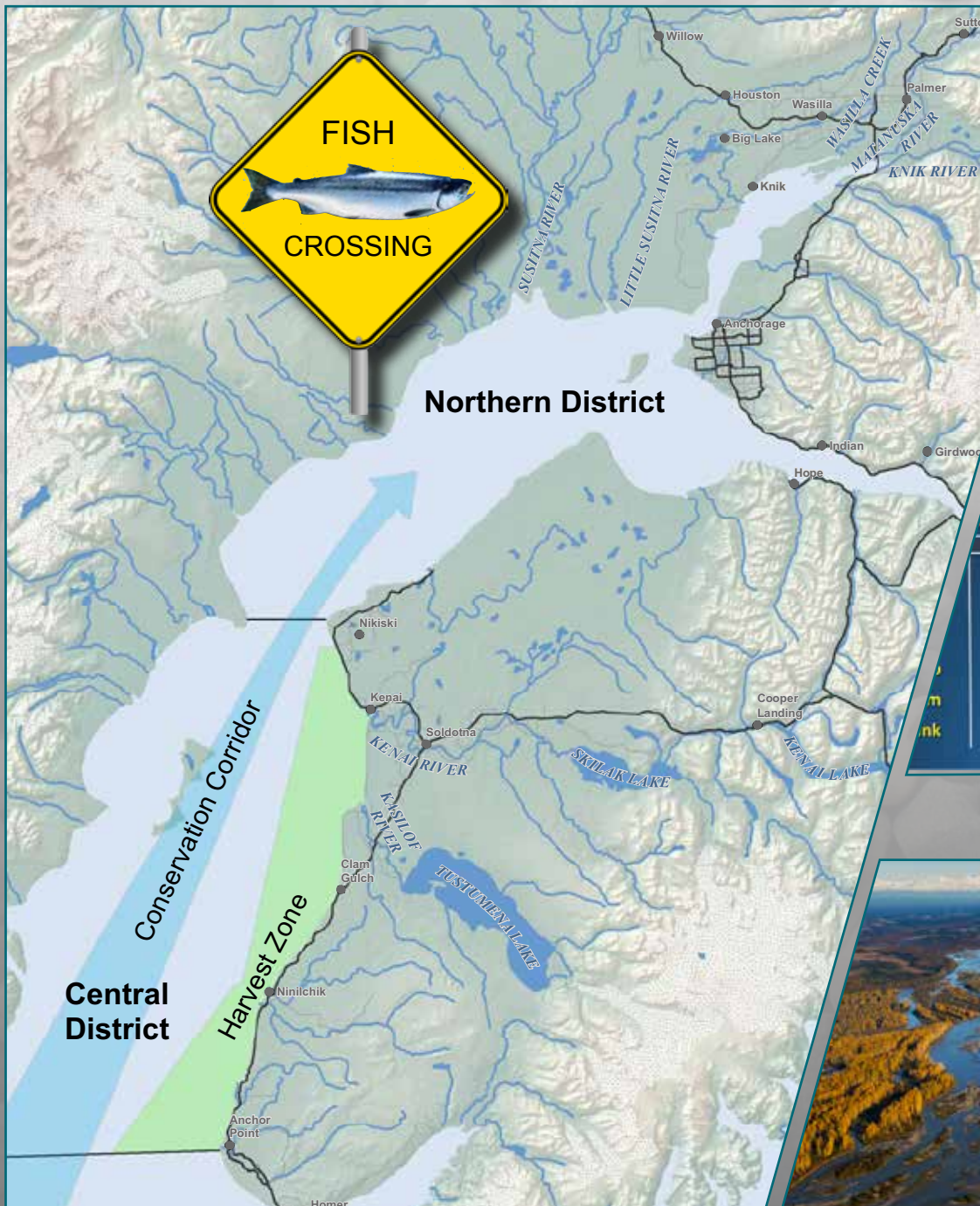


# It Takes Fish To Make Fish

2020

The Corridor is Working – Refine It



# MSB Fish and Wildlife Commission



**Matanuska-Susitna Borough Fish & Wildlife Commission:** Left to right: Howard Delo, Larry Engel, Amber Allen, Assemblymember Tamara Boeve, Assemblymember Dan Mayfield, Chair Mike Wood, Andy Couch  
Commissioners not pictured: Bob Chlupach and T. Bruce Knowles

## **Our Experience**

- 8-member volunteer board, appointed by the Mayor, including two Borough Assembly Members
- 12 years of combined experience on the Alaska Board of Fisheries with three years as Chair, 70+ years of combined expertise as State biologists, 35+ years combined experience as fishing guides and nine years as a commercial setnetter
- Directed \$9.5 million in Borough, State, and Federal appropriations toward science, genetic research, and fish passage improvements

## **Our Goals**

- Enhance the Conservation Corridor in the Central District Drift Gillnet Fishery Management Plan in July and early August (Proposals 129, 133) with mandatory area restrictions to regular fishing periods.
- Continue protection for identified Stocks of Concern – particularly Susitna Sockeye.
- Increase inriver returns of coho salmon to Northern Cook Inlet river systems by establishing an orderly transition from sockeye management to coho management.
- Adopt Chinook (King Salmon) management plans and strategies that address early run King salmon in the Northern Cook Inlet (Proposals 199, 215, 217, 219)
- Personal Use Fishery: Maintain or extend personal use fishing opportunity for Alaskan residents of the Northern Cook Inlet who choose to harvest salmon with net gear. (Proposal 234-238)
- Establish inriver or OEG (Optimal Escapement Goals) for salmon escapement in the Northern Cook Inlet

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# The Corridor is Beginning to Work

## Let's Refine It

### **It Takes Fish to Make Fish – Keep the Corridor Open**

For decades commercial fisheries management of Kenai River sockeye has driven Upper Cook Inlet with little regard to appropriate harvest levels of Northern Cook Inlet stocks. As a result, salmon stocks in the Northern Cook Inlet suffered drastic declines, local fishing opportunities were restricted or eliminated, and residents of the Mat-Su Borough watched helplessly as their commercial, personal use, and sport fishing needs took a back seat to Central District commercial interests.

Building off the highly successful terminal stock fisheries management program in Bristol Bay, the concept of a conservation corridor is designed to enable the commercial fisherman to target Kenai sockeye closer to shore while allowing northern bound coho and sockeye to pass through the corridor to reach Upper Cook Inlet. When the Conservation Corridor was established in 2011, the Northern Cook Inlet streams were almost universally in decline. Since the Corridor began, however, upticks in coho escapement in 2014 and 2015, and sockeye escapement in 2015 on some of the key rivers and creeks has shown promise. In the report,

**“Temporal and Spatial Distributions of Kenai River and Susitna River Sockeye Salmon and Coho Salmon in Upper Cook Inlet: Implications for Management” - ADF&G**

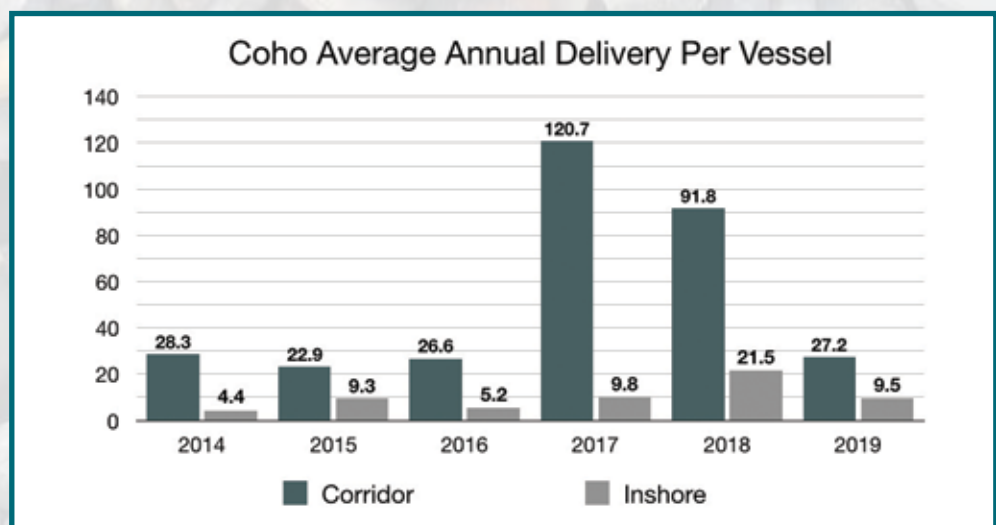
confirms the need for the Conservation Corridor. Fishing for Kenai sockeye in the terminal harvest zones, closer to shore, will harvest fewer Susitna sockeye and coho because these northern salmon are mostly running up the middle of the Central District.

The Matanuska-Susitna Borough supports fisheries management using the best available science. Harvesting Northern Cook Inlet salmon stocks primarily within the district where directed harvests can best match individual stock production and abundance level will minimize inseason restrictions and closures. This management approach will maximize the benefit for the state, the fishing economy, and the health of the fishery.

## BEFORE THE CORRIDOR



- **Angler days for sportsfishing sank to the lowest level in 34 years**
- **Escapement goals—the bedrock of fisheries management—had met chronic failure in Northern Cook Inlet sockeye and coho streams, while in the south the sockeye commercial harvest often had successive emergency openings to catch more fish**
- **Coho returns in Northern Cook Inlet streams reached record lows in 2011-2012**
- **8 of the State’s 16 Stocks of Concern are right here for sockeye and kings**



Annual Average Drift Fleet Per Vessel Coho Delivery, July 16-31

# Maintaining the Corridor

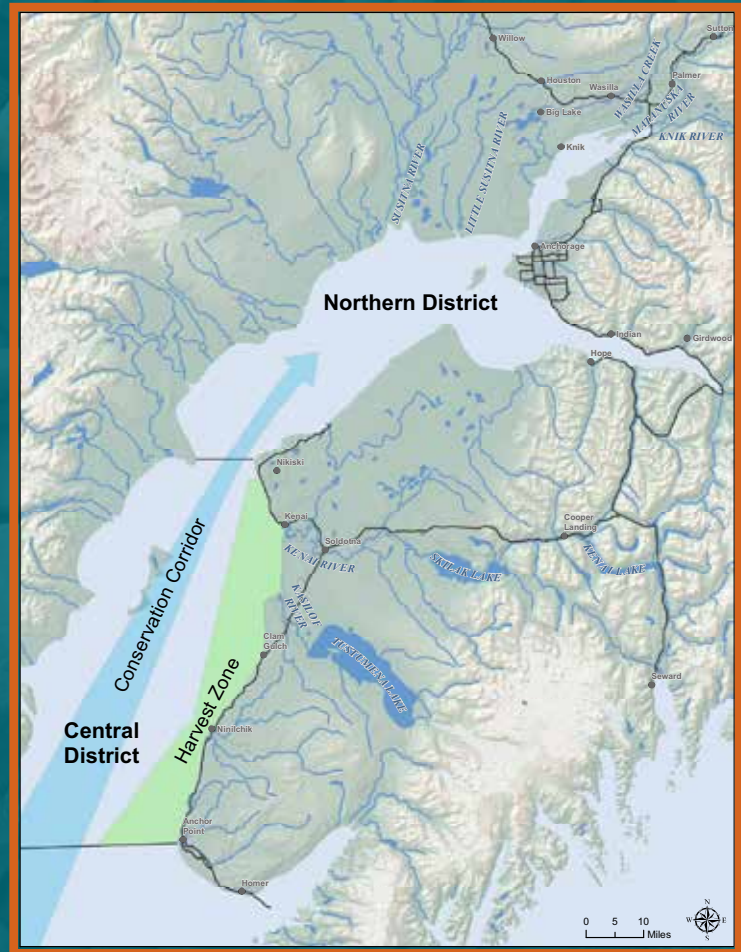
## ***A Reasonable Opportunity***

In 2014, because of a 7 to 0 vote by the Alaska Board of Fisheries, a sea change occurred. A second iteration of a Conservation Corridor enforced a clear directive that had been side-stepped for more than 35 years. The Central District Drift Gillnet Management Plan ensures “adequate escapement of salmon into the Northern District drainages” and the drift gillnet fishery is managed “to minimize the harvest of Northern District and Kenai River coho salmon in order to provide sport and guided sport fishermen a reasonable opportunity to harvest these salmon stocks over the entire run...”

However, from 2000-2016, the drift harvest had averaged more than 100,000 coho per year, while the Mat-Su sport fishery had harvested 65,000 per year until 2015. With the Corridor, during much of July the drift fleet is restricted to fish inshore near rivers where Kenai and Kasilof sockeye originate, allowing northern bound coho to pass north. This practice is proven. The most successful fishery in the world, Bristol Bay sockeye, is regulated this way with terminal fishing districts.

## ***Hold Tight to Escapement Goals***

Kenai sockeye returns often drive the sockeye escapement goals and outcomes for Northern Cook Inlet. There has been a history of the commercial drift fishery driving the Northern Cook Inlet fisheries. In 2005, for example, on the Yentna River, the optimum escapement goal (OEG) for a depressed sockeye fishery was set by the Board of Fisheries lower than what is normally considered scientifically sustainable. It was done in order to maximize the harvest of a large Kenai sockeye run. The result: in 2005—the Yentna escapement was, by far, the lowest ever while the Cook Inlet sockeye harvest exceeded 5.3 million. This escapement goal reduction is still going on today and needs to be addressed. By reducing the escapement goals on a struggling stock, the returns appear healthy but are simply meeting a lower goal.



## **Kenai Sockeye Are More Productive**

Kenai sockeye are highly productive (4.5 fish returned per spawner) and can be harvested heavily but Susitna sockeye are less productive (less than 1.5 fish per spawner\*) and cannot withstand the appropriate harvest rate of Kenai sockeye, yet this is what occurs. The Central District commercial fishery is overfishing Susitna sockeye and has historically overexploited Susitna coho beyond a fair share in the sport fishery directive. The differential between the sustainable exploitation rates clearly contributes to the complex fishery management challenges in Upper Cook Inlet. The solution is a logical and time-tested focus on terminal stock fisheries management strategy, for enhancing the protections afforded by a Conservation Corridor.

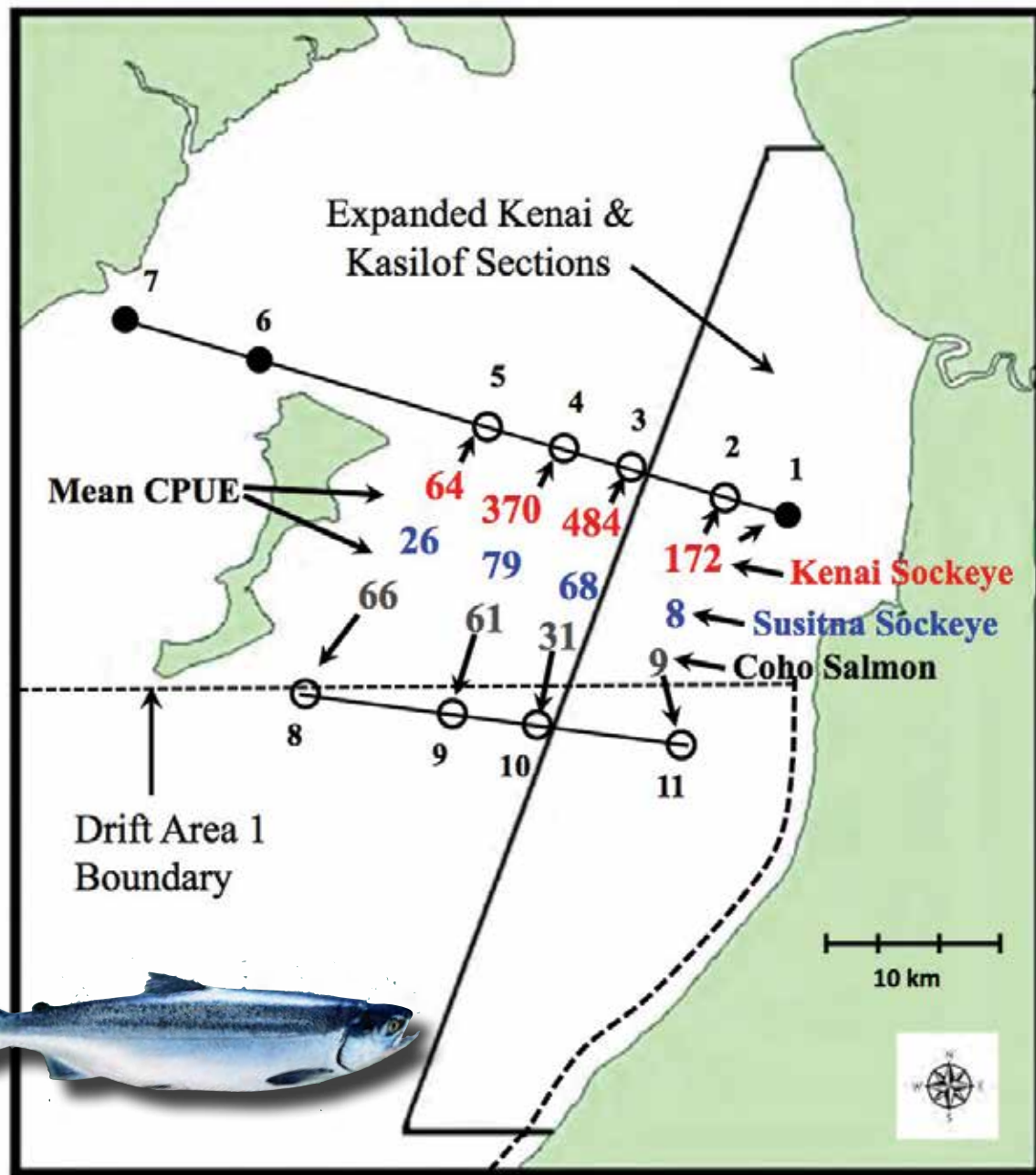
Source: ADF&G\*



# Successful Test Fishery Suspended

## North Offshore Test Fishery Falls to State Budget Ax

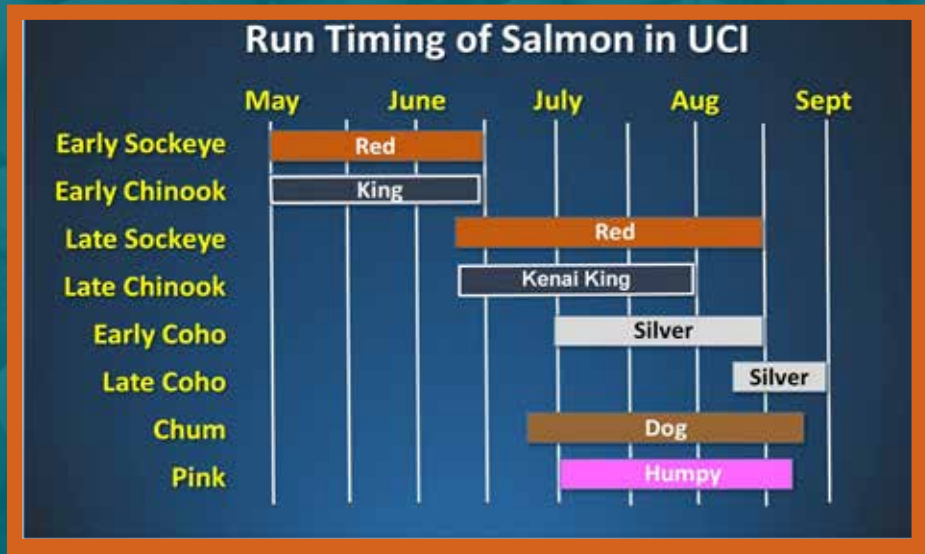
Results of the recent ADF&G study on distributions of Kenai River and Susitna River sockeye and coho in Upper Cook Inlet prove the concept of the Conservation Corridor. More data is desirable from the offshore test fishery in the Central District, but the program is suspended due to a State budget shortfall.



*Data collected 2012-2014 proved conservation corridor is working*

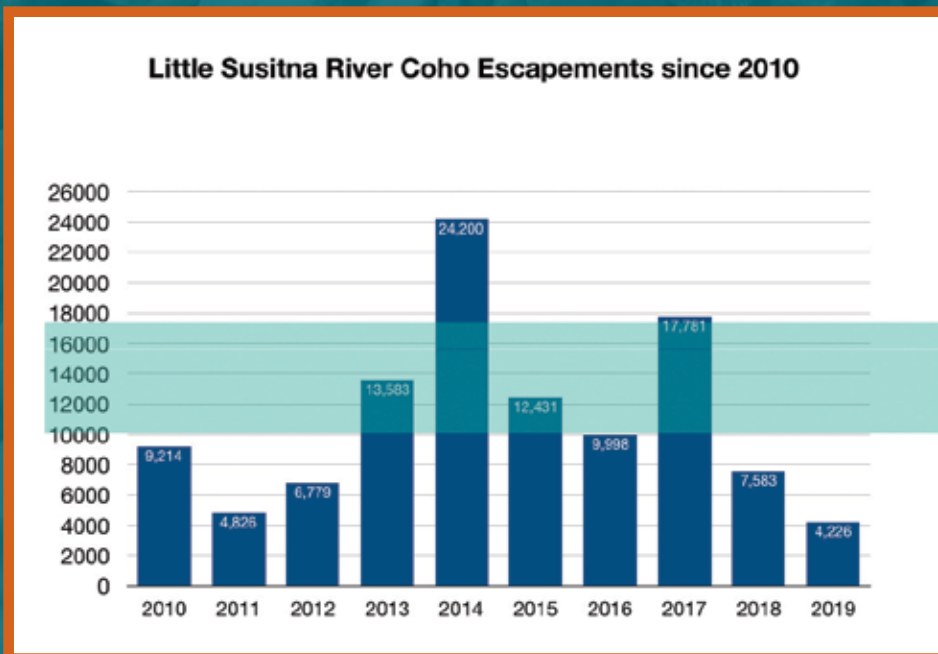
# Mixed Stock Fishery Complexity

Every July, five different species of salmon and numerous different stocks of salmon come through about the same time in Upper Cook Inlet. Among the salmon, are the Kenai sockeye, the Kenai kings, the Northern cohos, and the Northern sockeye all swimming in the same saltwater with commercial boats after them. This is a mixed stock commercial fishery. Farther up stream are the northern set gillnets. Still farther north are subsistence users, and finally the sport fishery in the Mat-Su Basin.



This overlapping run timing makes the commercial fishery difficult and complex to manage. How does a drift gillnet boat target Kenai sockeye, and let the northern-bound cohos pass? Adding to it is the hardiness of the fish. Kenai sockeye produce more returning offspring than Northern sockeye: 4.5 fish per spawner to Susitna's less than 1.5 fish per spawner. This means that only one Susitna sockeye offspring can be harvested if the stock will sustain itself versus the seven eligible Kenai offspring. The less productive stocks cannot sustain the same high harvest rates as the strong Kenai stock.

Management of the Inlet's weak- and strong-stock "mix" and for the different species, often results in substantial conflict among user groups. When commercial fishermen have a banner year for sockeye, sportfishermen often face closures because of few returning cohos. By studying when and where specific stocks and species are located, hotly contested harvest practices may be fine-tuned to benefit all users of this common property resource. The MSB Fish & Wildlife Commission has a genetic study for coho to improve this management.



17,700  
**S.E.G. Current**  
 10,100

# Stocks of Concern

## **8 of the State's 16 Are Here in the Northern Cook Inlet**

Stocks of Concern are fish that are struggling to maintain their harvest, their population stability, and in some cases their survival. Stock of Concern designations are assigned by the Alaska Board of Fisheries based on recommendations from the Alaska Dept. of Fish & Game.

Some Northern Cook Inlet sockeye and king salmon stocks have plummeted to such low levels that their reproduction is at risk. Issues on the high seas are likely major factors affecting king salmon not the interception in the Conservation Corridor. Factors affecting sockeye occur both in fresh water with habitat and in Cook Inlet marine waters from interception by fishing.

*Issues on the high seas are likely major factors affecting king salmon, not the interception in the Conservation Corridor*



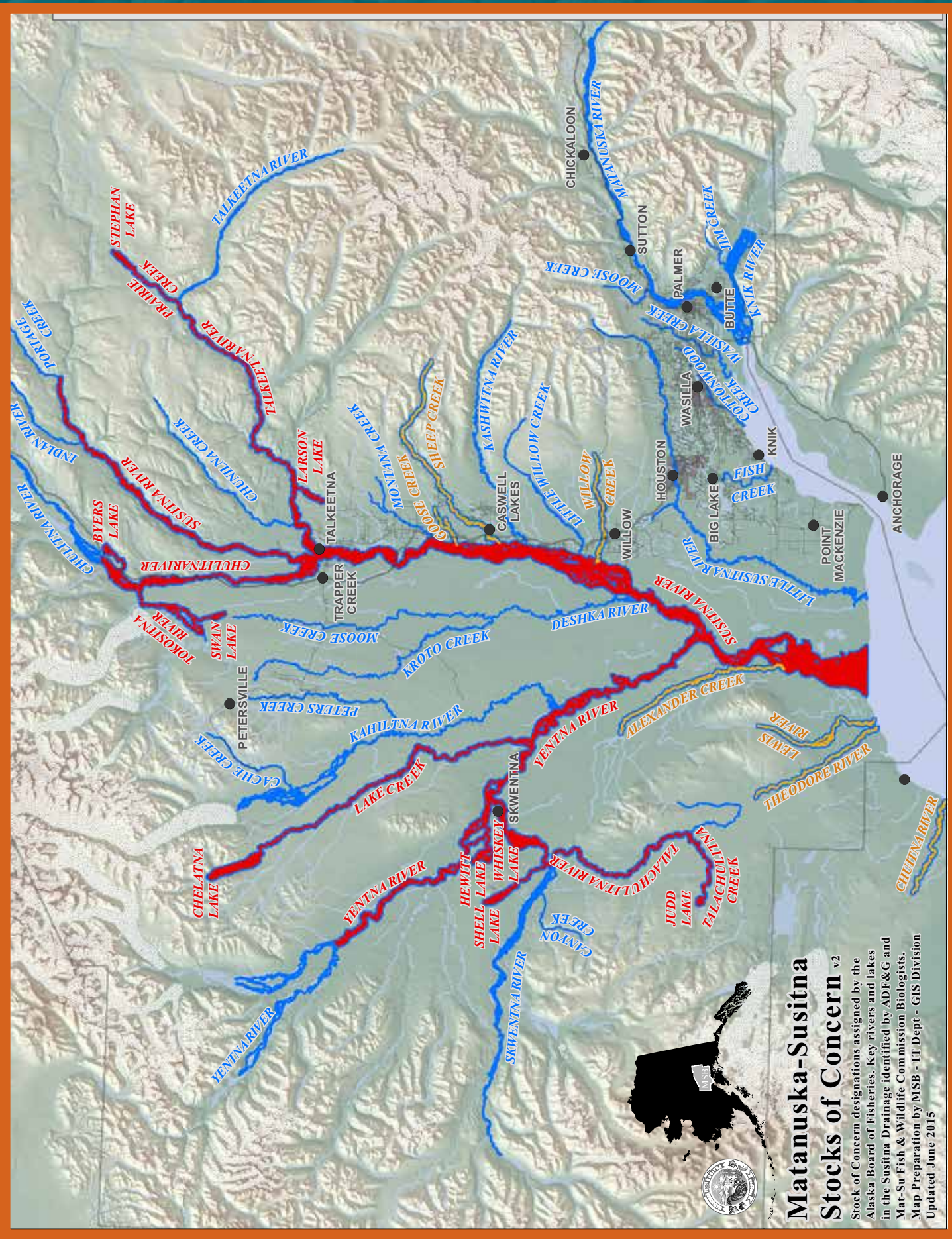
### **The Stocks of Concern are**

- *Sockeye across the Susitna River drainage*
- *Kings in Alexander Creek*
- *Kings in Chuitna River*
- *Kings in Goose Creek*
- *Kings in Lewis River*
- *Kings in Sheep Creek*
- *Kings in Theodore River*
- *Kings in Willow Creek*



Fishing for kings on the Deshka River in 2016, a year that saw an uptick in escapement.





## Matanuska-Susitna Stocks of Concern v2

Stock of Concern designations assigned by the Alaska Board of Fisheries. Key rivers and lakes in the Susitna Drainage identified by ADF&G and Mat-Su Fish & Wildlife Commission Biologists. Map Preparation by MSB - IT Dept - GIS Division Updated June 2015



Kings' Stocks of Concern shown in orange. Sockeye Stocks of Concern shown in red.

# Kenai Drives Management

(Bigger Projections = Smaller Protections)

## **When ADF&G forecasts a big Kenai sockeye run, less northern fish make it to spawn**

Historically, under State regulations called the Central District Drift Gillnet Management Plan, the bigger the projection of Kenai sockeye made by ADF&G, the fewer the Susitna coho and sockeye went north. Big runs brought a more aggressive fishing rate. The drift fleet has the capability of harvesting more than half a million salmon in a single day during the peak of a strong run.

Over the last six years, however, major regulation changes have been introduced with the concept of the Conservation Corridor, the terminal Harvest Zones, and actual restrictions on where and when to commercial fish in July when Northern coho and sockeye are running north, and the Kenai sockeye are returning home.

Prior to the development of the Conservation Corridor, during a large run, drift fisherman could fish often in an area of their choice. Today during a strong sockeye run with a projected escapement of 4.6 million fish, drifters are permitted only one 12-hour period per week in the mixed stock waters of the corridor from July 16-31. In 2017, the BOF added one additional district wide fishing period in late July.

***It's understandable that drift fishermen are upset. Just like Bristol Bay Drifters, they have to fish twice as hard, pay twice as much for the same number of fish. It's no longer their favorite fishing hole they work in and they're jockeying for position with other boats. These are important considerations. However, the Drift Plan is a compromise. It recognizes the importance of catching Kenai sockeye and also of passing fish to the north, which historically hadn't been done satisfactorily until 2011. Moving the drifters out of the Corridor during late July allows the Northern coho and sockeye to pass. It gets the Drifters' targeted sockeye away from the mixed stock fishery that is swimming in the middle of the Central District.***

***— Larry Engel, Mat-Su Borough Fish & Wildlife Commissioner***

Although it takes more effort, large numbers of fish are still harvested in the commercial fishery. Since the corridor was established, the drift net fishery has harvested some of its most successful seasons of the last two decades. The 2014 harvest is the 9th highest value in the Upper Cook Inlet commercial fishery since 1960.

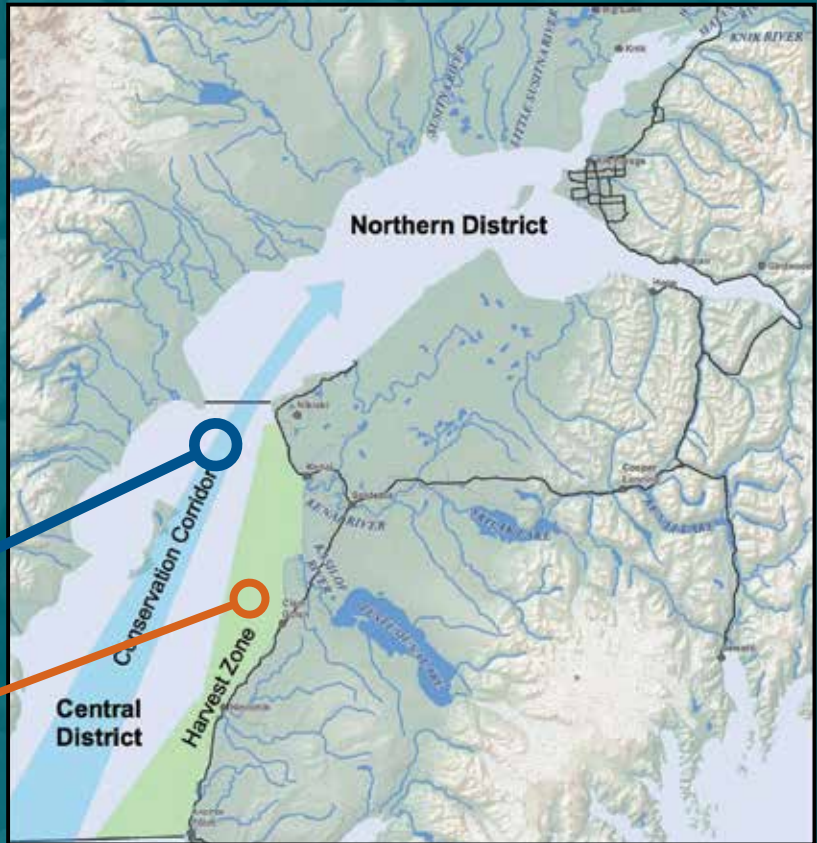
An important change suggested for the 2020 Board cycle is applying the vast knowledge on stock productivity for Kenai sockeye and the clear knowledge that concerns for "over escapement" have been drastically overstated. Proposals before the Board will significantly change management targets for Kenai sockeye and will provide managers additional flexibility as they apply management prescriptions.

***This compromise is a work in progress and still needs fine-tuning. A bias in methodology still exists toward maximizing the very productive Kenai commercial harvest at the expense of the ailing Susitna coho and sockeye escapements.***



From 2014-2019, drifters harvested an average annual delivery per vessel of 53 coho in the corridor versus 10 coho in the harvest zone from July 16-31

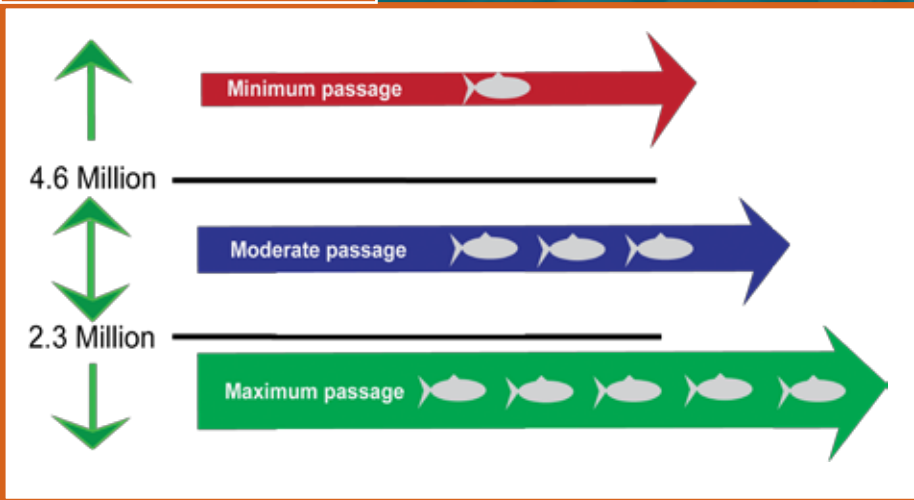
Source: Larry Engel



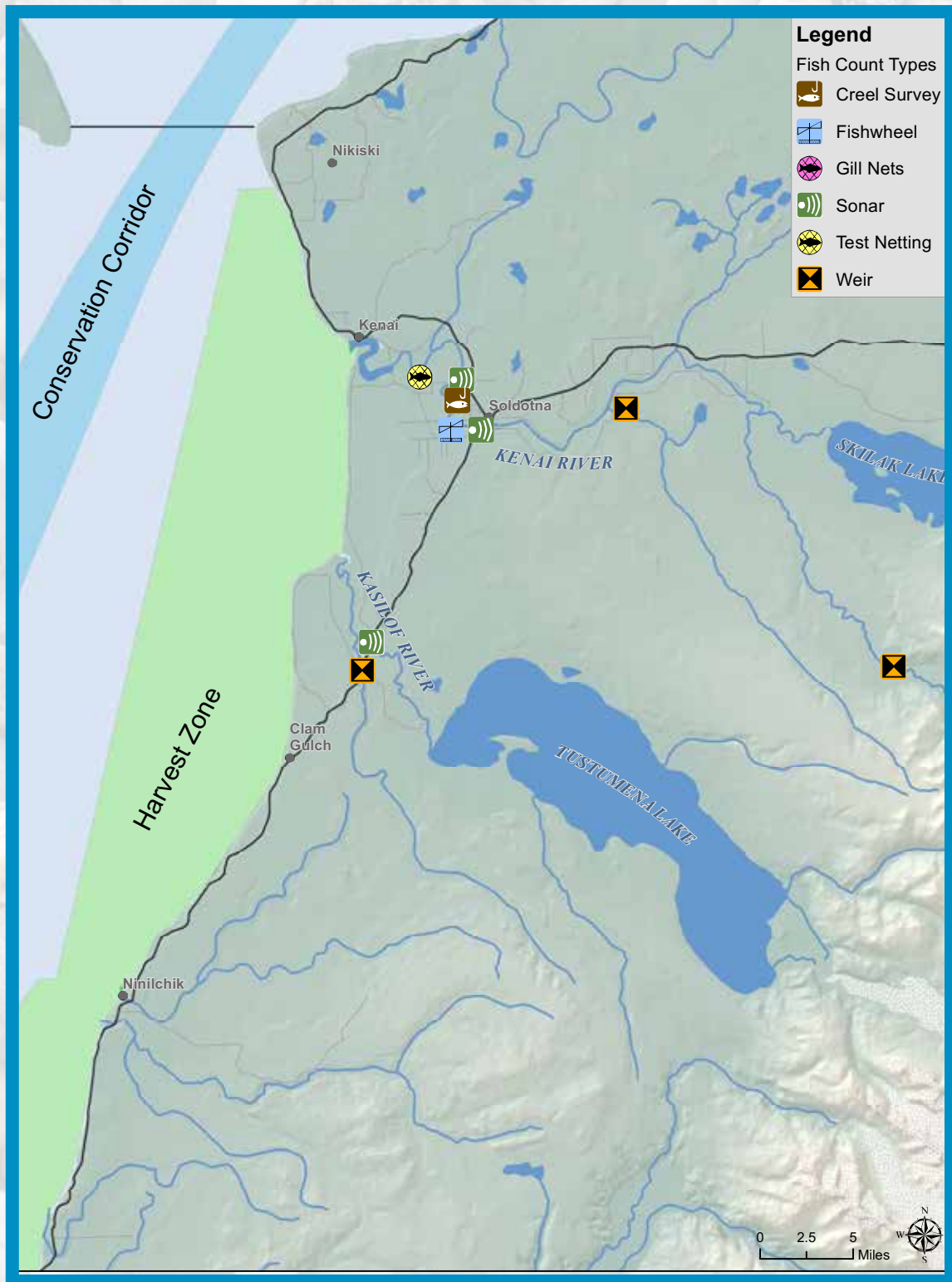
**The projections trigger the amount of fishing**

- At a projection over 4.6 million Kenai sockeye, the drift fleet may fish a single day a week district wide during July 16-31. The rest of the week, they fish in the harvest zone.
- In 2017, the BOF added one additional district wide fishing period in late July.
- At a projection below 2.3 million Kenai sockeye, the drift fleet only drops nets inside the harvest zone. No fishing allowed in the corridor during the early coho run, July 16-31.

**Northern Bound Salmon**

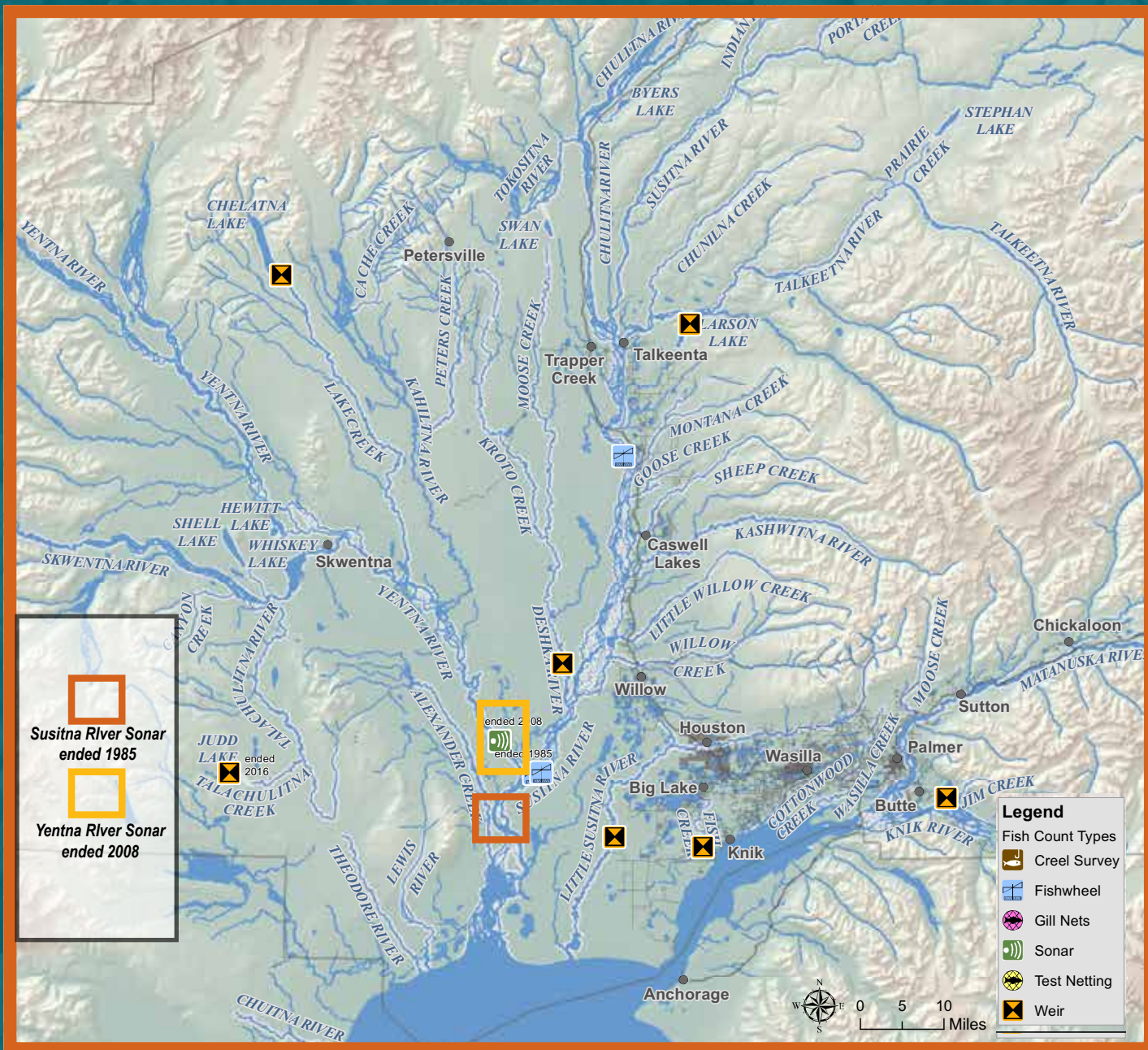


# Kenai has Inseason Management Tools



Kenai weirs and sonar are close to the fishery and provide real time feedback. When a weir on the lucrative Kenai sockeye fishery was malfunctioning, it was repaired.

# NCI has only Post-Season Mangement Tools



The Susitna counters are far up the Inlet and farther still up Mat-Su rivers and streams, and don't provide real time data that can be used for management in season. The data mostly helps with post season management. Beginning in 1985, ADF&G ended a few programs for fish counting in the Mat-Su Basin. In 1985, sonar ended on the Susitna River. In 2008, a malfunctioning sonar on the Yentna River was removed. This shows we do not have inseason management; other than the use of commercial harvest rates. So, we need to use the precautionary principle management strategy; which is provided for in the Conservation Corridor.

# Non-Traditional Environment

## A less productive stock exposed to the same high harvest rate

### Mat-Su Basin

A baby salmon in the 2,739-acre Chelatna Lake would have to travel more than 100 miles to reach the ocean. The Chelatna is the largest lake in the Mat-Su region but much smaller than Kenai Lake. Half of the sockeye fry in the Mat-Su Basin don't rear in lakes at all like most sockeye salmon; but in sloughs and volatile braided river channels that are shallow and susceptible to flooding and freezing to the bottom. These scrappy salmon have adapted to marginal conditions.



### Kenai

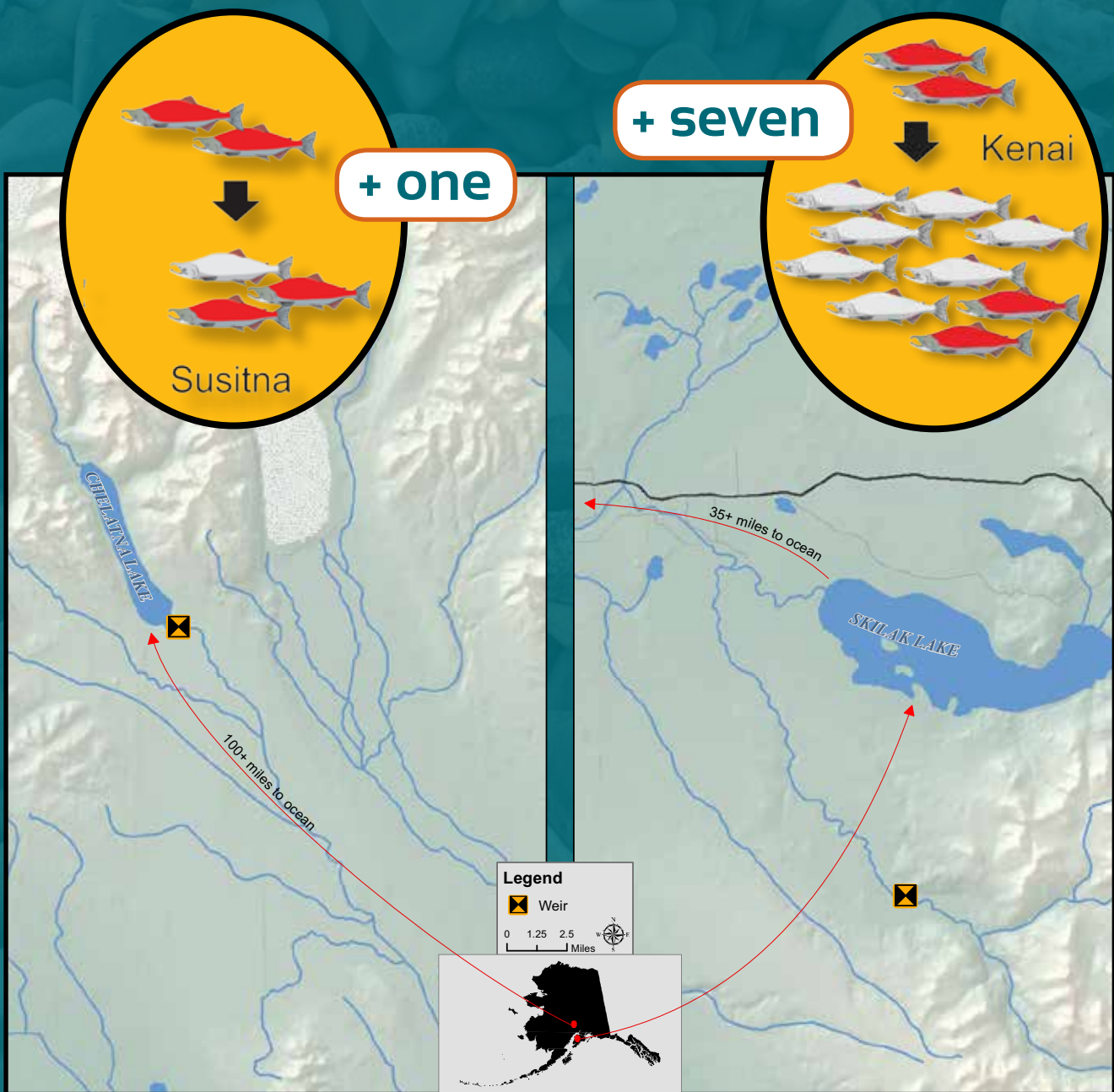
A baby salmon safely at the bottom of the 24,512-acre Skilak Lake may have no idea if a deep freeze hits. The lake is 15 miles long and up to 4 miles wide. Skilak Lake is part of the Kenai River system. The fry has access to food readily and lives in a very stable environment. Getting to the ocean is a 36-mile swim.



# A Naturally Less Productive Stock

**Kenai sockeye produce more returning offspring than Northern sockeye, 4.5 fish per spawner to Susitna's less than 1.5 fish\* per spawner. This means that only one Susitna sockeye offspring can be harvested if the stock will sustain itself versus the seven eligible Kenai offspring. The less productive stocks cannot sustain the same high harvest rates as can the strong Kenai stock.**

*\*Source: ADF&G*



# Northern District Set Gillnet Fishery



*Setnetters picking the net at the mouth of the Ivan River, two miles west of the Susitna River toward the Lewis River.*

*Photo Joshua Foreman*

The Conservation Corridor benefits northern commercial users. The Northern Cook Inlet begins at the narrowest part of Cook Inlet and extends to the Susitna River, Knik, and Turnagain Arm. This is a setnet fishery, a small-scale family run fishery with many difficulties including the long transport of catch to a processor in the Kenai or Anchorage. Many fishermen have adapted by direct marketing to residents.

About 90 Northern District set gillnet permits are registered on average and 80 are fished.

Sockeye harvests have been in steady decline for the Northern District setnetter. However, there has been a slight upward trend in harvest numbers since the implementation of the Conservation Corridor in 2014.





# Unprecedented Fish Habitat Improvements

From 2001 through 2019, the number of culverts replaced for salmon passage reached 111 within the Matanuska-Susitna Borough on state, local government, Alaska Railroad, and private land; the work continues with additional culverts being replaced in 2020. No other local government in Alaska has such an aggressive replacement program. The Mat-Su is lauded in Washington, D.C. by the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service for doing it right. Three national awards have been credited to the Mat-Su and its partners. This local priority on fish passage has reopened well over 100 miles of riverine habitat and acres of lake habitat for salmon spawning. Millions of dollars have been spent on this effort, shared by the Mat-Su Borough and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. These serious efforts to open up and improve Mat-Su Basin salmon habitat need one final component - returning fish to their natal streams to spawn.

Likewise, other partners have invested in projects that improve and enhance salmon habitat within the Mat-Su Borough. For example, Great Land Trust since the year 2000 has completed 19 projects that have conserved nearly 9,000 acres of fish habitat, and 40 anadromous stream miles.

***“The scale of the fish passage program in the Mat-Su is pretty unprecedented in the commitment to really seeing through and improving fish passage boroughwide.”***

***—Alaska Dept. Fish & Game, summer 2016***



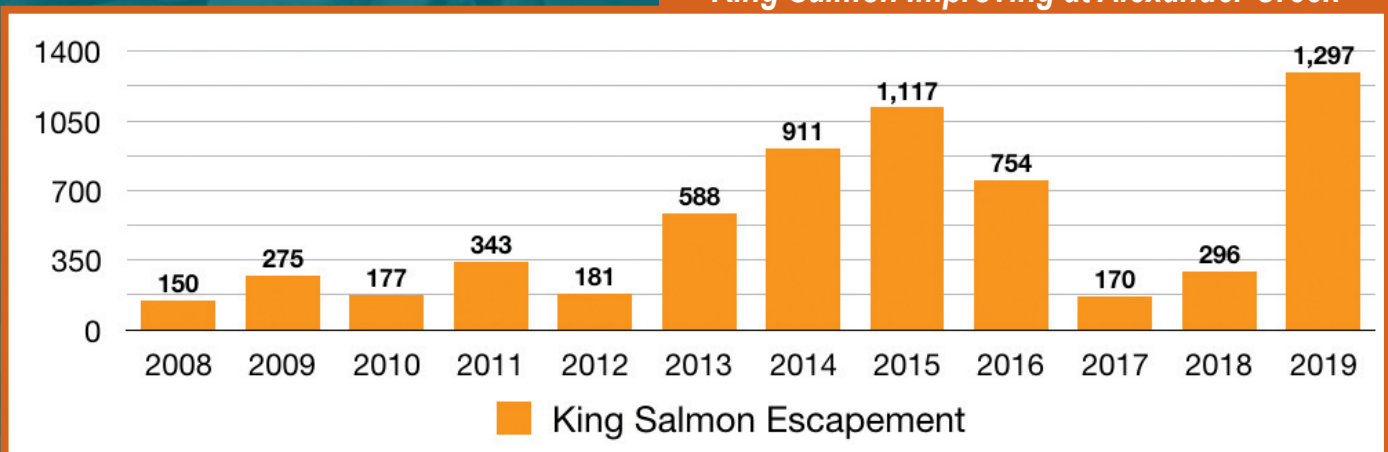
## **\$2.5 M to Salmon Research**

The MSB Fish & Wildlife Commission directed \$2.5 million in State appropriations toward science, genetic research, and fish passage. In 2015, the Commission led a stakeholder effort to prioritize research needs for Upper Cook Inlet. It's the first time a research plan has been completed for the Inlet despite decades of fishing.

One of the research projects was genetic identification of coho in Upper Cook Inlet. Data has been collected on Kenai sockeye

for more than ten years. With enough comparative data base compiled on coho, scientists have a better understanding of where coho travel and when through the Conservation Corridor. The genetic data on coho and sockeye shows a need to adjust fishing time in the Conservation Corridor.

## **King Salmon Improving at Alexander Creek**

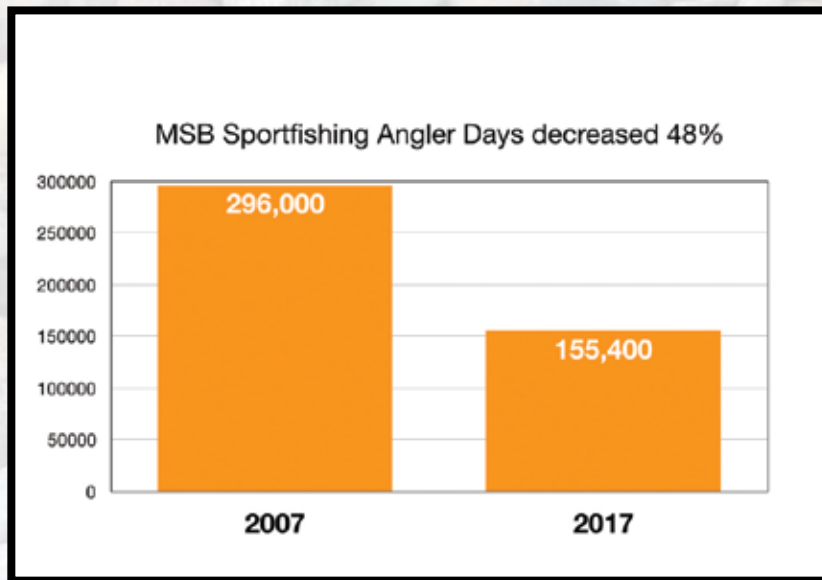


## **Bad Habitat Happens**

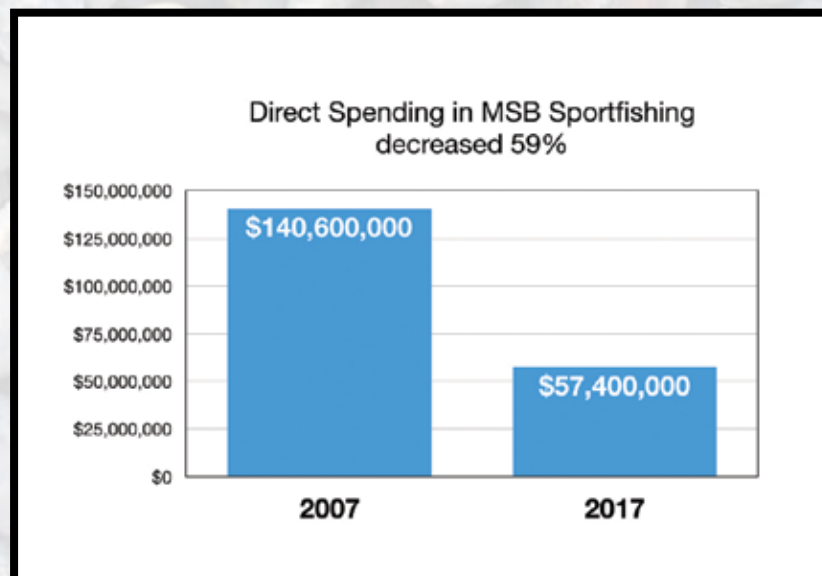
Problems with habitat exist here as they do in all parts of Alaska. Beaver dams, invasive weeds, and of course pike, a salmon predator. All-out warfare has occurred at Alexander Creek, one of the most troublesome pike areas. King Salmon returns from Alexander Creek have shown some improvement but escapements are still well below goals.

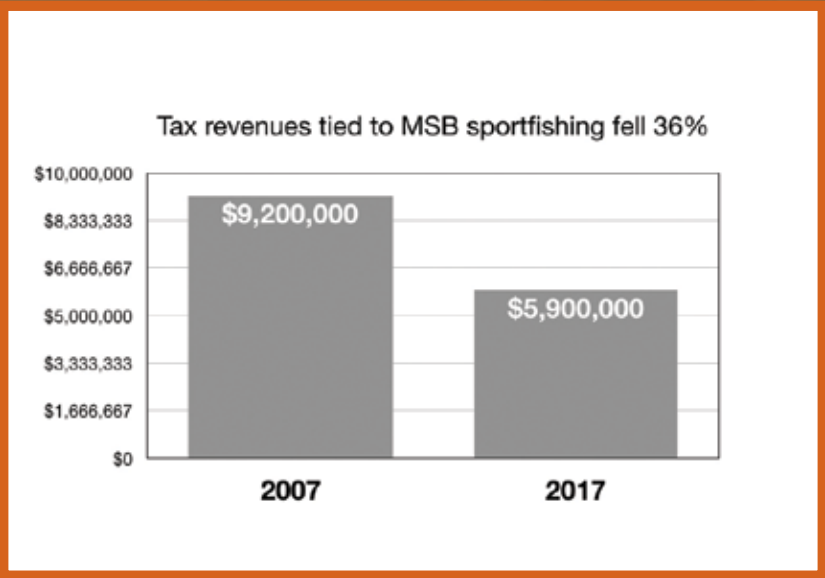
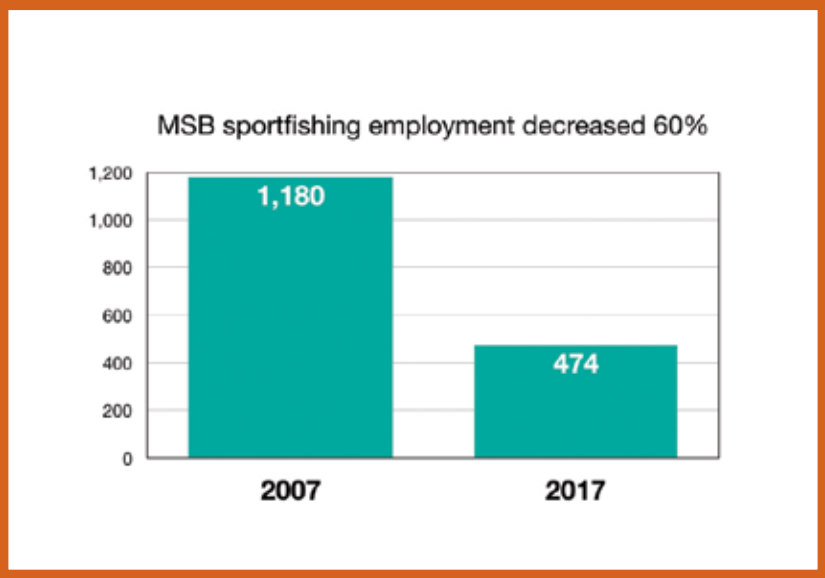
# Fish Economics

Two economic studies on sportfishing in Cook Inlet show the significant impact of and the recent decline in sportfishing in the Mat-Su Borough. This correlates with shrinking salmon returns to their natal streams in the area. In 2007 and 2017, these economic studies looked at sportfishing in the Mat-Su in terms of angler days, direct spending, employment, and tax revenue generated. In all cases, there were significant declines as follows:



Sport fisheries are disproportionately shouldering the conservation burden of Northern Cook Inlet salmon declines





**Take Aways:**

1. The economic impact of sportfishing in the MSB is significant in terms of direct economic impact, jobs, and tax revenues.
2. As salmon returns to the MSB have fallen from 2007 to 2017, so has angling effort in the Mat-Su Borough and the consequent lack of economic infusion of money to the local economy.
3. The solution: Have the State Board of Fisheries adopt salmon management plans that return more fish to Northern Cook Inlet streams so the full historic economic impacts of sportfishing can be realized again, here in the Mat-Su as well as other Northern Cook Inlet locations like Turnagain Arm and Anchorage Management Area.
4. It takes fish to make fish, and it takes fish returning to natal streams in Northern Cook Inlet to support sportfishing economies.

# The Proposals

## **Matanuska-Susitna Borough Fish & Wildlife Commission**

### **PROPOSAL 133 – Central District Drift Gillnet Fishery Management (5 AAC 21.353)**

Amend the Central District Drift Gillnet Fishery Management Plan with additional mandatory area restrictions to regular fishing periods, as follows:

The Changes to the existing plan are as follows:

(A)(iv) Drift Gillnet Area 1; [NOTWITHSTANDING THE PROVISIONS OF SUBPARAGRAPH (d)(2)(A) OF THIS SECTION, ONE REGULAR 12-HOUR FISHING PERIOD FROM JULY 16 THROUGH JULY 31 MAY OCCUR IN THE CENTRAL DISTRICT INSTEAD OF IN DRIFT GILLNET AREA 1;]

(e) From August 1 through August 15, [THERE ARE NO MANDATORY AREA RESTRICTIONS TO REGULAR FISHING PERIODS]

**(1) fishing during both regular 12 hour fishing periods per week will be restricted to one or more of the following sections and areas: (A) Expanded Kenai Section: (B) Expanded Kasilof Section (C) Anchor Point Section (D) Drift Gillnet Area 1,** except that if the Upper Subdistrict set gillnet fishery is closed under 5 AAC 21.310(b)(2)(C)9iii), or the department determines that less than one percent of the seasons total drift gillnet sockeye salmon harvest has been taken per fishing period for two consecutive fishing periods in the drift gillnet fishery, regular fishing periods will be restricted to Drift Gillnet Area 3 and 4. [IN THIS SUBSECTION “FISHING PERIOD” MEANS A TIME PERIOD OPEN TO COMMERCIAL FISHING AS MEASURED BY A 24-HOUR CALENDAR DAY FROM 12:01 AM UNTIL 11:59 P.M.]

**(2) additional fishing time under this subsection is allowed only in one or more of the following sections: (A) Expanded Kenai Section: (B) Expanded Kasilof Section: (C) Anchor Point Section.**

(f) From August 16 until closed by emergency order, Drift Gillnet Areas 3 and 4 are open for fishing during regular fishing periods.

***PROPOSAL 199 – Northern District King Salmon Management Plan (5 AAC 21.366) Amend the Northern District King Salmon Management Plan, as follows:***

(a) The purpose of this management plan is to ensure an adequate escapement of king salmon into the Northern District drainages and to provide management guidelines to the department. The department shall manage the Northern District king salmon stocks primarily for sport and guided sport uses in order to provide sport and guided sport fishermen with a reasonable opportunity to harvest these salmon over the entire run as measured by the frequency of inriver restrictions. The department shall manage the Northern District for the commercial harvest of king salmon as follows:

[(10) IF THE DESHKA RIVER IS CLOSED TO SPORT FISHING, THE COMMISSIONER SHALL CLOSE, BY EMERGENCY ORDER, THE COMMERCIAL KING SALMON FISHERY THROUGHOUT THE NORTHERN DISTRICT FOR THE REMAINDER OF THE FISHING PERIODS PROVIDED FOR UNDER THIS SECTION;]

(10) If the sport fishery on the Deshka River

(A) is closed or if retention of king salmon is prohibited, the commissioner shall, by emergency order, close the commercial king salmon fishery throughout the Northern District for the remainder of the fishing periods provided for under this section; or

(B) is restricted to retention of king salmon under 28 inches or less in length as measured from the tip of snout to tip of tail, the commissioner shall, by emergency order, reduce the time allowed per fishing period provided for in this section to no more than six hours in duration.

(12) If the sport fishery on the Little Susitna River

(A) is closed or if retention of king salmon is prohibited, the commissioner shall, by emergency order, close the commercial king salmon fishery in the General Sub-district of the Northern District including areas 247-41, 247-42, and 247-43, for the remainder of the fishing periods provided for under this section; or

(B) is restricted to retention of king salmon under 28 inches or less in length as measured from the tip of snout to tip of tail, the commissioner shall, by emergency order, reduce the time allowed per fishing period provided for in this section to no more than six hour provision in the General Sub-district of the Northern District including areas 247-41, 247-42, and 247-43.

(13) If the inseason Deshka River run projection is below the sustainable escapement goal; the commissioner may, by emergency order, close the commercial king salmon fishery throughout the Northern District for the remainder of the fishing periods provided for under this section.

(14) If the inseason Little Susitna River run projection is below the sustainable escapement goal the commissioner may, by emergency order, reduce the time allowed per fishing period provided for in this section to no more than six hours in duration throughout the Northern District.

**PROPOSAL 215**

**5 AAC XX.XXX. New section.**

**Create a Susitna and Yentna Rivers King Salmon Fishery Management Plan, as follows:**

**5 AAC 61.XXX Susitna and Yentna Rivers King Salmon Management Plan.**

**(a) The purpose of this management plan is to ensure an adequate escapement of king salmon into the rivers and streams of the Susitna and Yentna river drainages, to provide management guidelines and tools to the department and to provide predictability in management. The intent of the board is that the department will consider the management Upper Cook Inlet Finfish Proposals 121 Northern Cook Inlet Sport, Personal Use and Subsistence (31 proposals) Back to Top options listed in this plan prior to considering any other available options for managing the fishery.**

**(b) The department shall initiate management of the sport fisheries for king salmon in the Eastside Susitna management area (Unit 2 of the Susitna River) based on the preseason forecast for the Deshka River and other available abundance indices.**

**(1) If the pre-season forecast for the Deshka River projects the run to be below the sustainable escapement goal or if other available abundance indices indicate a high probability of runs below the escapement goal for other systems within the Eastside Susitna management area, the commissioner may, by emergency order,**

**(A) Close the sport fishery to the taking of king salmon; or**

**(B) Prohibit the retention of king salmon;**

**(2) If the pre-season forecast for the Deshka River projects the run to be within the sustainable escapement goal or if other available abundance indices indicate a high probability of inriver runs within established escapement goal for other systems within the East side Susitna management area, the commissioner may, by emergency order,**

**(A) Prohibit the retention of king salmon;**

**(B) Establish a maximum size limit of 28 inches as measured from tip of snout to tip of tail;**

**(C) Reduce the annual limit;**

**(D) Close one or more weekends of fishing;**

**(E) Start the fishery as described in 5 AAC 61.110 - 5 AAC 61.123;**

**(3) If, based on assessment based of available abundance indices, the inseason projection of escapement at any location within the Eastside Susitna management area is below the sustainable escapement goal, the commissioner may close, by emergency order, the sport fishery to the taking of king salmon; forecast for the Deshka River and other available abundance indices.**

**(4) If the inseason escapement projection based on available abundance indices at any location within the Eastside Susitna management area is assessed to be within the sustainable escapement goal the commissioner may, by emergency order,**

**(A) Conduct the season as described in 5 AAC 61.110 - 5 AAC 61.123;**

**(B) Modify the maximum size limit allowed for retention.**

## **PROPOSAL 215 Continued**

(5) If the inseason escapement projection based on available abundance indices at any location within the Eastside Susitna management area is accessed to be greater than the sustainable escapement goal the commissioner may, by emergency order,

(A) Increase hours to 24 hours per day;

(B) Add a 3-day weekend of fishing;

(c) The department shall initiate management of the sport fisheries for king salmon in the Talkeetna River management area (Unit S of the Susitna River) based on the preseason forecast for the Deshka River and other available abundance indices.

(6) If the pre-season forecast for the Deshka River projects the run to be below the sustainable escapement goal or if other available abundance indices indicate a high probability of runs below the escapement goal ranges for other systems within the Talkeetna River management area, the commissioner may, by emergency order,

(A) Close the sport fishery to the taking of king salmon; or

(B) Prohibit the retention of king salmon;

(7) If the pre-season forecast for the Deshka River projects the run to be within or above the sustainable escapement goal, or if other available abundance indices indicate a high probability of inriver runs within established escapement goal ranges for other systems within the Talkeetna River management area, the commissioner may, by emergency order,

(A) Prohibit the retention of king salmon;

(B) Establish a maximum size limit of 28 inches as measured from tip of snout to tip of tail;

(C) Reduce the annual limit;

(D) Restrict fishing to Saturdays - Mondays;

(E) Start the fishery as described in 5 AAC 61.110 - 5 AAC 61.123;

(8) If, based on assessment of available abundance indices, the inseason projection of escapement at any location within the Talkeetna River management area is below the sustainable escapement goal, the commissioner may close, by emergency order, the sport fishery to the taking of king salmon;

(9) If the in-season escapement projection based on available abundance indices at any location within the Talkeetna River management area is accessed to be within the sustainable escapement goal the commissioner may, by emergency order,

(A) Conduct the season as described in 5 AAC 61.110 - 5 AAC 61.123;

(B) Modify the maximum size limit allowed for retention.

(C) Increase hours to 24 hours per day;

(D) Allow use of bait;

(10) If the inseason escapement projection based on available abundance indices at any location within the Talkeetna River management area is accessed to be greater than the sustainable escapement goal the commissioner may, by emergency order,

(A) Increase hours to 24 hours per day;

(B) Allow use of bait;

## **PROPOSAL 215 Continued**

(d) The department shall initiate management of the sport fisheries for king salmon in the Yentna River management area (unit 4 of the Susitna River) based on the preseason forecast for the Deshka River and other available abundance indices.

(11) If the pre-season forecast for the Deshka River projects the run to be below the sustainable escapement goal or if other available abundance indices indicate a high probability of runs below the escapement goal ranges for other systems within the Yentna River management area, the commissioner may, by emergency order,

(A) Close the sport fishery to the taking of king salmon; or

(B) Prohibit the retention of king salmon;

(12) If the pre-season forecast for the Deshka River projects the run to be within or above the sustainable escapement goal or if other available abundance indices indicate a high probability of inriver runs within or above established escapement goal ranges for systems within the Yentna River management area, the commissioner may, by emergency order,

(A) Prohibit the retention of king salmon;

(B) Establish a maximum size limit of 28 inches as measured from tip of snout to tip of tail;

(C) Reduce the annual limit;

(D) Restrict days harvest is allowed to Fridays - Mondays;

(E) Start the fishery as described in 5 AAC 61.110 - 5 AAC 61.123;

(13) If, based on assessment of available abundance indices, the inseason projection of escapement at any location within the Yentna River management area is below the sustainable escapement goal, the commissioner may close, by emergency order, the sportfishery to the taking of king salmon;

(14) If the inseason escapement projection based on available abundance indices at any location within the Yentna River management area is accessed to be within the sustainable escapement goal the commissioner may, by emergency order,

(A) Conduct the season as described in 5 AAC 61.110 - 5 AAC 61.123;

(B) Modify the maximum size limit allowed for retention.

(15) If the inseason escapement projection based on available abundance indices at any location within the Yentna River management area is accessed to be greater than the sustainable escapement goal the commissioner may, by emergency order,

(A) Increase hours to 24 hours per day;

(B) Allow use of bait;

(e) At any such time that the retention of king salmon is prohibited or a maximum size limit is established the use of multiple-hooks is prohibited.

(a) Nothing in this management plan is to be construed as diminishing or affecting the commissioner's authority to modify bag, possession, and annual limits and methods and means by emergency order under 5 AAC 75.003.



**PROPOSAL 217**

**5 AAC XX.XXX. New section.**

**Create a Deshka River King Salmon Fishery Management Plan, as follows:**

5 AAC 61.XXX. Deshka River King Salmon Management Plan.

(a) The purpose of this management plan is to ensure an adequate escapement of king salmon into the Deshka River, to provide management guidelines and tools to the department, and to provide predictability in management. The intent of the board is that the department will consider the management options listed in this plan prior to considering any other available options for managing the fishery.

(b) The Department shall manage the Deshka River king salmon sport and guided sport fisheries to achieve the sustainable escapement goal and to provide reasonable harvest opportunities over the entire run.

(c) In the Deshka River,

(1) The seasons, bag, possession, and size limits, and other special provisions for king salmon are set out in 5 AAC 61.110 -5 AAC 61.112;

(2) From January 1-July 13, from its mouth upstream to ADF&G regulatory markers near Chijuk Creek (river mile 17), and in all waters within a one-half mile radius of its confluence with the Susitna River,

(A) If the pre-season forecast projects the run to be below the sustainable escapement goal, the commissioner may, by emergency order,

(i) Close the sport fishery to the taking of king salmon; or

(ii) Prohibit the retention of king salmon;

(B) If the pre-season forecast projects the run to be within the sustainable escapement goal the commissioner may, by emergency order,

(i) Prohibit the retention of king salmon;

(ii) Establish a maximum size limit of 28 inches as measured from tip of snout to tip of tail;

(iii) prohibit the use of bait;

(iv) Reduce the annual limit;

(v) Start the fishery as described in 5 AAC 61.112;

(C) If the pre-season forecast projects the run to be above the sustainable escapement goal the commissioner may, by emergency order,

(i) Start the fishery as described in 5 AAC 61.112;

(ii) allow the use of bait prior to June 1;

(iii) Increase hours to 24 hours per day.

(3) If the inseason escapement projection is below the sustainable escapement goal, the commissioner may close, by emergency order, the sport fishery to the taking of king salmon;

(4) If the inseason escapement projection is within the sustainable escapement goal, the commissioner may, by emergency order,

(A) Increase hours to 24 hours per day;

(B) Increase bag and possession limits;

(d) When retention of king salmon is prohibited or a maximum size limit is in effect the use of bait and multiple hooks are prohibited.

(e) Nothing in this management plan is to be construed as diminishing or affecting the commissioner's authority to modify bag, possession, and annual limits and methods and means by emergency order under 5 AAC 75.003.

## **PROPOSAL 219**

### **5 AAC XX.XXX. New section.**

**Create a Little Susitna River King Salmon Fishery Management Plan, as follows:**

#### **5 AAC 60.XXX. Little Susitna River King Salmon Management Plan.**

**(a) The purpose of this management plan is to ensure an adequate escapement of king salmon into the Little Susitna River to provide management guidelines and tools to the department Upper Cook Inlet Finfish Proposals 127 Northern Cook Inlet Sport, Personal Use and Subsistence (31 proposals) Back to Top and to provide predictability in management. The intent of the board is that the department will consider the management options listed in this plan prior to considering any other available options for managing the fishery.**

**(b) The Department shall manage the Little Susitna River king salmon sport and guided sport fisheries to achieve the sustainable escapement goal and to provide reasonable harvest opportunities over the entire run. The department shall initiate management of the sport fishery for king salmon in the Little Susitna River based on run sizes of immediate past years and other available abundance indices while minimizing the effects of conservation actions for the Susitna River on the Little Susitna River.**

#### **(c) In the Little Susitna River.**

**(1) The seasons, bag, possession, and size limits, and other special provisions for king salmon are set out in 5 AAC 60.120 -5 AAC 60.122;**

**(2) From January 1 - July 13, from its mouth upstream to the Parks Highway.**

**(A) If pre-season, the run is anticipated to be below the sustainable escapement goal, the commissioner may, by emergency order,**

**(i) Close the sport fishery to the taking of king salmon; or**

**(ii) Prohibit the retention of king salmon;**

**(B) If the pre-season, the run is anticipated to be within or above the sustainable escapement goal the commissioner may, by emergency order,**

**(i) Prohibit the retention of king salmon;**

**(ii) Establish a maximum size limit of 28 inches as measured from tip of snout to tip of tail;**

**(iii) Reduce the annual limit;**

**(iv) restrict days harvest is allowed;**

**(v) Start the fishery as described in 5 AAC 61.112;**

**(3) If the inseason escapement projection is below the sustainable escapement goal, the commissioner may close, by emergency order, the sport fishery to the taking of king salmon;**

**(4) If the inseason escapement projection is within the sustainable escapement goal, the commissioner may, by emergency order,**

**(A) Conduct the season as described in 5 AAC 61.112;**

**(B) Modify the maximum size limit allowed for retention;**

**(5) If the inseason escapement projection is greater than the sustainable escapement goal, the commissioner may, by emergency order, allow use of bait;**

**(d) When retention of king salmon is prohibited or a maximum size limit is in effect the use of multiple-hooks is prohibited.**

**(e) Nothing in this management plan is to be construed as diminishing or affecting the commissioner's authority to modify bag, possession, and annual limits and methods and means by emergency order under 5 AAC 75.003.**

# Recommendations

## The Commission recommendations to the 2020 Board of Fisheries

### **1. Enhance the Conservation Corridor in the Central District drift gillnet fishery—it is working as designed**

The Conservation Corridor provides strategic time and area closures in the center of Cook Inlet and expands use of terminal fishing areas based on abundance of the Kenai and Kasilof sockeye. Following corridor adoption, significant increases were observed in sockeye and coho salmon runs to the Mat-Su, local sport fisheries and escapements. The uptick in salmon numbers is part of what we, the Commission, were asking for when the 2014 Alaska Board of Fisheries adopted the current drift gillnet fishery management plan.

### **2. Continue to protect Stocks of Concern—particularly Susitna sockeye**

Susitna sockeye are currently a Stock of Yield Concern. Continuing declines and chronic escapement failures also qualify this stock for listing as a stock of management and conservation concern. Susitna sockeye are tremendously diverse but inherently less productive than Kenai and Kasilof populations which drive Upper Cook Inlet commercial fisheries. Freshwater productivity of Susitna sockeye also appears to be declining. The combination of declined productivity and continuing high harvest rates are a recipe for extinction. Freshwater production problems are imperative for limiting exploitation, not an excuse for continued over fishing in the mixed stock commercial fishery.

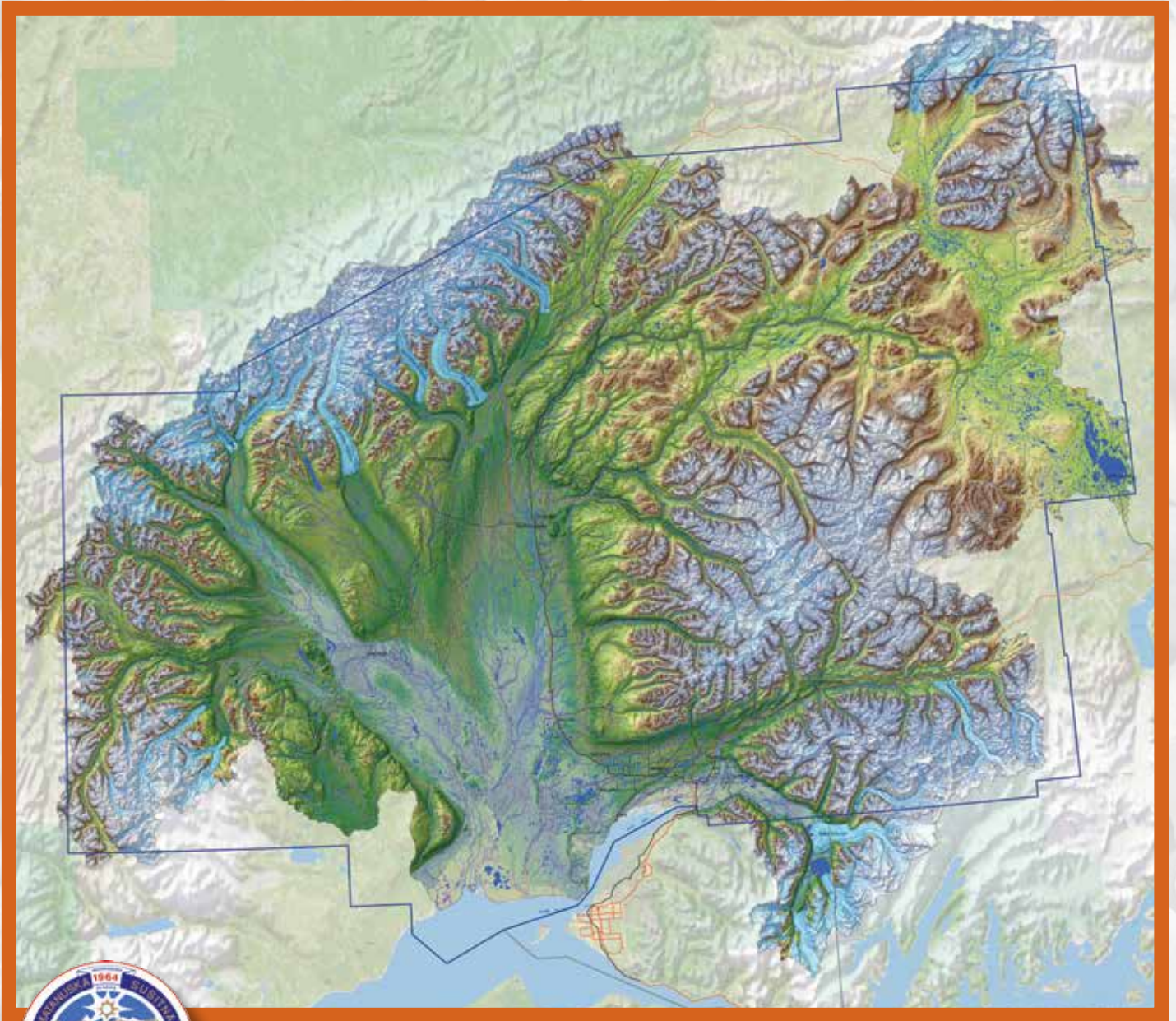
### **3. Limit commercial drift gillnet fishing in August to avoid excessive coho harvest**

Most of the commercial drift gillnet fishery is closed by regulation in August when less than 1% of the season's total sockeye harvest is caught on two consecutive fishery openers. This rule provides flexibility to extend the commercial fishing season when the sockeye run is late and significant numbers continue to be available for harvest. The rule also ensures that commercial harvest of sport-priority coho and Kenai kings is limited after the sockeye run winds down. This closure rule, as adopted, was meant to be absolute except as otherwise provided under the commissioner's authority to manage to meet escapement goals as a first priority.

### **4. Continue to provide robust personal use opportunities where stocks permit**

Over 25,000 to 30,000 households now participate in the UCI personal use fishery, harvesting approximately 325,000 or more sockeye salmon for the period 2013 to 2018, primarily from Kenai or Kasilof rivers. The majority of participation comes from residents of areas outside the Kenai Peninsula including the Mat-Su as other regional personal use opportunities are quite limited. The Commission supports maintaining and enhancing personal use fishery opportunities wherever possible. Commercial fishery limitations including closure "windows" are essential for delivering fish to the rivers when sockeye are running. The Commission also supports proposals to increase inriver goals for Kenai late-run sockeye for consistency with current inriver harvest levels.

# The Matanuska-Susitna Basin



The Nature Conservancy

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