

February 2026

My name is Martin Kelly, and I am testifying to the Board of Fish. I understand we are focusing on Area M. Some of the proposals I am in support of and need to emphasize are as follows:

**Proposal 128** submitted by Jack Reakoff, Chair Koyukuk River Fish & Game Advisory Committee. (3<sup>rd</sup> paragraph) “Salmon populations in the AYK region are facing significant challenges, including bycatch in commercial fisheries, particularly in Area M Bycatch of chinook, chum, and coho salmon in Area M negatively impacts the already stressed salmon runs returning to the Yukon and Kuskokwim rivers. The large-scale removal of salmon flesh and associated nutrients from the ecosystem disrupts the natural nutrient cycle, negatively impacting local ecosystems.”

**Proposal 132** submitted by Jeff Lucas, Chair: Fairbanks Fish & Game Advisory Committee Chair: “The Alaska Sustainable Salmon Policy (SSP/ 5AAC 39.222) requires that “the burden of conservation” of a depleted species be shared. In 2022, Bering Sea Fishermen’s Association, along with several tribal consortiums, wrote a letter to the Alaska Department of Fish and Game noting “If ADF&G does not limit June commercial harvest opportunities within Area M, the ensuing unmitigated interception of AYK-bound chum all but assures the destruction of AYK Region economies and traditional subsistence lifestyles, and places the entire burden of conservation on the shoulders of AYK Region subsistence users. The survival of our communities depends upon ADF&G’s intervention.” ii Even more significant, it could mean the extirpation of some chum stocks entirely.”

**Proposal 136** by John H. Lamont, Jr. “What is the issue you would like the board to address and why? Close South Unimak and Shumagin Islands June salmon fishing from June 7 through June 28. During this time period in the month of June this fishery intercepts salmon bound for AYK. Yukon People have not harvested salmon traditionally for going on 5 years now AND Yet Area M has been allowed to commercially harvest salmon bound to this River.”

I understand why these proposals were submitted

**Pilot Station, Alaska geographical location is 61.9369° N, 162.8838° W**

Pilot Station is also the location for the State of Alaska, Department of Fish & Game Sonar project. ADF&G manages and monitors the salmon passage to meet escapement needs for the entire Yukon to open subsistence on the lower river.

Pilot Station is a fishing community. Salmon was the staple diet for Pilot Station residents. Our school’s mascot is the Yukon Chinook jumping out of the river using a crown holding a scepter symbolizing independence and sovereignty.

Over centuries our lives have adapted to relying solely on salmon. It is within our DNA.

*(Deoxyribonucleic acid -The molecule inside cells that contains the genetic information responsible for the development and function of an organism).*

I have been active with the subsistence fisheries in my village throughout my entire life. Subsistence fishing was the highlight of all subsistence activities in my village to eat, dry, freeze and store for the up-coming winter. My Yupik people prepared for tomorrow. We only took what we needed. Applying Traditional Knowledge, we are taught and able to preserve and eat subsistence caught salmon throughout the entire winter until the next summer season. Winter months are 6 months long. During the winter months there are less wild subsistence to provide. Most families continue to rely on under the ice nets to harvest whitefish/inconnu, northern pike and burbot. This winter we were blessed to harvest some lamprey most known as eels. Lamprey also crashed and vanished for a period of 5 years at our harvesting areas. We continue to depend on our Yukon River to provide our families with subsistence to include moose, bear, ducks, geese, swans, blackfish, burbot, inconnu, whitefish to sustain and supplement feeding our families with a natural and healthy diet.

Beginning in the late 80's we started seeing the decline of salmon entering the river from the Bering Sea. For the last 7 years we haven't been able to subsist and dry salmon because of drastic low returning numbers.

Over the last 20 years ADF&G has applied heavy restrictions, regulations and gear reduction. Salmon crash hit the hardest in 2019, thus closing the entire river to subsistence fishing. To compensate and fulfill the void the State declared more than several salmon disasters. The application process gives the qualified user money to help buy necessities and to pay utilities and buy dried foods such as rice, flour and sugar.

I have been voicing my concerns with the subsistence teleconferences for many summers. Yukon River Delta Fisheries Association hosts a subsistence teleconference tracking salmon 1 village at a time. The goal is to track salmon migration up the Yukon River into Canada all the way to the headwaters some 2300 miles 1 week at a time. There are 66 villages and communities on the Yukon River who once heavily relied on salmon. At least 70% of these villages/communities are below poverty levels because of the cost of living.

During these teleconferences we summoned factors to include global warming/heat stress, commercial fishing on the Yukon River, area M, possible Russian/Japanese fleets poaching salmon, the nuclear disaster in Fukushima, Japan, predation, sicknesses or diseases like Ichthyophonis found in salmon. The most striking variance from my perspective causing the crash of salmon on the Yukon River is the Pollock trawling industry through incidental bycatch.

I'm certain the commission is familiar with incidental bycatch.

An overview of Salmon bycatch in Alaska groundfish Fisheries published in 2001 by David Withrell, David Ackley, and Cathy Coon can be found in [adf&g.gov](http://adf&g.gov)

Amount of Bycatch From **1990-2001**, an average of **37,819 Chinook** salmon and **69,332** other salmon were incidentally caught annually in the BSAI groundfish fisheries, and **20,799 Chinook** salmon and **20,496 other salmon species**.

Like I said, over the last 20+ years I've been actively listening and speaking about salmon. I've listened to and witnessed the crash of Yukon Salmon to date. Over a period, we were told there is no scientific evidence or explanation as to why Yukon River salmon stock has dwindled down to record low numbers. Although in **2021 546,000 chum and 12,000 Chinook** were reported as bycatch in the Bering Sea through "Groundfish Fisheries especially pollock." I'm no scientist but what if they were Yukon bound salmon? And it has happened year after year (sometimes more, sometimes less) for the last 25 years?!

Living through it and watching it slowly unravel to a mass decimation and destruction of salmon through trawling bycatch. No salmon to eat and put away, no more smokehouses. Families struggling to eat throughout the long winters

We continue to hold our hands out for food assistance programs while our salmon subsistence resource is being depleted mostly by trawling bycatch. There is no "**WANTON WASTE**" for the Pollock Industry to throw nontarget species back into the ocean. Please don't single us out and say we rely mostly on Public Assistance programs when the cost of living in the Kusilvak District is the highest in the Country. We were once salmon people.

Something drastic needs to be done.

- Based on preliminary reports for the 2025 season, Bering Sea and Aleutian Islands (BSAI) trawl fisheries caught over 38,000 Chinook salmon and at least 172,000 to 475,000 "non-Chinook" (primarily chum) salmon as bycatch.
- 2025 Yukon River counts were estimated at 347,146 summer chum by the Pilot Station Sonar project which is located 1.5 miles from Pilot Station, Alaska and has been in operation for the last 60 years by the State of Alaska.

In October of **2021** we had several men stranded 70 miles downriver from Pilot Station. These men were looking to harvest Beluga whales to help supplement subsistence food because of the salmon crash. There was no immediate response, in fact there was a lost dog which had more precedence then my people stranded without food and water.

This year inflation made the National news. The cost of heating fuel in my village is \$9.41 and the price of gas is \$9.41. Life is tough! Worldwide we are still experiencing *new variants of COVID-19 pandemic*.

As you know the late and respected elder Katie John & her fight for subsistence priority. "John's case began in the late 1980s when she and other Mentasta Alaska Natives sought traditional use of a fishing camp on the Copper River. After being denied by the state, John filed suit in 1991 against the government, seeking to ensure subsistence rights for rural residents."

During the early 80's there were Millions summer chum and well over 140k king salmon that passed the Pilot Station Sonar Project. Look at the numbers today. Our Yukon River salmon is facing extinction! Look at the variation of the numbers compared to years ago. Our Yukon Chinook salmon is on the brink of extinction! Your decisions should not focus on money and instead focus on the right judgment call, use common sense, save my people, save my salmon!