

JS Testimony Draft 2 -MM-JS

Jim Sykes
Fish and Wildlife Commission
Matanuska Susitna Borough
Public Testimony
Statewide Finfish and Supplemental Issues Board of Fisheries Meeting, 2026

Madam Chairman and members of the Board,

My name is Jim Sykes, with MatSu Fish and Wildlife Commission. I am a personal use dippnetter, Kasilof, Kenai, Susitna and finally Fish Creek last year. Important part of family food.

Since I arrived in Alaska 50 years ago, I remember times sport fishermen could keep five Chinook salmon a day. Now the rivers of northern Cook Inlet are seeing fewer fish passing north, including northern set gillnets, subsistence, personal use and the in-river sport fishery. Meanwhile, record numbers have populated Kenai area waters.

Historically, larger pre-season forecasts for Kenai Sockeye result in liberal sockeye fishing schedules and fewer Coho and Northern bound sockeye made it to their natal streams to spawn.

[1 minute]

While the state and federal governments are both obligated to support Conservation and Restoration for in-river runs of migratory salmon, The feds have an incredibly clumsy system of management based on Total Allowable Catch which does NOT adequately accommodate the complex mixed salmon stocks running around the same time.

It's more important now than ever that the State of Alaska uses it's more flexible conservation tools more effectively to respond to the dire circumstances facing Northern Cook inlet Chinook and Coho-- and Sockeye are not returning as strongly lately.

[2 minutes]

The Alaska Board of Fisheries Policy for the Management of Mixed Stock Salmon Fisheries (5 AAC 39.220) prioritizes the conservation of wild salmon stocks, ensuring they are managed for sustained yield. It requires that mixed-stock fisheries—where stocks from multiple streams are harvested—

minimize impacts on weaker stocks, with restrictions placed on new or expanding fisheries that threaten these populations.

The burden of conservation for Northern bound Coho has been placed exclusively on fisheries within the Northern district and those actions are consistently falling short in delivering salmon to the spawning grounds. Additional restrictions on the drift gillnet fishery are warranted.

- Restricting the drift fleet to the expanded harvest corridor and keeping them out of the Conservation Corridor, even on years of high sockeye projections, is a compromise and consistent with the Mixed Stock Fisheries Management Policy.
- We need to re-Evaluate the 1% Rule, intended to define the so-called “end” of the Kenai/Kasilof run and provide for orderly transition to Coho management.

And that is the crux of the biscuit. Northern bound stocks need to be more closely identified with real time monitoring in northern rivers, restore the test fishery between Kenai and Kalgin Island, gather more complete genetic samples, expand use of the Conservation Corridor-- and allow the opportunity for northern salmon to reach their natal streams.