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FISHING TOURISTS CAUSE HEADACHES FOR LOCALS

The Alaska Trollers Association is deeply concerned that for the second year in a row the Alaska Department of Fish and Game is struggling with the management of the non-resident Charter anglers flocking to Alaska. While ADFG is trying to implement laissez-faire management to placate the Charter and Lodge business, they are destroying the ability of our Alaska Trollers to fill orders to our fish-loving customers. Accelerated catches by tourists are appropriating fish away from our long-time small boat fisheries and processors. If our local small boat fishermen go out of business, the economic resilience of our isolated island communities will be diminished and destabilized region wide.

Today ADFG announced that once again (!) the unlimited and growing “commercial” Charter sport fishing industry, composed primarily of guided non-resident tourists, will take over 14,000 Chinook from the Troll fishery and force the elimination of the competitive August fishery. This opening is designated to occur in the Summer Troll Management plan and was to occur on King salmon set aside specifically for August after 70% of the Troll allocation was harvest in the July opening. This unexpected reduction cuts into the already modest amount earned annually by our fishermen and leaves processors explaining to their long-time customers why King Salmon won’t be provided as promised for their customers.

Troll fishing permits are limited by the State and our fishermen are managed with daily data from fish tickets. Our fishermen can stand down from Chinook harvest overnight, to keep our fishery sustainable. The local Alaska resident sport angler share remains stable and declining, and they are being impacted by tourist fishing too.

The issue is that the numbers of non-resident anglers are unconstrained and growing rapidly as tourism levels rise across the region and Charter businesses proliferate. The Charter client Chinook harvest proceeds throughout the summer season with daily bag and annual harvest limits for individual anglers. However, there is no annual limit or management objective for the Charter fishing sector. Tourists fishing in Southeast are the only group allowed this open-ended practice. In 2023 the SEAK commercial sport harvest went over the expected harvest share by 17,000 kings forcing the elimination of the August Troll Chinook opening and causing outrage among local processors with standing orders.

The recent change of management from in-season, adaptive management, to laissez-faire management for the tourists is controversial and contested. The Board of Fisheries Management plan negotiated March 2022 by representatives of the region’s three salmon stake holder groups; Resident Sport, Guided Sport, and Commercial Trollers, had been working well to sustainably distribute the Chinook harvest

between the groups. That agreement directed ADF&G to employ in-season management tools cut off the Chinook harvests by non-resident sport Anglers, or by the Trollers, when their share of the catch had been taken. In deference to local community food security, the resident angle harvest remained open year-round. That Agreement was to sunset at the end of March 2025.

But in response to a request to revisit the agreement to clarify management plans, the ADF&G Sportfish Division urged the Board of Fisheries to revise the negotiated agreement. Surprisingly, in December of 2023, **new language was adopted giving non-resident Anglers priority to harvest the Southeast Alaska Chinook treaty quota by and appropriating Chinook from the our Trolling families until the Treaty allocation was taken.** In-season management, the cornerstone of Alaska's well-respected and historic Sustainable Management Policy, was eliminated for the guided sport harvest. The Pacific Salmon Treaty establishes a strict annual limit for the total Chinook Southeast Chinook catch - Therefore, when one group goes over their allotted portion the other group is deprived. The change in language promoted by ADF&G staff to the Board of Fisheries was **not supported** by two of the three stakeholder groups that signed the original Agreement

In the past SEAK, harvesters successfully shared the King salmon catch. With the explosion of tourism that model fell apart. The unanticipated impact of over-tourism, depriving resident sports fishermen and Trollers of their traditional times and areas to harvest is wrecking relationships and community economies. The attorney representing Alaska in the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals, Laura Wolf, defended Southeast Alaska's economy in court. Referring to Trollers, Wolf told the court on July 18th of this year; "It [taking away king salmon] forces people into poverty or [they] choose to leave these very small rural communities and that [has] is huge cascading effects, it's not just harm to some fishermen it's [harm to] remote isolated communities".

According to the Commercial Fisheries Entry Commission (CFEC), ten years ago 756 trollers were actively fishing. In 2024 450 trollers fished. Shrinking overall Treaty quota, Covid effects, and a spurious lawsuit still working its way through the courts (that advise consumers to stop eating Chinook salmon) all contribute to the harm. Trolling is not a highly lucrative big bucks' fishery, instead it supplies a living wage to fishing families and grossed on average, \$65,574.

Trolling directly supports hundreds of Southeast Alaskan families, SEAK processors, and support industries. It produces the highest quality seafood in Alaska. Troll caught King Salmon is famous at white tablecloth restaurants. Alaska's inability to control Southeast Alaska out-of-state recreation fishing is hurting the resource, local economy, and rural existence.

Taking Chinook from Alaska residents (Trollers) and allocating this valuable and limited resource to a growing pool of non-resident sport harvesters is a violation of the Mission Statement of the Alaska Department of Fish and Game:

"To protect, maintain, and improve the fish, game, and aquatic plant resources of the state, and manage their use and development in the best interest of the economy and the well-being of the people of the state, consistent with the sustained yield principle."

Quotes

Former Board of Fish member and retired ADFG biologist Larry Edfelt representing Territorial Sportsmen Inc (Juneau Sports fishers) testified at the Homer BOF (12/23) that; *"Since residents and nonresidents*

share one quota the biggest threat to the stable resident king salmon fishery is the unlimited, unrestricted, nonresident king salmon fishery. More than 75% of the sport harvest was taken by nonresidents in 2023 and the (King) fishery exceeded its quota by 17,000 fish. Residents in inside waters can't begin fishing until mid-June or even July because of Stock of Concern restrictions on local runs".

Ron Somerville, 2019 Safari Club International (SCI) Alaska Chapter's Conservationist of the Year and retired ADF&G biologist, testified to the Board of Fish Jan 4, 2022; *"The resident preference in the management plan dates back 30 years. The resident preference is now threatened by the ever increasing fishing power of the nonresident fishery..." "...Why should trollers, who are an important factor in small community economies, have to forego fish during low abundance years when they are most valuable just to support an unlimited competitive nonresident fishery?"*

Alaska trollers Association President Matt Donohoe;

"On the entire West Coast, from California to Washington, Chinook sport fishing has been significantly restricted by limiting fishing days and areas. Because of this Lower 48 commercial West Coast sports charters and their clients seasonally transfer to SEAK. Alaska which has no limit to how many commercial sport boats are allowed to fish in Alaska."

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Notes to Editors

Southeast Alaska Trolling is a historic "Ma and Pa" hook and line fishery. Participants are 85% Alaska resident 31% of which are Tlingit/Haida tribal members. Represented by the Alaska Trollers Association (ATA) commercial Trolling is the backbone of the Southeast Alaska economy.

Along with the State of Alaska, ATA has recently been in the news as Joiner Defendants in a suit brought by the suburban Washington State fishing group Wild Fish Conservancy (WFC). WFC sued the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) hoping to shut down the 150-year-old SEAK King Salmon fishery. WFC claims that Trollers are harming Southern Resident Killer Whales (SRKW) by taking Puget Sound Chinook. Neither Puget Sound Chinook nor SRKW are found in SEAK.

If successful, this lawsuit would set a precedent making it easier for radical groups to shut down any Alaska natural resource industry. Trollers are the canary in the mine. If the Troll industry fails because of the outrageous and incorrect claims by WFC then SEAK will fail economically, and the rest of Alaska will more likely face a similar fate.

Through a vigorous Pacific Salmon Treaty (PST) process SEAK is granted an annual regional Chinook quota. The Board of Fisheries (BOF) then allocates Treaty Chinook between 5 Alaska fishing industries. Besides SEAK, the Pacific Salmon Treaty (PST) also governs Chinook harvest in British Columbia, Washington, Oregon, and Idaho. Oddly, only SEAK trollers, 85% of which are Alaska residents, were attacked by WFC.

Undermining the resident SEAK economy:

During the 3/22 BoF meeting in Anchorage three regional user organizations (Alaska Trollers Association, ATA [85% resident commercial], Southeast Alaska Guides Organization [SEAGO, non-resident guided sport harvest] and Territorial Sportsmen Inc [TSI, 100% resident sport]) negotiated an agreement regarding the SEAK treaty King Salmon harvest which was unanimously passed unchanged by the BOF. The Agreement was to sunset in March of 2025. Sometime between March 2022 and fall 2022 the Agreement was significantly altered by ADFG without informing the signators. In August of 2023 ATA and TSI discovered this change and worked to correct the error through the BOF process. Had they been informed of the changes, neither ATA nor TSI would have supported the revised agreement. Both parties have stated this on the record.

Both groups were pleased when, at the October BOF meeting, the Board agreed to consider a correction at the next BOF public meeting. When it was brought before the Board in December 2023 however, instead of reinstating the dropped language the board voted 4-2 to change the agreement even more. This BOF decision was based on miss-direction from ADFG personnel rather than the testimony against the changes by two of the three parties who signed the original Agreement (TSI, ATA).

The BOF is supposed to be a public process. Not only does this new Code have no resemblance to the original agreement it is now in conflict with 5AAC 29.060 which clearly allocates King Salmon quota between the SEAK fisheries and has been in effect since 1998. This act also violates Alaska's Sustainable Fisheries Policy (5AAC 39.222) by eliminating in-season management. In-season management is also expected under the Pacific Salmon Treaty (PST).