



## **Matanuska-Susitna Borough Fish & Wildlife Commission Mat-Su Season Wrap Up**

**Questions to ADF&G**

**November 27, 2017**

1. Why does the Commercial Division make no proposals to address meeting northern escapement goals?
2. The Drift Fishery Management Plan calls for “reasonable opportunity” to catch coho salmon through the entire duration of the run. Why is ADF&G ignoring this management plan mandate?
3. Both your preseason and in-season salmon forecasts have shown great variability over the years. Most recently, you overestimated the 2016 sockeye returns by more than one million fish and in 2017 you underestimated the returns by about 100,000 fish. Both estimates played a major role in how you allowed commercial fishing time in the Central District because the estimates serve as important conservation triggers. In 2016, the overestimate placed the return projections into Tier 3 for managing fishing times and areas. When the returns failed to develop, no effort was made to lower the projected returns into Tier 2, where they should have been placed to be more restrictive on fishing time and area to conserve the salmon resource. Conversely, as soon as the underestimate was discovered in 2017, immediate action was taken to move from Tier 1 up into Tier 2, increasing both fishing time and area.

The appearance given is that department management practices favor a commercial surplus harvest in the Central District over conservation for Northern District returns. How do you explain this? What is being done to improve the accuracy of the run strength estimates to eliminate this apparent commercial fisheries favoritism in the future?

4. Portions of the Northern District setnet fishery are commonly restricted by emergency openings, when in-river sport fisheries are closed or restricted. The drift fishery, however, is seldom restricted when Mat-Su sport fisheries undergo restrictions. This year it was restricted. Can we expect future management of the drift fishery to compliment closures or restrictions to northern sport fisheries?
5. The Commission appreciates Sportfish Division’s issuing End of Season Reports for the Mat-Su Valley, Anchorage, and Kenai Peninsula Management Areas issued on October 16, 2017. It is however, interesting to note that spawning escapement figure for the Mat-Su sport fish report only listed escapement counts through differing dates in late August — while the Commercial Report (also issued around mid-October) lists complete escapement numbers for the same streams. If sport fish division was providing final escapement numbers for the commercial report, why not put the same final count numbers into the sport fish reports at the same time?

6. Why was the 2017 Eklutna Tailrace return of stocked coho salmon so much poorer than the stocked coho salmon return at Ship Creek? What could the Department do to boost the Eklutna Tailrace stocked coho return to a level more similar to the Ship Creek return? Would imprinting coho stocked at the Tailrace location for a longer period of time (similar to the king salmon program) likely produce better returns to the Tailrace?
7. Since the Deception Creek king salmon stocking program has not produced enough hatchery king salmon to allow ANY legal harvest of king salmon within Unit 2 of the Susitna River drainage for the past 5 years, would it be more beneficial to cut the Deception Creek program and transfer / further boost the Eklutna Tailrace program where sport king salmon harvest has been allowed each year during the same time frame?
8. At the 2017 Board of Fisheries meeting ADF&G's commercial manager stated that there were no conservation issues with Little Susitna River salmon stocks, and further lobbied the Board of Fisheries to continue commercial fishing within one-mile of the mouth of Little Susitna River. During the 2017 season, however, the Little Susitna River sport king salmon fishery was closed by ADF&G emergency order for 20 days from June 24 — July 13 because of lack of sufficient king salmon passage to ensure attainment of escapement needs, and the Little Susitna River sport coho fishery was closed to bait fishing for 17 days from August 6 — August 23 at 5 pm. for lack of sufficient coho salmon passage to ensure attainment of coho salmon escapement needs. Further in 2016 the Little Susitna River sport coho salmon fishery was closed to bait fishing by emergency order from August 6—September 30 and ADF&G failed to attain the coho salmon spawning escapement goal in 2016. How does the Department plan to adapt commercial salmon management in 2018 in order to both meet Little Susitna River king and coho salmon spawning escapement needs and to provide reasonable sport fishing opportunity throughout the entire run of these salmon stocks (as required by management plans)?
9. On the Kenai River sockeye salmon are counted by sonar in the lower river, and then the sockeye salmon spawning escapement is reached by subtracting sockeye harvests above the counter from the sonar count. On Little Susitna River coho salmon escapement numbers were originally considered to be for salmon spawning above the Parks Highway, and when the weir was located above the Highway it made sense to use the weir count as a standalone figure for spawning escapement. Now that the Little Susitna River weir is located 35 miles below the Parks Highway, would not better science require the Department to subtract harvest above the weir from the weir count in order to reach the final Little Susitna River coho salmon escapement number?
10. When the Little Susitna River salmon counting weir was moved to the lower river location, ADF&G made no adjustment to the coho salmon spawning escapement goal — even though in the lower river location the weir now counts additional coho salmon spawning for 35 miles or more below the former weir location. In terms of providing a more realistic management target wouldn't it be beneficial for the Department, to at least, widen the coho salmon spawning escapement range by raising the top end of the goal?
11. Central District commercial salmon fisheries are often allowed expanded harvest opportunities far before escapement needs are met, yet in many cases sport fisheries may not be liberalized until after the top-end of escapement needs are projected to be exceed or have already been exceeded. In terms of maximizing benefit for sport fisheries would it be better (in most cases) to

liberalize sport fisheries as soon as the mid-point of an escapement goal could be projected or was attained? Please discuss in terms of this year's coho salmon returns to the Northern Cook Inlet Management Area.

12. Northern Cook Inlet Management Area sport fisheries for wild king salmon have been managed by emergency order for the past 5 years inconsistent with regulations listed in the sport fisheries regulation book. In some areas extremely limited or no legal king salmon harvest has been allowed for 5 years. When can we expect to see specific king salmon management plans that will better inform the public as to regulations or expected regulations under specific return levels? If not management plans when will we see regulations in the book more accurate to what regulations will likely be or reflecting what relations have been for the past 5 years?