

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

March 24, 2015

10:08 a.m.

MEMBERS PRESENT

Representative Louise Stutes, Chair
Representative Neal Foster
Representative Bob Herron
Representative Jonathan Kreiss-Tomkins
Representative Dan Ortiz

MEMBERS ABSENT

Representative Craig Johnson
Representative Charisse Millett

COMMITTEE CALENDAR

PRESENTATION(S): STATE OF THE SALMON

- HEARD

PREVIOUS COMMITTEE ACTION

No previous action to record

WITNESS REGISTER

LINDSEY BLOOM
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Provided comments during the presentation on the State of the Salmon.

HEATHER HARDCASTLE, Co-Owner
Taku Renewable Resources, Inc., d.b.a. Taku River Reds
Salmon Beyond Borders
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Provided comments during the presentation on the State of the Salmon.

JULIANNE CURRY, Executive Director
United Fishermen of Alaska (UFA)
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Provided comments during the presentation on the State of the Salmon.

STEPHANIE MADSEN, Executive Director
At-Sea Processors Association (APA)
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Provided comments during the presentation on the State of the Salmon.

JULIE BONNEY, Executive Director
Alaska Groundfish Data Bank, Inc.
Kodiak, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Provided comments during the presentation on the State of the Salmon.

RYAN MAKINSTER, Executive Director
Southeast Alaska Guides Organization (SEAGO)
Ketchikan, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Provided comments during the presentation on the State of the Salmon.

RICKY GEASE, Executive Director
Kenai River Sportfishing Association (KRSA)
Soldotna, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Provided comments during the presentation on the State of the Salmon.

BEN STEVENS, Tribal Member
Tanana Chiefs Conference
Stevens Village, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Provided comments during the presentation on the State of the Salmon.

GEORGE PIERCE
Kasilof, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Provided comments during the presentation on the State of the Salmon.

DAN DUNAWAY
Dillingham, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Provided comments during the presentation on the State of the Salmon.

JOHN McCOMBS
Ninilchik, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Provided comments during the presentation on the State of the Salmon.

ACTION NARRATIVE

10:08:13 AM

CHAIR LOUISE STUTES called the House Special Committee on Fisheries meeting to order at 10:08 a.m. Representatives Stutes, Foster, Herron, Kreiss-Tomkins, and Ortiz were present at the call to order.

^PRESENTATION(S): State of the Salmon

PRESENTATION(S): State of the Salmon

10:08:53 AM

CHAIR STUTES announced that the only order of business would be the State of Salmon presentation.

10:10:05 AM

LINDSEY BLOOM, mentioning that she is a fisheries consultant and fishes commercially in Bristol Bay, offered her belief that Alaska is about the last state with wild salmon that is a source of food and major driver of the state's economy, and that Alaskans view [this fishery] as a defining characteristic of the state that provides much opportunity and value to [many] Alaskans. Indicating a belief that [the salmon fishery in Alaska] has done very well thus far as a result of [legislative] decisions and policies engendered by the Alaska State Constitution, she offered her hope that the presentation today will engender legislative policies resulting in a bright future for fisheries management and salmon stewardship. Huge challenges [for the fishery] lie ahead; however, it will take forward-thinking and pro-active legislative leadership to meet the needs of future generations.

10:13:23 AM

HEATHER HARDCASTLE, Co-Owner, Taku Renewable Resources, Inc., d.b.a. Taku River Reds, Coordinator, Salmon Beyond Borders, indicated that she's involved in the commercial fishing industry, and that Salmon Beyond Borders campaigns internationally to safeguard transboundary salmon rivers. She relayed she would be speaking to the issue of salmon and large-scale mining in transboundary watersheds. People from all sectors are concerned about the health of the rivers that flow from British Columbia into Southeast Alaska, as large-scale mining in British Columbia currently threatens Alaska's salmon and water quality, and there are no enforceable protections in

place. She referred to a map included within members' packets, and said it illustrates the transboundary [watershed] region, containing several watersheds straddling the border between British Columbia and Southeast Alaska. The map depicts affected rivers including: the Taku, Whiting, Stikine, [Iskut], and Unuk Rivers, and the Nass River, although it doesn't cross into Alaska. She described these watersheds as the lifeblood of the region that serve as economic powerhouses.

MS. HARDCASTLE noted that for the last four years, Southeast Alaska has had the largest and most lucrative salmon harvests [compared to other regions of the state], with the aforementioned transboundary rivers having been key to that productivity. Only a small portion of the watersheds are located in Alaska; Canada controls the major portion of them, including the salmon spawning and rearing grounds. Alaska has done a very good job of protecting salmon habitat in Alaska's portion of these watersheds, and they are surrounded by [national lands currently unavailable for development]. This is not the case in Canada, and the aforementioned map also illustrates the location of various mining projects, in various stages of development, in British Columbia targeting, for the most part, low-grade gold and copper ore deposits containing sulfides, and thus the chance for acid mine drainage from these open pit and underground mining projects is quite high. These mining projects will also involve, for the most part, the use of tailings-storage facilities and water-treatment facilities that must operate in perpetuity.

[10:18:27 AM](#)

MS. HARDCASTLE, referring again to the aforementioned map, drew attention to the Tulsequah Chief Mine located in the Taku River watershed, and said it has been leaching acid mine drainage into the Tulsequah River - a Taku River tributary - since its abandonment in 1957, and no clean-up measures have been undertaken. She next drew attention to the [Kerr-Sulphurets-Mitchell (KSM) mining project] located in the Unuk River watershed, and said that if developed as proposed, it would become the largest gold and copper mine in North America. Last year, she relayed, Representative Kreiss-Tomkins, Alaska's congressional delegation, the State of Alaska, thousands of Alaskans, and thousands of Canadians requested that the Canadian government conduct a strict environmental review of that [project] - currently in the permitting process - but were denied. She then drew attention to the Red Chris Mine located in the [Stikine and Iskut Rivers watersheds], and said it's

currently filling its tailings-storage facility and trucking copper ore concentrate to Stewart, British Columbia, for shipment to markets. This mine is owned by Imperial Metals Corporation, the same company that owns the Mount Polley Mine, which recently suffered a catastrophic breach of its tailings-storage facility.

MS. HARDCASTLE relayed that the people involved in the issue are gravely concerned about the irreparable damage that these mining projects pose to water quality and salmon habitat, and although these projects might not experience breaches of the type that occurred at the Mount Polley Mine, experts from British Columbia state that when watered-tailings-facility technology is used - as will be used at the Red Chris Mine, for example - the chances of tailings spills are very high, with perhaps as many as two such spills possibly occurring every ten years. People are concerned about the cumulative impacts of all these projects over such a broad landscape, and what it will truly mean for the health of these transboundary rivers. People are also concerned about the chronic issues that will arise with having so many large mining projects in an area: for example, the acid mine drainage from open-pit walls and waste-rock piles in such a wet, seismically-active part of the world. It's hard to see how such clear damage to downstream interests isn't inevitable.

[10:21:55 AM](#)

MS. HARDCASTLE emphasized that currently, neither Alaska nor the United States has a seat at the table, so to speak, to discuss how these watersheds are managed in Canada. What she and many others see as the solution, she relayed, is to first have a forum that provides an equal opportunity for Alaska and the U.S. Department of State to engage in such discussions with British Columbia and Canada, and to then establish enforceable protections for salmon and water quality in this region. Research indicates that the International Joint Commission (IJC), established under the Boundary Waters Treaty of 1909, could provide [for a forum at which equal numbers of experts from both countries could address] the potential cumulative effects of multiple mining projects on these watersheds. [Thus far at least] 11 municipalities and 14 tribes in Southeast Alaska, as well as the Alaska Federation of Natives (AFN), the Alaska Native Brotherhood (ANB) and the Alaska Native Sisterhood (ANS), Alaska's congressional delegation, [and others] are in support of [invoking] an IJC process.

MS. HARDCASTLE said people are currently feeling threatened by the aforementioned upstream mining activity; therefore, the end goal is to have enforceable protections for salmon and water quality in the region in that there is an opportunity to create something wholly new [internationally] that truly safeguards [Alaska's globally-significant] resources. In conclusion, she noted the recent introduction of a resolution [sponsored and co-sponsored by Representatives Ortiz and Kreiss-Tomkins, respectively, requesting IJC's involvement], and asked members to consider taking [further] action to address these transboundary watershed issues.

The committee took an at-ease from 10:26 a.m. to 10:28 a.m.

10:28:06 AM

JULIANNE CURRY, Executive Director, United Fishermen of Alaska (UFA), referring to a PowerPoint presentation, explained that there are five species of salmon in Alaska: chinook or "king" salmon being the most iconic; sockeye or "red" salmon - the most plentiful in the Bristol Bay fisheries; coho or "silver" salmon; [humpback or] "pink" or "humpy" salmon - [producing] by far the largest commercial harvest every year; and chum or "keta" [or "dog"] salmon - an underrated species bolstered by successful fish hatchery operations. There are four Alaska Department of Fish & Game (ADF&G) management areas in Alaska: the Southeast Region spans the area from Ketchikan to Yakutat; the Central Region includes Prince William Sound, Cook Inlet, and Bristol Bay; the Westward Region includes Kodiak Island and the Aleutian Islands; and the Arctic-Yukon-Kuskokwim (AYK) Region [includes] the rest of the state. There are various methods and vessel-types used to harvest salmon in Alaska waters: seine vessels, which have a maximum length of 58 feet; gillnetters, which are typically 30-40 feet in length; setnets, which are set via skiff; and troll vessels, which range in size but are allowed to troll only in Southeast Alaska.

MS. CURRY said Alaska's commercial salmon fisheries extend from Ketchikan to Kotzebue, and deep into the Interior via the Yukon and Kuskokwim Rivers, and more Alaskans are employed in harvesting and processing salmon than in any other commercial fishery [in Alaska]. Salmon is the most valuable commercial fishery managed by the State of Alaska, with an average [yearly] ex-vessel value [for the years 2008 through 2012] of \$544 million - ex-vessel value being the price paid to the permit holder at the dock. In 2014, the total [ex-vessel] value of salmon harvested in Alaska was estimated to be [over] \$576.6

million, involving the harvesting of [more than] 5.78 million pounds of chinook salmon, [more than] 245 million pounds of sockeye salmon, [more than] 43.4 million pounds of coho salmon, [more than] 329 million pounds of [humpback] salmon, and [more than] 93.6 million pounds of chum salmon.

[10:32:33 AM](#)

MS. CURRY said salmon are iconic in Alaska, and nearly every Alaskan is in some way impacted by salmon; Alaska residents harvest salmon through personal-use, sport, commercial, and subsistence [fishing] methods, and are able to access salmon in grocery stores and restaurants throughout Alaska. In addition to having a love for salmon, Alaskans are also proud of Alaska's long history as a state where salmon are harvested commercially. Such harvests that have been recorded since 1878, were [key] to Alaska becoming a state, and have resulted in a thriving industry today. Once statehood was achieved, Alaska took control of salmon management [in its waters] - thereby protecting Alaskans' dependence upon this most-prized of resources - and since then has worked hard to develop a reputation of having the best-managed fisheries in the world. According to a study conducted by the McDowell Group, in 2013 approximately 20,000 people participated in commercial salmon-fisheries as either permit holders or crewmembers. Furthermore, [approximately] 38,000 people were directly employed by Alaska's commercial salmon-harvesting industry, and Alaska's commercial salmon-harvesters live in over 160 of Alaska's communities.

MS CURRY, in concluding her PowerPoint presentation, said Alaska's salmon harvest is vital to both the health of Alaska and to employment in Alaska. Virtually every business in Alaska benefits from commercial salmon fishing dollars, including restaurants, supermarkets, and shipyards; suppliers of hardware, marine supplies, fuel, air and water transportation, shipping services, accounting services; and those involving educators, scientists, boat builders, and administrators. Furthermore, activity by the salmon-fishing industry provides benefits to fishing communities in that economies of scale can be achieved thereby lowering the costs of utilities, shipping, fuel, [transportation], and taxes for year-round residents. The UFA has produced a set of "commercial-fishing facts" sheets, she relayed, detailing the importance of Alaska's seafood industry, and containing a breakdown of the taxes and fees paid by the industry; these facts sheets will be distributed to members, and are available on the UFA web site.

The committee took an at-ease from 10:35 a.m. to 10:36 a.m.

[10:36:29 AM](#)

STEPHANIE MADSEN, Executive Director, At-Sea Processors Association (APA), mentioning that the APA and the Pollock Conservation Cooperative are one and the same, referred to a PowerPoint presentation entitled in part, "Reducing Chinook Salmon Bycatch in the Bering Sea," and indicated that there are "prohibited species" catch limits for chinook salmon, and the exceeding of which will result in a "shutdown," and thus efforts are made to avoid catching chinook salmon [when fishing for pollock]. To that end, Incentive Plan Agreements (IPAs) - intended to encourage the avoidance of chinook salmon bycatch in the pollock fishery - are submitted to the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) for approval, and require annual reports. With regard to the aforementioned prohibited species catch limits, she mentioned that "60,000" is an "upper cap"; that there is also what she called a "performance standard" limit that members of her organization live within; and that [members of her organization] are required to demonstrate that they can do so.

MS. MADSEN indicated that members of her organization focus on avoiding areas where salmon bycatch is reported to be an issue, since failure to stay under prohibited species catch limits will result in vessels being precluded from fishing for pollock in certain areas. She offered her understanding that there is an automated alert system in place that sends an alert to everyone in the industry whenever 10 or more salmon are caught in "a tow," and that information about where those salmon were encountered is available on the Internet. [Chinook salmon bycatch] avoidance areas are identified based upon the number of salmon being caught with the pollock. Being precluded from fishing for pollock in certain areas provides members of her organization with the incentive to avoid areas where chinook salmon bycatch exceeds certain thresholds. She mentioned that one particular chinook salmon bycatch avoidance area is closed [to all pollock fishing] throughout what she referred to as the "A" season, and indicated that closures of certain bycatch avoidance areas during what she referred to as the "B" season is based upon "September performance."

[10:44:43 AM](#)

MS. MADSEN relayed that in 2014, 5,254 chinook salmon were caught with 573,726 metric tons of pollock, resulting in a

"bycatch ratio of 0.009." Any chinook salmon bycatch is counted on board, and thus information about which areas must then be avoided is obtained at that point. "Bycatch performance," she remarked, has improved during the last four years, since what she called "the program" was instituted; the "incentive program" is designed to work regardless of how abundant either salmon or pollock are, all salmon caught are retained and then [donated] and every 10th salmon is "sampled" for genetic information. She indicated that [her organization's] IPA was changed in 2015, thereby increasing communications; requiring the use of salmon-excluder equipment during all of the "A" season and during two months of the "B" season; and addressing, via penalties, vessels that engage in what she called "outlier" behavior wherein the vessels exceeded certain [chinook salmon] bycatch rates. Furthermore, chinook salmon bycatch limits might be reduced in the future during times of low abundance.

The committee took an at-ease from 10:48 a.m. to 10:49 a.m.

10:49:06 AM

JULIE BONNEY, Executive Director, Alaska Groundfish Data Bank, Inc., referring to a PowerPoint presentation entitled in part, "Chinook Salmon Bycatch in the Gulf of Alaska (GOA) Trawl Fisheries", mentioned that her organization represents trawl vessels and shoreside processors [operating] in the Gulf of Alaska (GOA), and that the GOA trawl fisheries are still managed under a limited access system wherein there is "a race" for the [targeted] fish. This limited access system results in both fishers and processors competing for access to "a common quota pool," thereby creating a number of problems [in terms of chinook salmon bycatch; for example, both catch and bycatch are managed at the fleet level, there's no individual accountability for either processors or vessels, and the ability to address bycatch is limited.

MS. BONNEY said that regardless of these problems, the North Pacific Fishery Management Council (NPFMC) has implemented chinook salmon bycatch limits for the GOA trawl-fishing industry in response to high numbers of bycatch in the Western GOA pollock fishery in 2010. Specifically, there are now chinook salmon bycatch limits of [6,684] in the Western GOA, and [18,316] in the Central GOA, for a total chinook salmon bycatch limit of 25,000 for the entire GOA pollock fishery. These limits were [based in part] by calculating the chinook salmon bycatch compared to the pollock quota between the years 2001 and 2011 - that being about 40,000 [metric] tons of pollock for the

Central GOA, for example. Since then, however, the pollock quota in the Central GOA has increased to over 150,000 [metric] tons, but the chinook salmon bycatch limit has not seen a similar increase, and this has put stress on the industry as it attempts to catch nearly four times the amount of pollock while having to comply with unchanged chinook salmon bycatch limits.

MS. BONNEY explained that the NPFMC has also implemented a total chinook salmon bycatch limit of 7,500 in the non-pollock [GOA trawl] fisheries - cod, flatfish, and rockfish fisheries - involving a limit of 1,200 in the Central GOA catcher vessel rockfish fishery, a limit of 3,600 in the GOA catcher/processor cod, flatfish, and rockfish fisheries, and a limit of 2,700 in the GOA catcher vessel cod and flatfish fisheries. These limits have created a lot of challenges for the industry. One such challenge involves how chinook salmon bycatch is counted in these fisheries; currently, bycatch estimates are derived from observer data rather than from fish tickets, and are based solely on a basket sample - a random sample of about 600 pounds from the catch at sea. This is much less precise than counting each salmon at the dock, as occurs in the pollock fishery, and doesn't reflect individual vessel [bycatch] performance.

[10:59:20 AM](#)

MS. BONNEY said that another challenge for the non-pollock GOA trawl fisheries, in this first year of operating under the aforementioned chinook salmon bycatch limits, is that the limit of 2,700 chinook salmon for the GOA catcher vessel cod and flatfish fisheries is already proving to be problematic just two months into the season, in that 1,056 chinook salmon have already been [caught] in the Western GOA catcher vessel cod fishery, but once the limit of 2,700 chinook salmon is reached, all the GOA catcher vessel cod and flatfish fisheries will close for the rest of the year. Ms. Bonney pointed out that when the aforementioned GOA bycatch limits of 25,000 and 7,500 chinook salmon were set, it was not yet known that [almost] 97 percent of GOA chinook salmon bycatch consists of salmon from the Pacific Coast, British Columbia, and Southeast Alaska [rather than from the Gulf of Alaska]. Furthermore, according to the North Pacific Anadromous Fish Commission (NPAFC), hatcheries release approximately 250 million chinook salmon each year; in 2013, for example, hatcheries in Canada released [over] 39 million chinook salmon, and hatcheries in the U.S. released over 200 million chinook salmon, though only about 5 percent of those fish came from Alaska hatcheries.

MS. BONNEY, in concluding her PowerPoint presentation, indicated that the GOA trawl-fisheries industry is trying to be proactive [with regard to chinook salmon bycatch]. For example, voluntarily instituting measures whereby catch and bycatch [can be] allocated to individual vessels; voluntarily reporting "hot spots" of chinook salmon bycatch; donating food-grade bycatch to food banks; researching better salmon excluder technologies; and funding chinook salmon bycatch stock-of-origin data. Also, the NPFMC is researching trawl bycatch tools.

[11:05:52 AM](#)

RYAN MAKINSTER, Executive Director, SouthEast Alaska Guides Organization (SEAGO), referring to a PowerPoint presentation that included an illustration of Pacific salmon migration patterns on the West Coast, noted that salmon are important to his industry and serve as an "economic driver." He relayed that there is a [chinook] salmon fishery management plan in place that [provides] what he referred to as an "Abundance Index." The Abundance Index dictates the total number of salmon [that can be harvested] by his industry in a given year, with the Alaska Department of Fish & Game (ADF&G) then allocating specific amounts [to the individual user groups]. He said the 2014 Abundance Index was 2.57, which he characterized as possibly being a record high, allowing his industry to [harvest] more [salmon] during the season; indicators are pointing to there being a [similarly-high] Abundance Index for 2015, he added, and mentioned that members of his industry are actively promoting salmon fishing.

[11:11:24 AM](#)

RICKY GEASE, Executive Director, Kenai River Sportfishing Association (KRSA), referred to a PowerPoint presentation titled in part, "2012 Cook Inlet Salmon Emergency Relief Program"; and relayed that the Pacific States Marine Fishery Commission (PSMFC) would be administering the emergency relief program related to the 2012 declaration that the Cook Inlet and the Kuskokwim and Yukon [Rivers] were what he called a "salmon disaster area." Also, according to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's (NOAA's) National Marine Fisheries Service (NOAA Fisheries), \$75 million in federal appropriations were allocated in 2014 to six different fisheries that had been declared by the U.S. Department of Commerce to have suffered fishery [resource] disasters. Alaska received \$20.8 million of that funding for the "chinook salmon failures" that occurred in 2012, with direct payments being made to commercial salmon

fishers in the Cook Inlet and the Yukon and Kuskokwim Rivers, to the "recreational sector" in various areas of the Cook Inlet via [payments to] various types of businesses in and involved with the sport fishing industry, and to upper Cook Inlet commercial salmon fisheries' buying stations and processors; remaining funds are to be focused on primarily on research, but also on restoration, education, gear replacement/modification, and outreach.

MR. GEASE noted that last winter the KRSA worked with the Matanuska-Susitna Borough, the Kenai Peninsula Borough, and various user groups to develop the application forms for the aforementioned businesses qualified to seek such funding; outlined some of the various qualifications that those businesses needed in order to receive such funding; and indicated that the application period would end May 29, with funds being distributed to qualified businesses by July 1. With regard to funds for research, he explained that plans are in place to address bottlenecks of chinook salmon.

11:19:30 AM

REPRESENTATIVE ORTIZ asked for clarification regarding the United States' lack of a seat at the table regarding the transboundary fishing and mining issues in that, according to Ms. Hardcastle's testimony, the United States has the support of its federal delegation and, he presumed, the U.S. State Department. He questioned what is preventing that seat at the table.

MS. HARDCASTLE responded that the International Joint Commission (IJC) is the only existing mechanism to bring the table to front and center, and allow an equal seat at that table with Canada. She explained there are numerous roadblocks in obtaining an IJC investigation, and although the federal delegation is in support together with many Southeast Alaska residents within interests groups, and local governments, they do not yet have the formal support from the State of Alaska stating it supports an International Joint Commission (IJC) investigation, but the state is taking this seriously. She pointed out that the U.S. State Department isn't outright in support of this, but it is the diplomat for the United States and has the tough conversations with neighbors, such as Canada. She said, it appears the State of Alaska, legislators, and the majority of residents, want the IJC to "go to bat for us and ask the tough questions of Canada." Pragmatically, she said Canada's support is needed to activate the IJC to study this issue, and it is not

necessarily excited to do that. That being said, she works closely with a number of experts who previously worked on the IJC, who have advised that both countries are hyper-aware there will be a situation where "they" want the IJC to be involved. She pointed out that it is not a case of "just being able to say no," and offered that the current stage is trying to raise a "stink" that a forum to address the issue is desired.

[11:23:45 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE HERRON asked whether it is currently active.

MS. HARDCASTLE explained that the International Joint Commission (IJC) becomes "activated" when it reviews an issue such as the cumulative effect of multiple mining projects on the transboundary watersheds. She explained that it requires the joint referral by the Canadian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and the U.S. State Department - which requires notifications to the U.S. State Department by the State of Alaska, legislators, elected officials, fishermen and tribes. She advised that Senators Murkowski and Sullivan are closely tracking this issue, and subsequent to Ms. Hardcastle's meeting with Senator Murkowski, Senator Murkowski met with Secretary of State John Kerry the next day. She offered that the legislature could continue that type of pressure by stating this is not anti-mining, or anti-permitting process existing in Canada, as it is simply "let's get to the table and talk about a shared resource with another country."

[11:25:14 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE HERRON asked whether she had specifically requested a resolution from the legislature.

MS. HARDCASTLE replied that a formal request has not been requested, although over the years they have been in close connect with the Southeast legislative delegation due to concerns related to the Tulsequah Chief mine in the Taku River watershed. She opined that Representative Ortiz supports the involvement of the IJC, recognizing it is the only current forum available so he took the leadership role in creating HJR 16, which is possibly scheduled for a hearing soon, she offered.

CHAIR STUTES opened public testimony.

[11:26:42 AM](#)

BEN STEVENS, Tribal Member, Tanana Chiefs Conference, offered his considerable experience as a subsistence fisherman throughout his life, and said that economic strategies are a concern. Officially, he described, he works with the Tanana Chiefs Conference in coordinating the hunting and fishing task force strategy relating to the rights of the people it serves. With regard to subsistence, in relation to the state of the salmon, he offered the economy of the rural life style in that fish go directly from the water to the plate. The Alaska residents living subsistence life styles of cultural and spiritual wellbeing are currently in a dire situation and when fish are not able to be taken for food purposes, it is unnerving, he said. He reminded the committee that salmon declines have continued since 1998, that 2000 was a particularly difficult year, and in 2014 fisheries were closed to subsistence given the stark reality of the disappearance of salmon stocks. He said a lack of action has been observed on the part of state and federal officials; therefore, tribal leaders are taking action. He referred to the 2014 moratorium on fishing, and said "Giving that many fish to the spawning grounds would not have been possible had it not been for the involvement that unified (indisc.) from tribes." That was a tremendous sign from tribes, he opined, that they are "all in" on the restoration and conservation of the stocks. He said a drastic effort on the part of tribes was to seek the support of the federal government to prioritize subsistence use.

[11:33:03 AM](#)

MR. STEVENS continued that the Kuskokwim River and Yukon River watershed people are involved in planning for fish commissions and will attempt to make substantive efforts in this regard. He reported that the tribes are seeking a voice in management actions, which should receive serious consideration in that the tribes are calling for all with the ability to affect the salmon restoration and conservation to take action. Currently, they are working with the North Pacific Fisheries Management Council to lower the by-catch, and do the right thing. The tribes of the Yukon River are working with the First Nations in Canada and the government of the Yukon and building bridges.

[11:35:54 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE ORTIZ referred to the "dire situation" in that this is a critical time for subsistence, and asked whether this relates solely to king salmon and whether this is the only fish

targeted for subsistence, or includes other species of salmon as well.

MR. STEVENS responded that the king salmon is targeted due to the quality of the nutrients, and "other reasons." However, he said, they are concerned as to how the disappearance of the chinook will impact other salmon stocks in the Yukon River as everything is in a perilous state currently, and expressed concern for all species of salmon.

[11:37:30 AM](#)

GEORGE PIERCE, said he is representing subsistence users and that they are being trumped by non-residents over fishing rights as guides are destroying the Kenai River by taking all of the kings out of the river by continuous fishing over 20 years over the spawning beds. He pointed out that the personal use priority is supplanting subsistence first. He noted that from 1993-1995 there was a dispute over rural and non-rural, and the Board of Fisheries decided on personal use and eliminated the word "subsistence." This decision was challenged in state court and the result was that subsistence is to be prioritized, he said. An illegal personal use fishery was created and, currently, if there is a shortage of fish the subsistence users are denied fish first, yet the commercial fishermen and sport fishing guides are allowed to continually fish. He pointed out that the sport fishing guides cater to non-residents, which is contrary to law in that subsistence users are entitled to the fish first. The personal use fishery is allowed into areas that subsistence users never were, and for longer periods of time, he stressed. He said no one is stepping up to this "because of the money," and asked the committee to investigate the illegal personal use fishery and stand up for Alaskans. He stated that the legislature gave the [Department of] Fish & Game permission to implement the personal use fishery, which is against the constitution.

[11:43:29 AM](#)

DAN DUNAWAY, testified that he sits as a secretary on the Fish and Game Advisory Committee, and is a member of the Federal Bristol Bay Rural Advisory Council for subsistence, but is testifying solely as a subsistence user. He advised that advisory committees are in the process of sending letters of concern regarding funding for fish and game management tools used in the Nushagak and Togiak area. He noted he would like to see Nushagak sonar salmon enumeration project funded

sufficiently to run through August of the pink and coho salmon fisheries, as it would assist in sorting out the management plan allocation among commercial, sport, and subsistence users. Also, he stated, there are rumors the Togiak salmon counting tower could be eliminated with the severe budget cuts, except that is the sole management tool for the run of 700,000 to over 800,000 sockeye salmon that normally produces approximately 550,000 fish harvest in the commercial and subsistence fishery. He expressed another concern, within the advisory councils, is the short funding issue in that there is the requirement of a minimum of one meeting per year is required in order to be considered an active advisory committee, but if funds are cut much more it will be hard to maintain the active status. He described tele-conferences as having limited utility. Finally, with regard to the by-catch topic, Bristol Bay was pleased to have the North Pacific Fisheries Management Council present their work on controlling and managing by-catch beings it is a large concern. He reported on a new technique by Dr. Dan Schlinder, Professor, University of Washington, which may be helpful in identifying stocks of origin in the by-catch.

[11:48:27 AM](#)

JOHN McCOMBS, regarding HB 110 and SB 42, expressed that there are currently 80 personal use fisheries statewide. Ramifications of these bills are not explained or rationalized, he said, and it is premature and misguided to initiate a dialogue about who gets to catch the last fish. Therefore, he advised he cannot support the above-bills. With regard to HB 103, in 2014 the Board of Fisheries passed two board generated proposals during the last two hours of a two-week long meeting and both contained contentious re-allocations of the fishery. He explained that board generated proposals take the public out of an open public process and undermines the advisory committee process.

CHAIR STUTES advised Mr. McCombs that the presentation is on the State of the Salmon, and noted the testimony today is confined to salmon issues.

MR. McCOMBS said he supports HB 103.

CHAIR STUTES closed public testimony after ascertaining that no one further wished to testify.

[11:51:06 AM](#)

ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business before the committee, the House Special Committee on Fisheries meeting was adjourned at 11:51 a.m.