

PROPOSAL 89 – 5 AAC 21.353. Central District Drift Gillnet Fishery Management Plan.
Repeal and readopt *Central District Drift Gillnet Fishery Management Plan* with the amended plan removing mandatory time and area restrictions from July 1–August 15, as follows:

Repeal and readopt sections of 5 AAC 21.353, and renumber remaining sections (g-h) to (f-g) to read:

5 AAC 21.353 Central District Drift Gillnet Fishery Management

(a) The purpose of this management plan is to direct the harvest of surplus salmon stocks in the Central District of Upper Cook Inlet by the drift gillnet fishery. The department shall manage the sockeye, pink and chum salmon stocks primarily for commercial uses to provide commercial fishermen with an economic yield from the harvest of these salmon resources based on abundance. This plan does not provide for additional fishing periods directed at Susitna River coho, Little Susitna River coho, or Kenai River coho salmon stocks. The department shall manage the Central District commercial drift gillnet fishery as follows;

(b) The fishery will be open for regular weekly fishing periods as described in 5 AAC 21.320(b). The fishing season will open the third Monday in June or June 19, whichever is later.

(c) From July 1 through August 15,

(1) Fishing will be allowed with drift gillnets as described in 5 AAC 21.320(b)(1).

(2) The fishing periods set forth in (1) of this subsection may be modified by emergency order;

(d) If additional fishing time is necessary to harvest surplus salmon, it will be allowed in one or more of the following areas based on inseason salmon abundance:

(1) Expanded Kenai Section

(2) Expanded Kasilof Section

(3) Anchor Point Section

(4) Drift Gillnet Area 1

(5) Central District

(e) From August 16 until closed by emergency order, drift gillnetting will be allowed in all waters of the Central District except those within 5 nautical miles of the Kenai Peninsula shoreline during regular fishing periods.

What is the issue you would like the board to address and why? From July 9–31, the Central District drift gillnet fishery is managed primarily by provisions found in the *Central District Drift Gillnet Fishery Management Plan* 5 AAC 21.353(c),(d) and (e). This plan was most recently modified in 2014 and is now the most inflexible and restrictive version of this plan since its adoption in 1999.

As currently written, the restrictive provisions prevent adaptive inseason management resulting in lost harvest opportunity and the over escapement of Kenai and Kasilof river sockeye salmon stocks. These restrictive provisions also result in the lost harvest of abundant pink and chum salmon stocks. The original intent of these restrictions was to conserve sockeye salmon bound for the Susitna River; however, more recent science indicates the restrictions were based on faulty data and flawed assumptions. These restrictive provisions have also been made a surrogate for

allocating northern bound coho salmon to inriver sport fisheries; this manipulation of the original intent uses the same flawed assumptions.

Genetic stock identification (GSI) data from the Anchor Point offshore test fishery (OTF) and the commercial drift harvest shows that there is no distinct temporal or spatial separation of Susitna River sockeye stocks from other sockeye salmon stocks as they migrate through the Central District. Moreover, there are no conservation concerns for Northern District coho salmon; in fact, since 1990, the Little Susitna coho salmon escapement goal has been met or exceeded 21 times in 26 years (81%). It is important to note that in most of the years where the Little Susitna coho salmon goal was met or exceeded, the drift gillnet fishery was prosecuted with far fewer restrictions than they currently have. Finally, the Kenai River late-run sockeye salmon inriver goal has been exceeded in 7 of the past 10 years while the Kasilof River sockeye salmon BEG has been exceeded in 9 of the past 10 years. Since these rivers are indices of escapements in other unmonitored systems it is likely that all systems are being under harvested by similar amounts resulting in lost harvests now and lower production in the future.

Because GSI data from the OTF and the commercial drift harvest show no one time period or any specific areas in the Central District where Susitna River sockeye salmon stocks separate themselves from east side Cook Inlet sockeye salmon, mandatory restriction on specific dates in July result in large escapements of sockeye salmon to the Kenai and Kasilof rivers while not providing any significant savings of sockeye salmon migrating north. Currently the drift fishery is restricted to Drift Area 1 and the Expanded Kenai and Expanded Kasilof sections for both regular fishing periods from July 9 to July 15. Then, from July 16 to July 31, ADF&G must restrict the drift fleet based upon the size of the sockeye salmon run to the Kenai River. At most, the drift fleet is allowed to fish in the middle of Cook Inlet no more than one day per week, regardless of how strong the sockeye salmon run is to the Kenai and Kasilof rivers. As noted above, the Kenai River sockeye salmon inriver goal and Kasilof River BEG have been exceeded 16 out of 20 years (combined). This needs to change in order to keep these and other stocks within sustainable levels.

This proposal seeks to provide ADF&G with more flexible use of the drift fleet in order to harvest abundant Kenai and Kasilof river sockeye salmon runs. If these changes are adopted, ADF&G will still retain its emergency order authority to restrict or close the drift fleet for sockeye and coho conservation when needed, keep in mind, northern Cook Inlet coho salmon escapement goals are being met or exceeded more than 80% of the time and Kenai sockeye inriver goals have been exceeded 100% of the time for the last 5 years.

Therefore, this proposal seeks to modify the overly restrictive provisions within the Central District Drift Gillnet Fishery Management Plan in order to: 1) allow for flexible inseason management; 2) provide a reasonable opportunity to harvest abundant sockeye, pink and chum salmon; and 3) to provide adequate protection to northern bound sockeye salmon and coho salmon and Kenai River coho salmon.

PROPOSED BY: United Cook Inlet Drift Association (HQ-F16-011)
