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The Legislature held a hearing on the lawsuit filed by the United Cook Inlet Drift Association (UCIDA) against the State of Alaska in federal court demanding the feds regain control of all salmon fisheries in Cook Inlet, Prince William Sound, and part of the waters off the Alaska Peninsula including Unimak Island. Control of the fisheries in these areas was transferred to the State of Alaska in 2012 via an Amendment to the Magnusson-Stevens Act.

State control of the fisheries is not good enough for the comm fish guys, opting to copy what the anti-Pebble greens are doing, and transfer control of Alaska natural resources back into the hands of the feds.

Who is UCIDA? They are a self-identified private organization with 312 – 570 gillnet permit holders in Upper Cook Inlet. They believe their God-given right to catch as many Cook Inlet salmon as humanly possible trumps the rights of every other resident of Cook Inlet to put salmon in their freezer, and like the anti-Pebble activists are ready, willing and able to put the feds in charge of all Cook Inlet salmon in order to remove the competition for the resource.

A representative study out of the MatSu Borough in 2011 (this has been going on for a long time) noted that fewer than 1,300 limited entry commercial entry fishermen harvest over 80% of all salmon in the Inlet, leaving less than 20% of the remaining catch for over 140,000 sport fish and 20,000 personal use fishing households. Further, sport fishermen spent over \$100 million in the MatSu Borough alone and \$700 million in Upper Cook Inlet in 2007. In contrast, the commercial fishery in that year brought in an average of \$16 million per year with a first wholesale value of \$77 million 2007. Clearly, the commercial boys aren't making enough money with their 80% of the total catch. They want control of the remaining 20% of the fish in Cook Inlet.

Over the last decade or two, creeping regulatory capture of the Board of Fish process and hires of comm fish guys into ADF&G have led to management decisions that effectively cut over 160,000 Alaskans out of decisions to open or close commercial fisheries in Upper Cook Inlet. As a result, salmon runs into the MatSu, Anchorage Bowl, Turnagain Arm and Knik Arm, particularly silver, pink and chum runs, have been decimated to the point where ADF&G SportFish does not effectively manage the resource any more.

Comm fish has been successful in past years pitting subsistence, personal use (dipnet), and sport fish users against one another while allowing the drift fleet to roam Cook Inlet on back to back to back emergency openings, wiping out salmon runs into the Susitna drainage, Turnagain Arm, Knik Arm, and the Anchorage Bowl. Bird Creek which a

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decade ago produced nearly 15,000 coho is now down to less than a thousand, and it is still a stocked run.

Solution? Upper Cook Inlet is managed exclusively around the second run of reds into the Kenai River. Decisions to open or close the fisheries lie exclusively on personal use, sport fish and for the first time last year, the set netters. The drift fleet was allowed to roam free. Decisions to issue those emergency openings were made exclusively by the ADF&G Kenai Comm Fish office, rather than a group decision between Kenai comm fish and sport fish, Anchorage comm fish and sport fish, and MatSu comm fish and sport fish.

Yet the commercial boys want more fish and are in federal court demanding it order the feds to do so.

During the hearing last week, UCIDA did not have a good day. In fact, they were thoroughly embarrassed. ADF&G reportedly told the Legislature that a federal takeover would shut everything down as the only federal interest in Cook Inlet is in protecting the artificially endangered species – Cook Inlet Belugas, mismanaged by NOAA into endangered species status nearly two decades ago

This problem poses a larger issue for the Republican majority in the legislature, as the Cook Inlet commercial fishermen have been very successful in insinuating themselves into leadership positions. Speaker Chenault's Chief of Staff is a comm fish guy. Legislation attempting to combine sport fish, personal use and subsistence into a single personal use category has been held for years by Rep. Paul Seaton, a commercial fisherman operating out of Homer. And a bunch of other rock solid conservatives have looked the other way rather than taking on comm fish and their supporters in their party in recent years.

Legislative Republicans need to be careful allowing this state of affairs to continue, as they give democrats an opening large enough to drive a pair of 18-wheelers through in future elections. It is always better to take care of a few hundred thousand of your constituents than a couple thousand.

This system is seriously broken. It is an example of regulatory capture by a special interest and is up to us to make sure that capture extends no longer. The upcoming Board of Fish meetings in Anchorage the end of this month over Cook Inlet Salmon management plans is vitally important. Plan to participate. Your ability to fill your freezer with fish is at stake.