysis shows a period of low productivity over the past 15 years. She said that between 1994 and 2006, only two brood years had productivity levels greater than 2:1, and seven years during that period, productivity fell below one recruit per spawner. She said productivity from the 2004-2006 brood years was below the minimum replacement level of one recruit per spawner, producing the lowest trending run abundance in the past four years.

MS. GILLIS said it is possible to safeguard Alaska's treasured salmon runs and the thousands of people whose livelihoods depend on them. She expressed certainty that everyone wants the same thing: resources that are healthy and abundant in numbers. She said it is exciting to be part of the state's progress toward getting stakeholders involved in the management process. She said the decisions made have consequences and risks associated with them. Ms. Gillis said the ultimate goal is to understand and rebuild salmon stocks. She reiterated the effects that low salmon runs have. She named those concerned and the entities involved, including the legislature. She concluded as follows:

Many current fishery problems are the legacy of a misplaced belief in the resiliency or inexhaustibility of our resources. Our task and yours requires the involvement of every person, from doctors of science to subsistence users, to commit themselves to implementation of the idea of healthy and abundant salmon stocks for generations to come. This can only be achieved by working together.

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MS. GILLIS, in response to Representative Austerman, said the aforementioned \$21.7 million was given by U.S. Congress in federal FY 02, and the first projects were in the water in 2003. She confirmed that the funding lasted 10 years.

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CHAIR THOMPSON opened public testimony.

[4:52:42 PM](#)

ORVILLE HUNTINGTON, Director, Wildlife Parks, Tanana Chiefs Conference, said his concerns are the same as those of Tim and Ms. Fosdick, which are related to the difficulty experienced by subsistence fishermen. He said his experience has shown that it is necessary to work with "fish and game." He encouraged the legislature to continue its support of good organizations, such as the Bering Sea Fishermen's Association and the Yukon River Drainage Fisheries Association. He said his organization works closely with them. He observed that some representatives had left the meeting, and he said he is sorry that happened, because "it's not easy living out there." He related that he is one of the few commercial fishermen in the area who has let his commercial fishing license sunset, because he "didn't see the sense in it anymore." He said this summer was the first that he only fished one day as a subsistence fisherman. He said he knows he has done his part, and said complaining will not get to the root of the problem. He said he thinks that "you guys" are the ones that can do the most good at this point. He relayed that he has met with representatives in the federal government and has been told to do the best he can "within the system - without money," and he said those are difficult words to accept. Mr. Huntington expressed his willingness to work with the legislature on this issue, and he thanked ADF&G for its efforts.

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LOUIS GREEN said he comes from a sub-district that has experienced a decline in salmon runs for 30 years. He said there is a lot of emphasis on the AYK Region and he thinks the testimony he has heard has covered much of the problem. He related that he has been both a subsistence and commercial fisherman. The declines in the Nome sub-district started way ahead of that of other areas, but the efforts he and others made to bring this to light seemed to fall on deaf ears. Now, he said, it seems that many people are using "our" problems to

bring theirs forward. He said Nome's long history of declining salmon runs is not just an economic issue, but also a cultural issue. He said he is shareholder of Sitnasuak Village Native Corporation, which owns all the land around ADF&G Special Management Area Unit 22C, and many of the rivers in that area are rivers of concern. Mr. Green said he also served as chair of the Tier II salmon work group, in 1998 and 1999, and that system "didn't do anything." He offered his understanding that the escapement goals were dropped, and when he asked the past AYK director why, he was essentially told not to complain because he "got the fish." Mr. Green said he has a problem with lowering escapement goals to get fish, because it means killing off the runs faster.

MR. GREEN said he heard someone say the Nome sub-district has escaped Tier II management for a while. He questioned local management allowing subsistence fishing before any of the salmon get up to the counting weir, and then shutting down the subsistence fishing when management decides it's not getting enough. He said that is backwards management, because the fish should get up to the weir to ensure they get to spawning grounds before anyone is allowed to catch them. He said he has a difficult time understanding where the problem lies, and said he thinks "there's a lot of political stuff going on here."

MR. GREEN said his CDQ group is allowed to work on enhancement and rehabilitation of salmon runs. He said he looked at the annual report, and saw that \$22 million has been spent through 2011. He said he doesn't know how much of that goes to enhancement, but knows that a lot of it goes to ADF&G for counting tower projects. He said that money from the CDQ group is supposed to take care of economic development for "us." He said ADF&G has an oil field "up there" to take care of its budget; therefore, he does not understand why they need "our" money.

MR. GREEN said at one point in time there was low-technical hatchery running on the Nome River - through a cooperative agreement with ADF&G, the Nome Fishermen's Association, and the regional aquaculture association for Norton Sound and Bering Straits - that was doing a small enhancement project that seemed to be working, but "now that's over with." He questioned why the people of Nome cannot have this hatchery project in operation for their economic and scientific benefit.

[5:02:21 PM](#)

VERNER WILSON stated that he is a commercial, sport, and subsistence fisherman. He said he also works for the World Wildlife Fund (WWF), which tackles projects involving fishing off of Russia, pollock and salmon fisheries, Bristol Bay, and to increase the price, value, and quality of Bering Sea fish. He described a WWF project. He said one goal toward protecting Bristol Bay salmon, including fisheries throughout the Bering Sea and AYK Region, is to protect marine habitat. He referred to a NOAA fisheries review completed in April 2011, by the Bureau of Ocean Energy Management, Regulation, and Enforcement, titled, "The Review of Salmonid Use of North Aleutian Basin Lease Area and Surrounding Habitats," which states that when salmon migrate out of freshwater, including the Kuskokwim watersheds, some head directly to the North Ocean Basin area, where the federal government may allow offshore drilling after 2017. When those salmon return to spawn, offshore drilling can risk the integrity of the fisheries because of drilling contaminants, seismic surveys or infrastructure that can kill juvenile fish and eggs, and oil spills that can harm fish populations and taint Alaska's clean fisheries' image. He said the AYK Region benefits from the CDQ program, similarly to Bristol Bay, and warned that if offshore drilling is allowed in the North Aleutian Basin, fishing operations, from crab to pollock, could be affected.

[5:04:51 PM](#)

STAN ZURAY relayed that he has been a subsistence and commercial fisherman in the Tanana area for about 40 years. He said he presently runs a number of fisheries data collection projects, some of which are directly related to the decline of Chinook salmon run numbers, quality, and size of fish. He said during the years of the decline of Yukon Chinook salmon in average size and overall numbers, proper escapement was determined by management only by using the number of fish. Data collections and anecdotal information show that a large number of smaller, male Chinook presently are being used towards this escapement number, and he said, "This needs to be changed as it makes managing for proper returns impossible."

MR. ZURAY stated that the quality of escapement has clearly been more positive in 2009 and 2011, the two years in which there were "Chinook pulse closures." He opined that this needs to be instituted and continued for all pulses each year, until a trend of healthy Chinook years is shown. Regarding customary trade, he said he would like to clarify that it is not the redirection of commercial fish harvest, as it predates the Alaska Commercial

Fisheries Entry Commission program by many years. Commercial fishing, more accurately, is the redirection of customary trade, with 90 percent of that allowable Chinook quota having been allocated to the lower of the districts. He added, "That would be an upper river perspective."

5:07:47 PM

FRED W. ALEXIE SR. stated that ADF&G does not monitor fish in the Yukon River by Kaltag; the monitoring is done based on whatever is caught downriver or whatever passes the sonar station. He questioned how ADF&G knows where the fish that pass the sonar are going when the distance between the sonar and Kaltag is so great. He recommended another sonar station at Bishop Mountain, because it would eliminate the "guesswork." He said the other sonar is in Eagle, which is too far from Pilot Station. He expressed his disappointment that the weir station program that taught children how to manage fish was ended. He said he does not see ADF&G people near his home to monitor the fish. He pointed out there were two closures last summer during the peak of the Chinook run, and that in all his years of fishing on the Yukon he has never seen it that bad. He asked, "How did [ADF&G] know?"

5:10:57 PM

TIM SMITH, President, Nome Fishermen's Association, relayed that he also serves on the Federal Regional Subsistence Advisory Council. He said as a pilot he has flown salmon surveys for thirty years over the rivers on the Seward Peninsula. He said the department's presentation made the situation sound like it is getting better, but he does not agree. He said commercial fishing in the Nome area has been closed since 1989, and it has been closed in the Port Clarence district since 2006. He said this year only forty-six king salmon were caught in the weir on the Pilgrim River, and returns have been approximately in that range for the last seven years. He opined that run - by any reasonable standard - is extinct. He said subsistence fishing for red salmon was closed for most of the season and the harvest was insignificant. In addition, subsistence fishing for silver salmon in the Nome sub-district was closed for most of the run, and the harvest was insignificant. He said [Nome's] chum salmon returns were low, and so was the harvest. Mr. Smith said there is no useful information regarding what is causing these shortages.

MR. SMITH said he is the manager of the Hobson Creek Fish Hatchery in the Nome River, which is a proven hatchery that has been working on salmon enhancement projects since 1991, producing healthy fry and getting marked adult returns back. He said this year there is water running through the hatchery, but no eggs, because the hatchery cannot get permits from ADF&G. He said hatchery production is necessary to have a harvest, and he does not understand why the department is blocking this effort.

[5:13:42 PM](#)

MR. SMITH, regarding previous testimony from the department, said he has been a member of the regional salmon planning team since 1997; however, that entity has not met since 2006 and has no plans to meet in the future. He stated that there are no meaningful salmon enhancement projects going on right now on the Seward Peninsula, while in the rest of the state salmon hatcheries produce lots of salmon for both commercial and subsistence fishermen. He said there are no hatcheries on the Bering Sea, and he said "we" don't see how [Nome] could be the only place in the state that does not need hatchery production. Furthermore, ADF&G has not been forthright on its position of opposition to hatchery production in areas that have been heavily impacted.

[5:14:22 PM](#)

BRYAN MARACLE, Director, Natural Resources, Council of Athabaskan Tribal Governments, stated that the Yukon Flats saw the largest number of closures for all the Yukon fisheries. He said the council remains concerned about "how the management is dealing with the large scope of our district." Mr. Maracle said based on the management criteria of escapement of fish crossing the border, the council urges the consideration of opening up tributaries during fisheries closures. Certain tributaries, he explained, do not see Canadian-bound stocks. Further, Mr. Maracle said the council would like to participate in a better collection of salmon use surveys, and participate in a greater way with subsistence harvest surveys that are conducted by ADF&G. He said there is a lack of trust between "people on the ground" and ADF&G personnel, and the council firmly believes that good management needs good data. He said the council would like to facilitate that. In response to Representative Austerman, he named some of the tributaries to which he had previously referred.

[5:18:50 PM](#)

ROY ASHENFELTER, chair of the Norton Sound Advisory Committee, offered a history of chum salmon in the region. He said in early 2000 there was an escapement goal - a chum cap - of 375,000. He said the cap was there for a number of years in a row. However, after a change of governor, BOF members, and commissioner, that was eliminated. He said the message heard was, "We know when to stop fishing." He said, "The carte blanche information and strategy in opening the fishery was left to the commercial fishermen - not to the department." He indicated that the result was that "they cut 1.2 million chum." He referred to data on the Nome sub-district, and he said for years there was a gradual incline of chum salmon escapement. Most of the rivers had a reduced chum run. He stated that in 2010 and 2011, the area fishermen decided to take control and not open their fishery until late June. He said, "It is really scary that when you have all kinds of measures being addressed to the users, subsistence fishermen in Norton Sound, and Yukon, and Kuskokwim, and in the other area where they're catching the fish there's no control at all." He questioned "How do we make some changes?" He asked [the committee] when and how it would ask the department to do its job. He said there is something wrong with the system, and he relayed that, by volume, less than 2 percent of the fish caught are caught by subsistence fishermen. Mr. Ashenfelter observed that the research in his area is being done by the local CDQ, not the department. He then expressed his hope that there would be meaningful dialogue and shared responsibility regarding the responsible management of chum salmon.

[5:24:00 PM](#)

CHAIR THOMPSON noted that Charles Swanton, Director of the Division of Sport Fish, ADF&G, and Mike Smith from the BOF were available for questions.

REPRESENTATIVE SEATON stated he had requested an analysis of a chart that had been given to the committee regarding escapement goals, so that there is a way to monitor large streams.

[5:24:46 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE AUSTERMAN commented to the department that this hearing has highlighted many issues that have gone unanswered for years. He said he would like another hearing with the department at the start of the new session regarding the information that was presented today - particularly regarding

the amount of money that is being spent on research. He said he was pleased to discover that the governor and perhaps the commissioner are taking a stronger interest in putting more money into the AYK Region to find out what is going on; however, he remarked that there is only so long research can continue before it may be necessary to question the research. He said he wants stronger answers from the department to explain what's going on in the marine environment. Representative Austerman said he would also like to consider what is happening in the Asian market, as well, because "at some point in time there's going to be an 'abundance limit' of what the ocean system can take."

[5:28:54 PM](#)

CHAIR THOMPSON said he is certain the department has taken note of the concerns expressed during testimony, and he said follow-up discussions will occur, beginning in January.

[5:29:29 PM](#)

#### **ADJOURNMENT**

There being no further business before the committee, the House Special Committee on Fisheries meeting was adjourned at 5:29 p.m.