

PROPOSAL 127 – 5 AAC 21.363. Upper Cook Inlet Salmon Management Plan and 21.360. Kenai River Late-Run Sockeye Salmon Management Plan. Remove inriver goals from the list of escapement goals in the *Upper Cook Inlet Salmon Management Plan* and realign inriver and escapement goals in the *Kenai River Late-Run Sockeye Salmon Management Plan*, as follows:

Option 1:

Drop “inriver goal” from the list of escapement goals in 21.363(e) since in-river goals are allocative in nature and the department should not be put in a position of favoring one allocation strategy over another without consultation with the Board. The Kenai River is the only location in the state where in-river goals exist in regulation.

Option 2:

Realign in-river and escapement goals to avoid continuing confusion. Standardize the upper end of the in-river goal for each tier at 1.5 million which is equal to the upper end of the SEG (1.2 million) plus 300,000 sockeye which is the current maximum sport harvest above the sonar. The lower end of in-river goals for each tier should be retained as is in order to continue to ensure that escapements are distributed throughout the goal range and large runs are shared among fisheries.

What is the issue you would like the board to address and why? A complex of codified management plans now govern the salmon fisheries in Upper Cook Inlet and elements of one plan, on occasion, conflict with elements found in another. Major UCI fisheries harvest mixed stocks bound for more many different rivers. During its 2008 meeting, the Board developed specific regulatory language for Upper Cook Inlet at the request of the Department to provide guidance when objectives or prescriptive tools of one management plan conflict with or compromise the department’s ability to direction of another plan. Additional clarifications are needed in this language.

Interpretation and application of in-river goals and the optimum escapement goal in the Kenai late-run sockeye salmon management plan continues to be a source of confusion. The current in-river goals are also based on old data which substantially underestimates the numbers of sockeye that are currently harvested in the sport fishery above the sonar.

The plan identifies an OEG of 700,000 – 1,400,000. This is consistent with the SEG of 700,000 to 1,200,000 with an allowance at the top end in place since 1999 in recognition that large escapements continue to provide large returns. In-river goals are designated for three run size tiers in order to distribute escapements throughout the range and share the bounty of large runs among fisheries.

One problem is what to do when numbers are exceeding the in-river goal but still within the escapement goal. In-river goal ranges are relatively narrow (only 200,000 fish wide) and can be difficult to hit given uncertain run forecasts and wide variation in run timing. However, even when Kenai sockeye escapements are still comfortably within the OEG, exceeding in-river goals can trigger out-of-plan actions that conflict with the intent of management plans for other stocks including Kenai kings and Susitna sockeye. In-river goals are themselves allocative targets designed to distribute harvest among commercial and in-river fisheries. However, out-of-plan actions inevitably impact the allocation balance among commercial drift, commercial setnet, personal use, and sport fisheries. This places the Department in the no-win situation of having to

decide between one set of allocative targets and similarly allocative out-of-plan actions. Allocation decisions are the responsibility of the Board, not the Department.

Another problem is that the sport fishery has demonstrated the capability of harvesting many more sockeye above the sonar than when the in-river goal ranges were originally established. There are only 150,000 fish between the upper end of the SEG and the top tier as measured at the sonar. However, in recent years as many as 300,000 are harvested by the sport fishery above the sonar. As a result, we are effectively managing for a lower SEG than has been identified.

PROPOSED BY: Kenai River Sportfishing Association (HQ-F16-070)
