

Talking Points for Area M Seiners/CAMF

- Write your testimony down- do not wing it
- You only have 2 minutes- so practice
- Avoid using acronyms- they are not familiar with fish jargon
- 2 minutes is only a little less than $\frac{3}{4}$ a page typed
- All these points cannot be covered in one testimony, so please work with other testifiers within your group to make sure the points are spread out and all areas are covered.

This bill is because Proposal 140 failed.

- Proposal 140 asked to shut down Area M fishing during specific times during the season in hopes to get more chum salmon up to AYK. This would not have been effective because migration of chum salmon cannot be nailed down to a specific time.
- This proposal which was nearly a carbon copy of the Fish and Game management plan for the Area M June fishery between 2001 and 2003, this plan decimated the region and had no noticeable benefit for AYK Chum stocks.
- Measuring the success of a fixed closure during a specific time would have been difficult given the low harvest rate and distance from Coastal Western Alaska (CWAK) streams.
- Proposal 140 could not guarantee it would lead to increased chum passage to AYK.

Actions were taken that would be more effective than proposal 140

- Proposal 140 was not adopted, but Proposal 136 as amended with RC's 104 and 190 passed. This instituted a long 72-hour window to allow for Chum passage through Area M based on recent Genetic data from ADFG and reduced fishing time in the June fishery by 42 hours as well as closing the Sanak Islands section to all fishing in June.
- In response to the high chum harvest in 2021, the Area M Seiners fleet, in addition to the Fish and Game management plan, developed their own voluntary management plan to further reduce chum harvest in the June fishery. The seiners voluntarily stood down 217 hours which led to a decrease chum harvest slightly over 50%. Recognizing that previous plans had failed to meet expectations of increased Chum passage to the AYK, the BOF decided to adopt the seiner's voluntary management plan and incorporated into RC 104.
- The BOF action cut the first fishing period by 22.7% less fishing time from 88 hours to 68 hours. For the 2nd fishing period, the BOF cut the fishing time by 25% less from 88 hours to 66 hours. Instead of being closed for 32 hours between the 1st and 2nd period, the BOF action closed the fishery for 76 hours which is 2.4 times longer. And lastly, before the BOF action, Sanak Island Section of Unimak was open for all gear types. The BOF closed this entire area to all gear types resulting in a complete closure of an area.
- In short actions that were taken:
 - Significantly reduced Area M fishing time

- Closure of an entire area known for higher chum harvest
- Implementation of new limits/caps in the June fishery for South Unimak and the Shumagin Islands, which if reached would require ADFG to further restrict fishing inseason
- The Board also approved the fleet implementing a cooperative management agreement, which requires 100% of the fleet to sign on, share all harvest data, monitor chum harvest inseason in space and time, and stand down or move fishing locations when directed, to create opportunity for chum to pass through. This adaptive approach is actually the only way to ensure more passage to coastal western AK, as opposed to fixed closures in regulation that don't correspond to when chum are actually on the fishing grounds.

The impact of the Area M salmon fisheries on AYK chum returns is very low according to recent scientific data

- Sampling data provided from ADFG to the Board of Fish in 2022 indicated about 17% of the chum harvest in the June Area M salmon fishery were chums from coastal western Alaska. Coastal Western Alaska is considered the large coastal area that spans from Norton Sounds to Bristol Bay.
- Genetic sampling- which is created taking DNA samples from the fish, showed that less than 5.5% of the chum harvested in Area M were returning to the vast Coastal Western Alaska of which the Yukon River is one of many.
- Nearly 60% of the chum caught in Area M were hatchery fish from Asia.

What happened to the Yukon chums?

- As commercial fishermen who make their livelihood off a resource, we care about healthy stocks and sustainable management. What is happening on the Yukon is alarming and should cause great concern- but closing Area M down will not help bring back the chum to this region because according to scientists, bycatch and interception is not the cause for low chum returns to the Yukon- the cause is changes to climate and ecosystems.
- Science presented at the Area M meeting by ADF&G explained that **climate and ecosystem changes are having substantial impacts on salmon and salmon returns in AYK.**
- We've heard some from some legislators they can no longer trust ADFG science, so here are some non-ADFG scientist stating in their own words what happened to chum along the Yukon:
 - Dr. Vanessa von Biela is an aquatic ecologist for the U.S Geological survey. In 2019 after witnessing the effects of temperature on Yukon salmon, she said that all signs pointed to one cause of death. *"I think there's strong evidence to suggest that fish are dying because of heat stress"*
 - In 2019, Yukon River Inter-Tribal Fish Commission led by Dr. Stephanie Quin-Davidson, a fisheries biologist, flew a team of scientists to the Koyukuk (a

tributary of the Yukon River) to check out what was happening. Cutting open the fish, the team found underdeveloped eggs and sperm in the bellies, indicating the salmon had a long way to go to reach their spawning grounds, where the fish usually die. Concluding that the chum died due to heat stress Dr. Quinn-Davidson said *“When fish are exposed to warmer temperatures, their metabolism increases and they go through their energy stores much faster. The salmon that died didn't have enough energy to make it to their spawning grounds”*

- Dr. Peter Wesley, UAF Assistant Fisheries Professor who was on the Koyukuk trip led by the Yukon River Inter-Tribal Fish Commission said, *“A river that is usually teeming with life felt like a tomb. The deaths should not be a surprise because climate models have for years forecast unhealthy Alaska river temperatures for salmon. It's directly in line with the predictions of what scientists like myself and other colleagues have been warning is likely to occur, and we need to prepare ourselves and not be surprised when it happens again in the future, because it will.”*
- A NOAA Fisheries report from 2022 stated their “science indicates several factors working in combination due to warm water temperatures likely contributed to poor Yukon and Kuskokwim River returns in the past 2 years.” They observed thinner, less fit young chum salmon in their survey. They suspect this was due to a combination of increased metabolic rates, reduced prey, and poor prey quality. At the same time, there were also mass seabird die offs, and a gray whale unusual mortality event. Poor prey availability was identified as a potential factor in both of these situations.

What this bill does to the fishery

- Closes the entire commercial fishery to all gear types in the June fishery.
- This bill also closes the whole of the Alaska Peninsula salmon fishery for the month of June, not just that portion of the fishery where chum salmon are incidentally caught (i.e. the False Pass fishery). There is a significant sockeye fishery that occurs on the North Peninsula (Bering Sea side) in the last 10 days of June that would also be closed if this bill were to pass. This fishery catches NO western Alaska bound chum salmon. This would have a dramatic negative impact on the participants in the fishery for not even a minimal marginal benefit to western Alaska subsistence users. Additionally, it also closes Nelson Lagoon which also harvest no western Alaska chum. Why are areas that do not catch Western Alaska chum being closed in this bill if the idea behind the bill is to save chum?

What SB 128 does to the BOF process

- Overriding the authority of a State board will have long-lasting and unknown precedents on future management issues
- The BOF makes their decision after receiving in-depth scientific reports, public testimony, written comments, a committee of the whole procedure.

- The BOF work hard. The work starts weeks before a meeting where they review hundreds of pages of comments and reports. They work hard during breaks and well into the evening to bring user groups together to come to a compromise. Meetings can last up to 14 days straight- including weekends.
- Overruling BOF Actions sends a message that the BOF appointees that the legislature themselves appoint, are not to be trusted and that the time they spend at BOF meetings was in vain. We have a difficult enough time getting people to put their names in – this will make it even more difficult.
- With every proposal the BOF looks at, there is always a winner and always a loser. Allowing this bill to move opens the door to anytime someone is unhappy with a BOF decision, they can come to the legislature to try and solve the problem.