



Alaska State Legislature

September 6th, 2024

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Juneau, AK 99802-1668

TRANSMIT VIA ONLINE PORTAL
and by e-mail at jon.kurland@noaa.gov

Comment to the Federal Register on NOAA-NMFS-2024-0042: Gulf of Alaska Chinook Salmon Petition

Dear Mr. Kurland,

As Alaska State Legislators, we write on behalf of the people of Alaska to express our strong opposition to the proposal under consideration by the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) to list and designate critical habitat for any Gulf of Alaska (GOA) Chinook Salmon subpopulations under the Endangered Species Act (ESA), as detailed in the petition by the Wild Fish Conservancy (WFC), a Washington state-based environmental group. The proposal under docket number NOAA-NMFS-2024-0042 would have profound negative impacts on Alaska's culture, recreation, lifestyle, and economy.

1. The Petition Should Never Have Been Accepted

We are deeply concerned that the Wild Fish Conservancy's petition was accepted despite NMFS acknowledging, in its 90-day finding, that the petition failed to present "a complete, balanced representation of the relevant facts, including information that may contradict claims in the petition," as required by 50 C.F.R. § 424.14(d)(5). The petition contains numerous factual errors, omissions, incomplete references, and unsupported assertions and conclusions, which should have disqualified it from consideration under NMFS regulations. A "reasonable person" standard should not conclude that GOA Chinook Salmon are at risk of extinction now or in the foreseeable future based on the petition's content. Accepting a petition of this nature undermines the credibility of the ESA listing process and sets a dangerous precedent for future petitions based on incomplete or biased information.

2. Alaskans Wish to Maintain the Management of Their Fisheries

The State of Alaska, through the Alaska Department of Fish and Game, the Alaska Legislature, and its citizens, can sustainably manage the state's salmon stocks. The ESA is an inappropriate tool to address a downturn in Chinook productivity, especially given Alaska's long-standing commitment to sustainable fisheries management. Federal intervention under the ESA would undermine Alaska's ability to develop adaptive management practices specific to various regions of our state.

Moreover, listing GOA Chinook Salmon under the ESA would severely restrict Alaskans' ability to harvest not just Chinook but also other species of fish. The overlapping and multi-species nature of Alaska's fisheries means that restrictions on Chinook could easily lead to cascading effects on the harvest of other species, which are vital to the livelihoods of Alaskans. This would have a disastrous impact on our economy, particularly in coastal communities where fishing is a primary source of income and food security. The ESA listing could jeopardize our ability to sustain our communities, feed our families, and maintain our cultural traditions connected to fishing and subsistence practices.

3. Caution Against Overreliance on Speculative Models

We urge NMFS to exercise caution in relying on long-term climate models that may be extrapolated to reach any desired conclusion about the status of Chinook stocks. The use of such models to project the status of stocks into the distant future involves numerous assumptions, many of which may be speculative or inaccurate. Listing a species under the ESA based solely on projections that predict potential habitat loss 100 years from now sets a concerning precedent that removes meaningful barriers to listing under the ESA. The decision to list should be grounded in robust, current data rather than speculative future scenarios that do not adequately account for the complexity and adaptability of both species and management strategies.

Conclusion

We strongly urge NMFS to reconsider the acceptance of the Gulf of Alaska Chinook Salmon Petition and to terminate the current status review. The substantial geographic area under review, which encompasses a broad swath of coastline from the Canadian border through the Aleutian Islands, does not lend itself to a one-size-fits-all approach to species management. A critical habitat designation and listing under the ESA would not only impose severe restrictions on Alaska's communities but would also disregard the successful management record of the State of Alaska. Furthermore, such a designation would lead to cascading restrictions on the ability to harvest other fish species, thereby threatening the economic stability, food security, and cultural heritage of Alaskan communities. The decision to list must be based on sound science, complete and balanced data, and a thorough understanding of the socio-economic and cultural impacts on the people of Alaska.

We appreciate your consideration of our comments on behalf of the people of Alaska, whose way of life, economy, and ability to feed their families are intricately tied to the health and sustainability of our fishery resources.

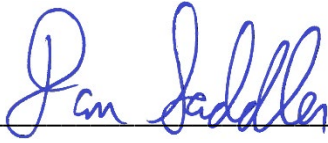
Respectfully,



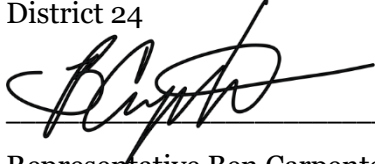
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District 6



Speaker Cathy Tilton
District 26



Representative Dan Saddler
District 24



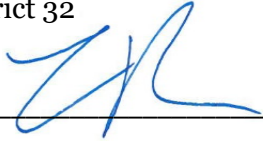
Representative Ben Carpenter
District 8



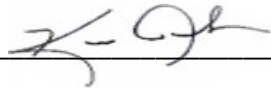
Representative Julie Coulombe
District 11



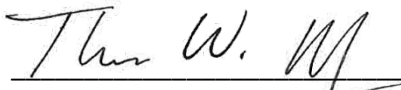
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District 32



Representative Thomas Baker
District 40



Representative Kevin McCabe
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Representative Tom McKay
District 24



Representative Mike Prax
District 33



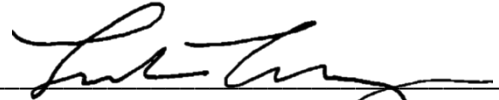
Representative Craig Johnson
District 10



Representative Mike Cronk
District 36



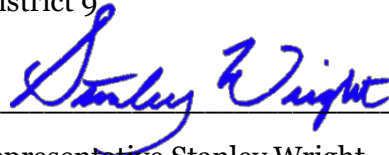
Representative Justin Ruffridge
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District 34



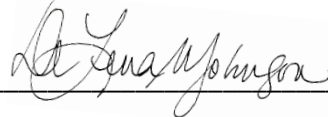
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