

RC 27

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# Editorial: Board must take up kings, take no more from setnetters

## JOURNAL OF COMMERCE

The — now official — disaster in Cook Inlet during the 2012 salmon season is back in front of the Board of Fisheries at its upcoming annual work session Oct. 9 to 11 in Anchorage.

Issues between the sport and commercial users that are contentious in the best of times will be front and center against the backdrop of a record-low return of Kenai kings in 2012 with the Kenai River Sportfishing Association, or KRSA, pushing for a full evaluation of king salmon management while Peninsula setnetters and the statewide United Fishermen of Alaska are opposing the KRSA agenda change request.

The issue upon which the two sides agree is the need to formally adopt new escapement goals for the Kenai and Kasilof river kings based on the new DIDSON fish counters deployed fully in 2012 after three years of side-by-side testing against previous sonar counters.

The Alaska Department of Fish and Game, which originally planned to present new DIDSON-based escapement goals for the regularly scheduled 2014 Upper Cook Inlet meeting, now says it has the capability to present goals in time for 2013.

The discussion around the new goals developed by ADFG, what current counts reveal about the status of the Kenai River king salmon stocks, and how ADFG will use existing authorities under the current management to achieve the goals should be a productive step toward achieving a more orderly 2013 season.

In 2012, near total closures of the sport and commercial setnet fisheries were required to meet Kenai River king salmon escapement goals. The setnet fishermen lost out on 95 percent of their typical annual harvest while the tourism sector suffered from cancelations and lost visitor traffic.

Both commercial and sport fishing industries recognize the need to conserve king salmon and achieve a sustainable fishery. It is certainly not in the setnetters' interest — especially after a total loss in 2012 — for diminishing returns of king salmon and the restrictions to their sector that go along with it.

However, the setnetters also believe that when KRSA is pushing for a change in management it is typically going to cost them money.

At the 2011 Upper Cook Inlet meeting of the Board of Fisheries, setnetters were helpless as the four-member majority took measure after measure proposed by KRSA that included a new mandated closures on Tuesdays in addition to the current "weekend window" closures on Fridays, the decoupling of their sector from the drift fleet and a provision for a more expedient closure to their season after Aug. 1.

The allocative shifts away from the setnetters were worth millions during the first season under the new rules in 2011, and with low forecasts for Kenai River kings in the near future they can anticipate even more of their historical catch going up the river or into the drift fleet's pockets.

It is important for the board to remember that when it comes to allocations, a bedrock principle of management is history in the fishery.

Submitted by KPFA

For setnetters who have, in some cases, fished the same sites for generations, it is no easy thing to swallow to see their allocations consistently eroded by a relatively new user group as is the sport guide industry.

A setnetter shouldn't lose fishing opportunity merely by the nature of someone starting a guide business or building a fancy cabin along the Kenai River. They also shouldn't be told that a dollar they earn to feed their families and support the local communities is less valuable than a dollar earned by a guide or a B&B.

For the value of the Cook Inlet commercial fishery to the state economy goes far beyond the \$50 million in ex-vessel value it is usually pegged at by the sport industry.

Only considering ex-vessel value ignores the impacts of fuel and supply purchases, processing jobs, crew wages spent throughout the community, the transportation and logistics infrastructure necessary to move 25 million pounds of salmon to domestic and international markets, and the end-user spending at retail and fine restaurants where Alaska salmon is served.

The setnetters have more than borne their fair share of conservation for Kenai River kings.

As the board considers changes in management, they should not weigh them down any more.