

PROPOSAL 93 – 5 AAC 21.353. Central District Drift Gillnet Fishery Management Plan.
Amend preamble of management plan and restrict commercial drift gillnet fishery to the Expanded Corridor and Drift Gillnet Area 1 from August 1-15, as follows:

Amend sections (a) and (e) of the Central District Drift Gillnet Fishery Management Plan:

(a) The purpose of this management plan is to ensure adequate escapement of salmon into the Northern District drainages and to provide management guidelines to the department. The department shall manage the commercial drift gill net fishery to minimize the harvest of [NORTHERN DISTRICT AND KEANI RIVER] coho salmon in order to provide sport and guided sport fishermen a reasonable opportunity to harvest these salmon stocks over the entire run, as measured by the frequency of inriver restrictions. The Department shall manage the commercial drift gillnet fishery as described in this section.

(e) from August 1 - 15, [THERE ARE NO MANDATORY AREA RESTRICTIONS TO REGULAR PERIODS,]

(1) fishing during both regular 12 hour periods per week will be restricted to one or more of the following sections: (A) Expanded Kenai Section; (B) Expanded Kasilof Section;

(C) Anchor Point Section; (D) Drift Gillnet Area 1, except that if the Upper Subdistrict set gillnet fishery is closed under 5 AAC 21.310(b)(2)(C)(iii), or the department determines that less than one percent of the season's total drift gill net sockeye salmon harvest has been taken per fishing period for two consecutive fishing periods in the drift gill net fishery, regular fishing periods will be restricted to Drift Gillnet Areas 3 and 4. In this subsection, "fishing period" means a time period open to commercial fishing as measured by a 24-hour calendar day from 12:01 a.m. until 11:59 p.m.

(2) additional fishing time under this subsection is allowed only in one or more of the following sections; (A) Expanded Kenai Section; (B) Expanded Kasilof Section; (C) Anchor Point Section.

What is the issue you would like the board to address and why? The plan allows unnecessary drift gillnet fishing in Drift Gillnet Area 2 during the first half of August, which jeopardizes attainment of Northern District drainage salmon escapement needs and reasonable salmon harvest opportunities for other Upper Cook Inlet user groups. Looking at a map of Upper Cook Inlet that shows Drift Gillnet Area 2 and the Northern District, a person can visualize how effectively salmon can be blocked from Northern District waters by concentrated drift gillnet fishing in Area 2. Even if no drift gill netting were allowed in Area 2, individual drift gillnet permit holders would still get first harvest opportunity, in a much larger harvest area, using considerably more gear, fishing in a more mobile fashion, and with more commercial openings to harvest Northern District bound salmon compared to Northern District users.

As proven many times the drift fleet can harvest plenty of surplus Kenai River sockeye without corking off Northern District bound sockeye and coho salmon in Area 2. While addressing Northern conservation issues (Jim Creek coho salmon and stock of concern Susitna River sockeye salmon) and allowing more reasonable Northern harvest opportunity for all other user groups, this proposal also seeks to maintain drift gill netters a liberal opportunity to harvest surplus sockeye salmon during times of July and August abundance. Note: Even if the drift fleet was restricted

under the 1% rule, the department could still allow the fleet to fish 7 days per week (5 days per week in the Expanded Kenai, Expanded Kasilof, and Anchor Point Sections and 2 days per week in Drift Gillet Areas 3 and 4 during a portion of the season when sockeye salmon abundance is in decline and coho harvest makes up an increasing portion of the drift catch). Just as the importance of sockeye salmon is recognized for commercial users throughout Upper Cook Inlet, so should the importance of coho salmon, throughout Upper Cook Inlet, be recognize for sport and guided sport users in a management plan.

Considering restrictions on other user groups during August, this proposal, if adopted, would increase the likelihood of attaining Northern District escapement needs, provide more reasonable harvest opportunity for other user groups, while retaining significant drift gillnet opportunity. Such changes would better align the plan provisions with it's stated purpose: "The purpose of this management plan is to ensure adequate escapement of salmon into the Northern District drainages and to provide management guidelines to the department. The department shall manage the commercial drift gill net fishery to minimize the harvest of Northern District and Kenai River coho salmon in order to provide sport and guided sport fishermen a reasonable opportunity to harvest these salmon stocks over the entire run, as measured by the frequency of inriver restrictions."

PROPOSED BY: Alaska Outdoor Council

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