



UNITED FISHERMEN OF ALASKA

Mailing Address: P.O. Box 20229, Juneau AK 99802-0229

Phone: (907) 586-2820

E-mail: ufa@ufa-fish.org **Website:** www.ufa-fish.org

April 21, 2022

Sent Electronically to: Senate Finance Committee

RE: State Assumption of the Clean Water Act 404 Permitting Program

Dear Senate Finance Committee Members,

United Fishermen of Alaska (UFA) is the statewide commercial fishing trade association, representing 37 commercial fishing organizations participating in fisheries throughout the state and the federal fisheries off Alaska's coast.

On behalf of UFA, we urge you to remove the Department of Environmental Conservation's (DEC) request for \$4.9 million in the operating budget to fund the assumption of the Clean Water Act 404 permitting program. We believe that DEC's assumption of the program threatens Alaska's wetlands and salmon rivers that support our fisheries.

Alaska's wetlands and headwater streams provide essential habitat for juvenile salmon and other important fish species. The Clean Water Act 404 permitting program authorizes the dredge and fill of wetlands and streams for development projects. While we support development and other industries in Alaska, we also must ensure that projects are developed and permitted in a way that protects critical fish habitat. We are concerned about DEC's statements regarding its desire to assume the program to streamline the permitting process and reduce enforcement and mitigation requirements. That approach can have major implications for the protection of fish habitat and our fisheries.

We are also concerned that this proposed budget appropriation is not nearly enough to fund a complicated permitting program. Only three states have assumed the 404 permitting program due to its high cost. DEC has yet to provide a feasibility study to analyze the true cost of the program to the state of Alaska, including exposure to and costs of potential lawsuits. Without that analysis, we believe it is unwise to start a program that the state may not be able to adequately administer.

Finally, it is also highly unlikely that stable funding will be available for the program over the long-term. DEC's budget cuts over the last several years have led to fewer staff and cuts to programs that protect sensitive habitat and our fisheries. Future staff cuts and budget reductions for this permitting program will inevitably lead to a streamlined approach and result in permits issued that do not protect our wetlands, rivers and salmon habitat and not be able to meet EPA's minimum standards.

UFA respectfully requests that the Senate Finance Committee remove the \$4.9 million funding appropriation for DEC to assume the Clean Water Act 404 permitting program from the operating budget.

Regards,



Matt Alward
President



Tracy Welch
Executive Director

MEMBER ORGANIZATIONS

Alaska Bering Sea Crabbers • Alaska Longline Fishermen's Association • Alaska Scallop Association • Alaska Trollers Association
Alaska Whitefish Trawlers Association • Area M Seiners Association • At-sea Processors Association • Bristol Bay Fishermen's Association
Bristol Bay Regional Seafood Development Association • Bristol Bay Reserve • Cape Barnabas, Inc. • Concerned Area "M" Fishermen
Cook Inlet Aquaculture Association • Cordova District Fishermen United • Douglas Island Pink and Chum • Freezer Longline Coalition • Fishing Vessel
Owners Assn Groundfish Forum • Kenai Peninsula Fishermen's Association • Kodiak Crab Alliance Cooperative • Kodiak Regional Aquaculture
Association • Kodiak Seiners Association • North Pacific Fisheries Association • Northern Southeast Regional Aquaculture Association • Northwest
Setnetters Association • Petersburg Vessel Owners Association • Prince William Sound Aquaculture Corporation • Purse Seine Vessel Owner
Association • Seafood Producers Cooperative • Southeast Alaska Herring Conservation Alliance • Southeast Alaska Fisherman's Alliance • Southeast
Alaska Regional Dive Fisheries Association • Southeast Alaska Seiners
Southern Southeast Regional Aquaculture Association • United Catcher Boats • United Southeast Alaska Gillnetters
Valdez Fisheries Development Association