

# Summary and Results of Outreach Plan for DEIS on Chinook Salmon Bycatch in the Bering Sea Pollock Fishery

April 2009

## Genesis for outreach plan

As a result of one of the Council's policy priorities, it is developing a draft policy approach to focus on improving outreach and communications with rural communities and Alaska Native entities and developing a method for systematic documentation of Alaska Native and community participation in the development of fishery management actions.<sup>1</sup> Upon review of several suggestions to expand both ongoing communication and outreach specific to particular projects,<sup>2</sup> the Council initiated a small workgroup to further review potential approaches and provide recommendations. Upon review of the workgroup report in February 2009, the Council approved the workgroup's primary recommendation to initiate a standing committee to provide input to the Council on ways to improve outreach to communities and Alaska Native entities. The committee will have three primary tasks: 1) to advise the Council on how to provide opportunities for better understanding and participation from Native Alaska and rural communities; 2) to provide feedback on community impacts sections of specific analyses; and 3) to provide recommendations regarding which proposed Council actions need a specific outreach plan and prioritize multiple actions when necessary. The committee will likely be formed prior to the June 2009 Council meeting.

In addition to the stated Council policy priority, the need to improve the stakeholder participation process was highlighted during development of the Chinook bycatch EIS/RIR/IRFA. While it is NMFS' legal obligation to undertake formal tribal consultation with Federally-recognized tribes and ANCSA corporations,<sup>3</sup> the Council made efforts to solicit and obtain as much input as possible on the proposed action from Alaska Natives, rural communities, and other affected stakeholders. This outreach effort, specific to Chinook salmon bycatch management, will likely dovetail with the Council's overall community and Alaska Native stakeholder participation policy.

As the Council chose a preliminary preferred alternative for the Chinook salmon bycatch issue at its June 2008 meeting, it was determined timely to undertake an outreach effort with affected community and Native stakeholders during the development of the draft EIS/RIR/IRFA (draft EIS) and prior to final Council action. The outreach plan for Chinook salmon bycatch management was developed by Council staff with input from NMFS and affected stakeholders. It is intended to improve the Council's decision-making processes on the proposed action, as well as enable the Council to maintain ongoing and proactive relations with Alaska Native and rural communities. Another of the objectives of the plan is to coordinate with NMFS' tribal consultation activities to prevent a duplication of efforts between the Council and NMFS, which includes not confusing the public with divergent processes or providing inconsistent information.

This report will be included, in part or in whole, in the Final EIS submitted to the Secretary of Commerce after the Council makes a final recommendation. A broad overview of the three primary steps of the Chinook salmon bycatch outreach plan follows.

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<sup>1</sup>This policy priority is identified in the Council's workplan resulting from the Programmatic SEIS.

<sup>2</sup>[http://www.fakr.noaa.gov/npfmc/Tasking/community\\_stakeholder.pdf](http://www.fakr.noaa.gov/npfmc/Tasking/community_stakeholder.pdf)

<sup>3</sup>Section 161 of the Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2004 (P.L. 108-199), as amended by Section 518 of the Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2005 (P.L. 108-447), extends the tribal consultation requirements of E.O. 13175 to Alaska Native corporations formed under the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act (ANCSA).

## **Direct mailings to stakeholders**

In early September 2008, the Council provided a mailing to over 600 stakeholders, including community governments, regional and village Native corporations, tribal entities, and other community or Native entities in communities (e.g., regional non-profits). The mailing was also sent to previous contacts or individuals that have contacted the Council on this issue, and State legislature and Congressional representatives.

The mailing included a letter and a two-page flyer for posting in communities. The letter solicited input from stakeholders identified as being potentially affected by the proposed action, prior to the release of the public review draft analysis. The letter also provided a website reference to a Council brochure which explains the Council process and how to be involved in the Federal fisheries management process (*Navigating the North Pacific Council Process, 2007*)<sup>4</sup>. The flyer provided a summary of the proposed action, including a description of the Council's preliminary preferred alternative and its schedule for action. The flyer also outlined how individuals and communities can provide feedback on this action and a schedule of community outreach meetings planned for October 2008.

NMFS also sent a letter to the same broad group of stakeholders, announcing the release of the Draft EIS on December 5, 2008, and providing a copy of the executive summary. In addition to outlining the process for providing formal written comments to NMFS during the public comment period, this letter also included the Council's schedule for final action and ways to provide input to the Council.

Finally, the Council sent another letter in early March 2009, in order to ensure awareness of the schedule for final action, the preferred alternative, and opportunities to provide further feedback prior to or during the April 2009 Council meeting.

The Council website also posted the draft EIS, associated documents, outreach flyer,<sup>5</sup> and the powerpoint presentation provided at regional meetings,<sup>6</sup> prior to the Council's scheduled meeting for final action in April 2009. In addition, the Council newsletter reported upon progress and relevant meetings. The Council will also consider a follow-up mailing to potentially affected entities as to the results of the Council's final recommendation for Chinook salmon bycatch reduction measures to the Secretary of Commerce, if, at that point, the website and Council newsletter are not considered sufficient means to reach potentially affected stakeholders.

## **Community outreach meetings (late 2008 – early 2009)**

Upon informal consultation with community and Native coordinators, staff determined that the most effective approach to community outreach meetings is to work with established community representatives and Native entities within the affected regions and attend annual or recurring regional meetings, in order to reach a broad group of stakeholders in the affected areas. It was determined that Council staff would convene individual outreach meetings only as necessary and appropriate, if a regional meeting was not scheduled in a particular area during a timeframe in which Council staff could attend or sufficiently prior to final action.

The outreach plan also directed Council staff to coordinate with NMFS, if NMFS conducts a formal consultation with a tribe or ANCSA corporation. Council staff could provide an overview or background

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<sup>4</sup>[http://www.fakr.noaa.gov/npfmc/misc\\_pub/Navigating\\_NPFMC.pdf](http://www.fakr.noaa.gov/npfmc/misc_pub/Navigating_NPFMC.pdf)

<sup>5</sup>[http://www.fakr.noaa.gov/npfmc/current\\_issues/bycatch/salmonbycatch109/Chinookflyer\\_109.pdf](http://www.fakr.noaa.gov/npfmc/current_issues/bycatch/salmonbycatch109/Chinookflyer_109.pdf)

<sup>6</sup>[http://www.fakr.noaa.gov/npfmc/current\\_issues/bycatch/salmonbycatch109/outreachPPT109.pdf](http://www.fakr.noaa.gov/npfmc/current_issues/bycatch/salmonbycatch109/outreachPPT109.pdf). Note that the powerpoint presentation was modified slightly over several meetings.

presentation on the proposed action as part of the Council outreach plan, and NMFS could conduct the tribal consultation as a separate part of that meeting.

With regard to community and Native outreach meetings, Council staff consulted with the coordinators of the Federal Subsistence Regional Advisory Councils (RACs) and the Association of Village Council Presidents (AVCP) in order to schedule time on the agendas for their upcoming meetings. Council staff provided presentations on the Council process, overall outreach efforts, and the proposed action on Chinook salmon bycatch reduction measures, at six separate regional meetings. Two Council members attended five of the six meetings, and one to two Council staff analysts attended each meeting. The primary Council analyst on the project attended every regional outreach meeting. Council members could not attend the first regional meeting in Dillingham, as it conflicted with the end of the October 2008 Council meeting in Anchorage.

While the intent was to attend each of the appropriate Federal Subsistence RAC meetings in the fall, Council staff and members could not attend the Yukon Kuskokwim Delta Regional Advisory Council meeting (Bethel) or the Seward Peninsula Regional Advisory Council meeting (Nome) due to direct scheduling conflicts with the October 2008 Council meeting in Anchorage. However, the Council participated in the AVCP meeting in Bethel, in order to reach a broad group of communities and tribal representatives from the surrounding area. The Council also organized its own outreach meeting in Nome in January 2009, in order to reach the Bering Straits communities. An audio link was provided such that surrounding communities could listen in and follow the powerpoint presentation remotely, as well as provide direct feedback via telephone.

In sum, Council staff, Council members, and in some cases, NMFS staff, participated in the following regional meetings:<sup>7</sup>

<b>Bristol Bay RAC</b>	October 6 – 7, 2008	Dillingham
<b>AVCP meeting</b>	October 7 - 9, 2008	Bethel
<b>Eastern Interior RAC</b>	October 14 – 15, 2008	Nenana
<b>Northwest Arctic RAC</b>	October 16, 2008	Kotzebue
<b>Western Interior RAC</b>	October 28 – 29, 2008	McGrath
<b>Nome Outreach Meeting</b>	January 22, 2009	Nome

In addition to the above regional/community meetings, Council staff provided a lengthy presentation of the main EIS findings at the Yukon River Panel meeting on December 9, 2008 in Anchorage, as the EIS had recently been released for public review. The Yukon River Panel is an international advisory body established under the Yukon River Salmon Agreement<sup>8</sup> for the conservation, management, restoration, and harvest sharing of Canadian-origin salmon between the U.S. and Canada. Nine Council members attended and responded to questions. In addition to specific clarifications on the presentation and Council intent, there was substantial time allotted for discussion between Yukon River Panel members and Council members on the forthcoming action.

## Documenting Results

This summary report was prepared to document the outreach process and results of the regional meetings. This report will be presented to the Council, in conjunction with the Comment Analysis Report prepared for the draft EIS, in April 2009, when the Council is scheduled to take final action to recommend

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<sup>7</sup>Note that NMFS staff also provided a presentation on the proposed action on BSAI Chinook salmon bycatch at the Southeast Regional Advisory Council meeting in late September 2008 in Juneau.

<sup>8</sup>This agreement constitutes Chapter 8 of the Pacific Salmon Treaty: [www.psc.org/pubs/treaty.pdf](http://www.psc.org/pubs/treaty.pdf).

Chinook salmon bycatch reduction measures. As stated previously, this report will also be included, in part or in whole, in the Final EIS submitted to the Secretary of Commerce after the Council makes a final recommendation.

Council staff documented comments provided at the regional meetings, including public testimony. A short summary of each meeting is provided below, as a brief reference. Note that the dates provided below refer to the date on which the Council presentation and comments occurred, recognizing that each meeting was typically two to three days. Details of the regional meetings attended, the participants, and the numerous comments provided (by category) are attached as **Appendix A**. Resolutions or motions resulting from these meetings are provided as **Appendix B**.

#### **Bristol Bay Subsistence Regional Advisory Council, October 7, 2008, Dillingham**

The Bristol Bay RAC meeting was comprised primarily of RAC members and State and Federal agency staff, with a few public participants (estimate of 25 total participants). The Bristol Bay RAC represents 31 Bristol Bay subsistence communities and rural residents. The RAC emphasized the importance of Chinook salmon as a subsistence food and noted lower returns (and smaller Chinook) in their region. The RAC was also very concerned about the lack of genetic information on which to base potential impacts to individual river systems. The RAC adopted a resolution to: request the Council adopt regulations to significantly minimize the bycatch of all salmon species in the Bering Sea pollock fishery; support a Chinook salmon bycatch hard cap not to exceed 38,000 fish annually; support hard caps and other regulations that are conservative and designed to preserve salmon stocks; and support State and Federal efforts to conduct additional data collection and analyses to refine regulations that minimize salmon bycatch in the Bering Sea trawl fisheries.

#### **Association of Village Council Presidents 44<sup>th</sup> Annual Convention, October 8, 2008, Bethel**

The AVCP is centralized in the Yukon-Kuskokwim Delta, along the Southwestern region of Alaska, and serves 56 Federally-recognized Alaska tribes. Approximately 200 participants attended, including representatives from member tribes, subsistence and commercial salmon fishermen, Federal and State agency staff, CDQ group representatives, and city and borough representatives. Translation services were provided to translate between Yupik and English. Comments were centered on the priority to protect the subsistence salmon fishery, both for cultural and traditional reasons, as well as a primary food source. Detailed comments were provided with regard to the preliminary preferred alternative and incentive plans linked to a higher cap of 68,000 Chinook. The AVCP submitted a resolution relevant to this issue at the 2008 Alaska Federation of Natives<sup>9</sup> annual convention, which passed. The resolution encouraged the Council and NMFS to take emergency action to regulate the 2009 pollock fishery such that measures would ensure the conservation and rebuilding of western Alaska Chinook salmon stocks; to implement permanent regulations for the 2010 pollock fishery; and to establish a bycatch hard cap of no more than 30,000 Chinook.

#### **Eastern Interior Subsistence Regional Advisory Council, October 15, 2008, Nenana**

The Eastern Interior RAC meeting was comprised primarily of RAC members, community members, environmental groups, and some State and Federal agency staff (estimate of 40 total participants). The Eastern Interior RAC represents thirteen villages along the Yukon or Tanana rivers and an additional seventeen villages within the region. The RAC emphasized several concerns about the preliminary preferred alternative and its ability to meet a goal of reduced Chinook salmon bycatch and to increase in-river fisheries. While appreciative of the efforts to communicate with the RAC on this issue, the RAC

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<sup>9</sup>The Alaska Federation of Natives (AFN) represents 178 Alaska villages (both Federally-recognized tribes and village corporations), 13 regional Native corporations and 12 regional nonprofit and tribal consortiums. Note that a separate resolution passed at AFN submitted by Kawerak, Inc., that requested that the Federal government fulfill their legal requirement to develop and institute a tribal consultation process and that consultation begin immediately between NMFS and any and all tribes affected by the salmon bycatch EIS.

also commented that ongoing, open dialogue with the Council is long overdue and that additional, non-commercial representation on the Council is necessary. The RAC adopted several motions, which were sent in the form of a letter to the Council (dated 1/30/09). The motions supported a Chinook salmon hard cap of 29,323 for immediate implementation; requested economic penalties on individual trawl vessels; recommended that the pollock industry bear the cost of improved sampling methods and genetic studies on the Chinook salmon stocks impacted by the industry's bycatch; recommended modification to the food bank program in order to distribute bycaught salmon to Western and Interior Alaska communities; and related concerns with the length of time it takes to have a management action implemented.

#### **Northwest Arctic Subsistence Regional Advisory Council, October 16, 2008, Kotzebue**

The Northwest Arctic RAC meeting was attended primarily by RAC members and Federal and State agency staff. The region the RAC represents encompasses 11 villages on the coast of Kotzebue Sound and along the Noatak and Kobuk Rivers. The RAC did not have a quorum under which it could conduct business, due to airline cancellations due to weather. However, members present did receive the presentation and comment on the proposed action. The primary comments and questions addressed the rationale for the various range of hard caps. The RAC noted some tentativeness in providing a recommendation on the proposed action, as Chinook salmon is less important to their region relative to chum and char. The RAC noted significant interest in future management measures for chum salmon.

#### **Western Interior Subsistence Regional Advisory Council, October 28, 2008, McGrath**

The Western Interior RAC meeting was comprised of RAC members, State and Federal agency staff, and community members (estimate of 25 total participants). The region the RAC represents encompasses 27 villages along the Yukon and Kuskokwim rivers. The RAC related concerns that several external factors, including fuel prices and unsustainable management measures, put increasing pressure on subsistence users. They had several questions about the rationale supporting the PPA and questioned the potential efficacy of the incentive plans and the transferability provisions. The RAC did not support the PPA hard cap of 68,000 Chinook, noting that it represents an average of the three highest bycatch years on record. The Western Interior RAC adopted several motions, which were sent in the form of a letter to the Council (1/30/09). The motion recommended a hard cap of 29,323 Chinook, which represents the long-term historic range of Chinook salmon bycatch, but that a hard cap within the 10-year average of 29,000 – 38,000 Chinook would be acceptable. While the RAC does not support the higher cap of 68,000 Chinook in the PPA, if a higher cap figure is adopted, selling or trading the caps should not be allowed. The motion also recommended that all salmon bycatch should be processed and returned to Alaskan communities within the rivers of origin, but not to replace subsistence activities. Finally, the RAC requested a review of the pollock quota and consideration of season reductions to protect the pollock stock, noting concern that as the pollock stock becomes less abundant, more fishing effort follows, which results in additional salmon bycatch.

#### **Council Outreach Meeting, January 22, 2009, Nome**

Due to the inability to attend the Seward Peninsula Subsistence RAC meeting, Council staff organized a separate outreach meeting in Nome, in order to reach the Bering Straits communities. The Alaska Sea Grant Marine Advisory Program (MAP) agent in Nome helped publicize the meeting and provided equipment, and the Nome Eskimo Community hosted the meeting at its tribal hall. This meeting was also coordinated with NMFS, in that NMFS conducted a tribal consultation with the Nome Eskimo Community subsequent to the Council's outreach meeting. The outreach meeting was also intended to provide background information to facilitate the tribal consultation.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>10</sup>NMFS related to Council staff that tribal letters NMFS receives in response to the Draft EIS during the formal comment period (Dec. 5, 2008 – Feb. 23, 2009) will be treated as public comments and responded to in the draft comment analysis report, as well as referenced under the tribal consultation part of Chapter 1 of the EIS. Tribal letters received after the end of the comment period will be responded to as possible and in the Final EIS. Comments resulting from tribal consultations, and a description of the tribal consultation process, are not included as part of the Council's general outreach report.

The meeting in Nome was publicized through the community's email list serve, which generally reaches the sector of Nome which attends events, meetings, and activities. The meeting was also advertised on two radio stations in Nome. A letter was also sent to thirty Bering Strait governments, IRAs, and village corporations in early January, which announced the meeting and the ability to set up remote audio/internet sites in several villages, which would allow nearby villages to listen to the meeting real-time and follow the powerpoint presentation on a host computer. In addition, the Nome MAP agent posted the Council outreach flyer at about 15 locations in Nome.

An estimated 50 people attended the meeting in Nome, with several additional people participating remotely from the communities of Stebbins, Brevig Mission, Elim, Unalakleet, and Kotzebue. A broad cross-section of individuals participated, including ADF&G staff, Board members<sup>11</sup> and staff of the Norton Sound Economic Development Corporation (NSEDC), members of the pollock industry, an environmental group, staff from the local radio and newspaper, subsistence and commercial salmon fishermen, tribal representatives from the Nome Eskimo Community, Elim, Stebbins, and Brevig Mission, and staff of Kawerak, Inc., which is the regional non-profit corporation organized by the Bering Straits Native Association to provide services throughout the Bering Straits Region.

Feedback provided at this meeting was also varied, but centered heavily on the cultural significance and traditional use value of Chinook to surrounding communities, and the lack of adequate analysis in the EIS on the impacts to and characterization of the subsistence fishery. Participants also provided several comments on the PPA, and the concept of the industry incentive plans. Overall, those who addressed a specific cap level supported a lower cap of 30,000 Chinook, noting that the starting place for such a measure should be conservative due to the lack of genetic data and uncertainty. Comments were also made noting that the local CDQ group, NSEDC, contributes heavily to the Norton Sound economy in terms of employment, community share payments, and fishery infrastructure projects, and that the majority of CDQ funding is directly related to the pollock fishery. Formal comments on the EIS have been provided from several of the tribes and organizations that attended this meeting.

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<sup>11</sup>NSEDC Board members included representatives from Savoonga, Teller, Elim, White Mountain, Koyuk, and Stebbins.

**Appendix A  
General Meeting Information**

<b>MEETING LOCATION</b>	<b>Meeting specifics</b>	<b>Estimated number of people in attendance &amp; Council members/staff</b>	<b>Number of people that provided formal comments</b>	<b>Formal resolution or motion?</b>
<b>Dillingham</b>	Bristol Bay Subsistence Regional Advisory Council meeting, October 7, 2008. Bristol Bay Native Association Family Resource Center, Dillingham.	25 Council staff: Stram and Kimball	<b>6 of 10 RAC members:</b> Randy Alvarez, Chair (Naknek), Dan O'Hara (Naknek), Dan Dunaway (Dillingham), Peter Abraham (Togiak), Alvin Boskofsky (Chignik Lake), Boris Kosbruk Sr. (Perryville).	Yes (attached in Appendix B). Support Chinook bycatch cap at lower (2002) level of 38,000 Chinook.
<b>Bethel</b>	Assn. of Village Council Presidents annual meeting, October 8, 2008. Yupiit Piciryarait Cultural Center, Bethel.	200 Council members: Olson (AK) and Tweit (WA); Council staff: Stram and Kimball	approximately 20	Yes (attached in Appendix B). Submitted by the AVCP (and passed) at the annual Alaska Federation of Natives convention, October 2008. Support cap of no more than 30,000 Chinook.
<b>Nenana</b>	Eastern Interior Subsistence Regional Advisory Council meeting, October 15, 2008. Nenana Tribal Hall, Nenana.	40 Council members: Fields (AK) and Merrigan (AK); Council staff: Stram	<b>7 of 9 RAC members:</b> Sue Entsminger, Chair (Mentasta Pass), Virgil Umphenour (North Pole), Andrew Firmin (Fort Yukon), William Glanz (Central), Andrew Bassich (Eagle), Richard Carroll, Jr. (Fort Yukon), Matthew Gilbert (Arctic Village)	Yes. Motions sent in the form of a letter (attached in Appendix B). Support Chinook bycatch hard cap of 29,323 Chinook.
<b>Kotzebue</b>	Northwest Arctic Subsistence Regional Advisory Council meeting, October 16, 2008. Nullaqvik Conference Room, Kotzebue.	20 Council staff: Stram; Council members: Fields (AK) and Merrigan (AK)	<b>2 of 6 RAC members:</b> Victor Karmun, Chair (Kotzebue), Enoch Shiedt (Kotzebue)	No.
<b>McGrath</b>	Western Interior Subsistence Regional Advisory Council meeting, October 28, 2008. McGrath City Hall, McGrath.	25 Council members: Benson (WA) and Cotten (AK); Council staff: Stram and Kimball	<b>10 of 10 RAC members:</b> Jack L. Reakoff, Chair (Wiseman), Raymond L. Collins (McGrath), Timothy P. Gervais (Ruby), Donald V. Honea Jr. (Ruby), Carl M. Morgan, Jr. (Aniak), Jenny K. Pelkola (Galena), Michael J. Stickman (Nulato), Robert A. Walker (Anvik), James L. Walker (Holy Cross), Eleanor S. Yatlin (Huslia)	Yes. Motions sent in the form of a letter (attached in Appendix B). Recommends a hard cap of 29,323, which represents the long-term historic range of Chinook salmon bycatch. A hard cap within the 10-year average 29,000 – 38,000 would be acceptable.
<b>Nome</b>	Council outreach meeting, Jan. 22, 2009. Nome Eskimo Community Tribal Hall, Nome.	50 - Additional communities that participated by phone: Stebbins, Brevig Mission, Elim, Unalakleet, Kotzebue - Council members: Olson (AK) and Tweit (WA); Council staff: Stram and Kimball	approximately 25	Not applicable.

**Appendix A  
Detailed comments by meeting**

<b>Comment Category</b>	<b>Dillingham</b>	<b>Bethel</b>	<b>Nenana</b>	<b>Kotzebue</b>	<b>McGrath</b>	<b>Nome</b>
Salmon donation program	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Salmon from this program should go to Western AK, not the Seattle area.</li> <li>– Another comment that no chinook should be given away through foodbanks or educational projects.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Several comments that while residents would rather catch Chinook fresh in-river, bycaught salmon should be redistributed to Western AK communities (not Seattle).</li> <li>– Questions on whether it is a matter of applying for a distribution center in AK, and the need for industry to volunteer to provide this.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Comment that salmon donation program (foodbank) needs revision such that salmon are redistributed to western and interior AK communities, not Seattle (at industry cost).</li> <li>– Note that foodbank is not the solution to the bycatch problem, or substitute for additional restrictions on the pollock fleet.</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Potential foodbank opportunities must not be viewed as a substitute for active subsistence, but would support a distribution center for western AK.</li> <li>– Headwater communities need the redistribution of salmon as a food source (many are using freezers). This would not help those doing strips.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Questions on proportion of salmon bycatch that goes to the donation program; concern that only distribution center is in Seattle. While we'd see a benefit from a western AK distribution center.</li> <li>– Higher concern on not catching salmon incidentally in the first place. While some benefit provided by receiving salmon through this program, the cultural, traditional, and personal pride in the ability to subsistence fish is lost.</li> </ul>
Lack of genetic information	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Cap level must take into account the recent returns to the river systems. Concern that there is very little genetic information on which to base potential returns to individual river systems.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Need to prioritize river of origin genetic studies within the funding agencies. Yukon did not achieve escapement goal in 2007.</li> <li>– Need to refine the large, aggregate areas used to indicate impacts.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Comment that the Bering Sea pollock industry should pay for increased genetic studies and additional in-season genetic reporting.</li> </ul>			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Concern that we don't have enough genetic information to link bycaught salmon to a specific river system (e.g., Norton Sound river systems). Questions about whether individual river stocks run together as much as regional stocks, which the document cannot address. Important to assess the level of risk to an individual river system; without further genetic information, the analysis dilutes impacts to specific communities that have a significant dependence on an individual river system or stock.</li> </ul>
Other		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Want to keep pollock fishery and other commercial fisheries farther offshore. Concern mentioned specific to keeping fishing zone outside Nunivak Island.</li> <li>– Concern with overall regulation that requires that Chinook bycatch is not retained (thrown away).</li> <li>– Questions about salmon excluder devices and potential effectiveness.</li> <li>– Concern about lack of fish buyers in lower Yukon (used to have 4, now only 2). With infrastructure disappearing, the government cannot delay implementing measures to reduce bycatch.</li> <li>– Concern with the method (trawling) for harvesting pollock, as it is wasteful.</li> <li>– Must ensure that the analysis accounts for the bycatch effect of one year on subsequent years.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Comment that pollock fishery needs to be more conservation-based.</li> <li>– NPFMC needs to include additional representation for non-commercial interests.</li> <li>– Overall and ongoing dialogue with the NPFMC is long overdue and appreciated; attempts to establish ongoing and open communication have been unsuccessful in past. Notes that the Upper Yukon and Lower Yukon communities are working collaboratively together; but not with NPFMC.</li> <li>– Meaningful to have Council members travel to villages most affected by the action. Even under limited resources, there is an ability to pool resources and communicate more effectively.</li> <li>– Severe concerns with the amount of time it takes for the Council/NMFS process to implement management regulations.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Questions on Chukchi Sea and future fishing opportunities.</li> <li>– Significant interest in future management measures for chum salmon.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Questions about salmon excluder devices and potential effectiveness.</li> <li>– Questions about where salmon are intercepted, why bycatch is highest in Sept/Oct, and whether we know whether/why average pollock and salmon sizes are declining.</li> <li>– Time, quota, and season reductions for pollock should be considered for at least the Aleutians and south AK peninsula.</li> <li>– As pollock stocks decline, more searching for pollock can lead to higher bycatch of salmon.</li> <li>– Chum bycatch measures should be expedited.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Need to keep individual skippers and companies motivated to treat salmon as its most valuable if its kept in the water. Concern that transferability of bycatch would naturally induce vessels to increase salmon bycatch, and fish up to the maximum cap annually.</li> <li>– Comment that Glacier Fish Company has been involved in CDQ Program since 1992; a program which contributes heavily to the economy of Norton Sound in terms of employment, community share payments, salmon enhancement projects, infrastructure projects, etc. Concern that we need to find reasonable balance so that we provide for salmon runs and yet do not close down the pollock fishery.</li> <li>– Interest in having analysts identify a list of research needs and priorities specific to salmon, such that the public and funding agencies can understand research priorities.</li> </ul>

**Appendix A  
Detailed comments by meeting**

<b>Comment Category</b>	<b>Dillingham</b>	<b>Bethel</b>	<b>Nenana</b>	<b>Kotzebue</b>	<b>McGrath</b>	<b>Nome</b>
Observer coverage		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Questions on the amount of Chinook bycatch and how well the pollock fishery is observed.</li> <li>Also questions regarding marine mammal bycatch/incidents.</li> </ul>	<p>Several comments about the precision of catch estimates and questions regarding the credibility of the observer program.</p>			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Emphasis for the need for 100% observer coverage on vessels participating in the pollock fishery and subject to the cap.</li> <li>Concern with observer harassment and interest in training level of observers.</li> </ul>
Other possible causes of salmon stock decline	<p>Questions regarding why bycatch has more than doubled in a short amount of time (2006 to 2007). Questions about whether the pollock fleet is fishing harder/longer than previous years.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Questions about whether the number of pollock permits and participating vessels has changed since 2003.</li> <li>Others note that beavers are blocking salmon spawning areas.</li> </ul>	<p>The long term sustainability of Yukon Chinook salmon remains a major topic of concern for this area.</p>			
Hard cap	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Appreciate consideration of a hard cap; but 68,000 is too high. Last two seasons, Chinook runs have been lower than forecasted by ADF&amp;G on the Yukon. Cap level must take into account the recent poor returns to the river systems: the Naknek barely met the escapement goal; Nushagak met escapement.</li> <li>Concern that by the time the caps are implemented they are based on old data. Conservative approach would be to set minimal cap.</li> <li>The ability to rollover 80% of the cap from the A to the B season appears too high; need to provide same level of incentive during the entire year.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>If the average bycatch is 30,000 Chinook from 1990 - 2003, why is the Council proposing to double the average for a cap of 68,000?</li> <li>Strong support for hard cap of no more than 30,000, and strong opposition to the PPA of 68,000.</li> <li>Consider emergency closures in the pollock fishery. Emphasis that the burden of conservation of Chinook should not fall solely on lower Yukon and other rural AK residents.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Support lowest cap possible. Comment that it is insulting (within the document/presentation) to compare cost of bycatch restrictions to the pollock fishery to in-river subsistence users/needs.</li> <li>Caution that when translating numbers and percentages to impacts on in-river fisheries, it has a much greater effect than numbers indicate.</li> <li>Support cap level of 29,300 Chinook.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Questions about the rationale for the difference between the low and high bycatch cap alternatives.</li> <li>Difficult for the NW RAC to recommend a bycatch cap for Chinook, as chum and char are more important to their region.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Concern with bycatch in general and management using a hard cap; the high bycatch of 2007 (122,000 Chinook) is more than double what is needed for subsistence in some river systems (50,000 Chinook).</li> <li>Need to implement hard cap, otherwise bycatch will continue to shift across areas of the Bering Sea.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Comment on support of a tax and trade concept, but not hard cap. Vessels with lower bycatch would pay a lower tax. Tax funds could be used to enhance fisheries in western AK or subsidize village needs (e.g., food &amp; fuel). Concern that a hard cap encourages a derby fishery driven by bycatch.</li> <li>Support for 30,000 hard cap. One comment that the Council should implement a lower cap (than the PPA) to start, and raise it if the impact is minimal. But with so many uncertainties, the starting point should be conservative (i.e., a low cap).</li> <li>Concern that the range of caps considered only represent one kind of number (averages), which would allow the fishery to continue as it has in the past. If the point of the EIS is to inform that process, we should have also analyzed truncations of numbers, different ranges of numbers, etc., in terms of options.</li> </ul>

**Appendix A  
Detailed comments by meeting**

<b>Comment Category</b>	<b>Dillingham</b>	<b>Bethel</b>	<b>Nenana</b>	<b>Kotzebue</b>	<b>McGrath</b>	<b>Nome</b>
<b>Cultural, traditional and subsistence value of salmon</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Emphasis on importance of Chinook as subsistence food. Studies of Y-K Delta and other western AK communities show that 80% of the local diet is fish. Other food sources (moose, caribou, musk ox) have seasons; it is important that subsistence fish do not have seasons.</li> <li>– Local people are frustrated that they are only harvesting smaller kings (Togiak, Scammon, Kuskokwim Rivers). Returns very low in 2007 and 2008.</li> <li>– Several more thousand returning Chinook make a big difference to all users (subsistence, recreational, commercial).</li> </ul>	<p>2008 was a bad year for the lower Yukon, and current effects will be cumulative over future years. Alaska has the highest subsistence reliance of any state (ISER study), and we need to prioritize subsistence use over commercial industry.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Several comments on the reduced ability to meet commercial and subsistence salmon goals.</li> <li>– Reduced subsistence fish does not only harm the individual; it harms the entire community. The value of subsistence represents people's livelihoods.</li> <li>– Comment that the Upper Yukon is equally dependent on Chinook for livelihood as is pollock industry. Emphasis on the importance of Chinook salmon to the Tanana River, Canadian border passage and to salmon escapement in general. Also economic importance of bycatch to other drainages like the Nushagak River and its sportfish guiding industry.</li> </ul>		<p>Concern that external pressures like fuel prices, complex regulatory processes, and unsustainable management put increasing pressure on subsistence users. Subsistence users are incurring extreme expense. Fewer Chinook means increased subsistence regulations, even a few thousand fish has a huge impact. It currently costs a significant amount of money (compared to previous years) for each household to try and meet their subsistence needs.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Several comments emphasized cultural significance and traditional use value of salmon, and that the analysis needs more focus on the impacts on subsistence users. Subsistence education for children of western AK.</li> <li>– Analysis does not adequately assess subsistence and cultural values, or impacts on communities. Means of describing the subsistence economy in the analysis is inappropriate and should be revised.</li> <li>– The Environmental Justice section is sufficient in explaining what it is and how it should be applied, but does not address impacts on coastal communities (unbalanced by comparison).</li> <li>– The analysis should address the slow moving process of tribal consultations, and emphasize its importance. Suggestion to hire a tribal liaison and/or social scientists at NMFS.</li> </ul>
<b>Industry incentive plans</b>		<p>Comment that the higher 68,000 Chinook cap is only in place with a sufficient industry incentive program. This concept is somewhat counter-intuitive to several commenters. Uncertainty that this creates an incentive to reduce bycatch both in years of low and high abundance.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Several comments that the credibility of pollock industry is questionable and on the incentives necessary to obtain the higher cap. The ability to transfer caps makes it more likely the fishery will reach the hard cap figure; if they take the cap and subdivide it, it is less likely that every sector will reach their cap.</li> <li>– Comment that the pollock industry should come up with severe economic penalties for individual vessels with high bycatch rates. It is not the responsibility of the people impacted by this fishery across the west coast to ensure the pollock fishery makes an extra profit or remains viable.</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– RACs would like to have attendance at public meetings on incentive programs (Feb 09), as this is an integral part of the action's success.</li> <li>– No support for incentive program coupled with higher cap of 68,000, which averages the three highest years considered.</li> <li>– If higher caps are established, transfers of those caps (Chinook) within the pollock industry should be prohibited.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Concept of incentive plans includes ability for increased adaptive management. Need incentive for skipper to avoid bycatch from beginning to the ending of the season. The industry needs to convince the Council at final action (April 2009) that the incentive plans will be effective.</li> <li>– Industry could make changes to the incentive programs voluntarily, but if the Council doesn't think the program is meeting its intent, changes (e.g., to performance measures) could only be made through rulemaking. An annual report from industry to the Council would help notice industry as to whether it is meeting the Council's intent.</li> </ul>

## **Appendix B.**

Resolution from Bristol Bay Subsistence Regional Advisory Council (October 28, 2008)

Resolution from the Alaska Federation of Natives, submitted by the Association of Village Council Presidents (October 25, 2008)

Letter and motions from the Eastern Interior Subsistence Regional Advisory Council (January 30, 2009)

Letter and motions from the Western Interior Subsistence Regional Advisory Council (January 30, 2009)

**Bristol Bay Alaska Subsistence Regional Advisory Council**  
**c/o U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service**  
**1011 East Tudor Road, MS 121**  
**Anchorage, Alaska 99503**  
**Phone: (907) 786-3888, Fax: (907) 786-3898**  
**Toll Free: 1-800-478-1456**

Eric A. Olson, Chair  
North Pacific Fishery Management Council  
605 West Fourth Avenue, Suite 306  
Anchorage, Alaska 99501-2252

Dear Mr. Olson:

The Bristol Bay Subsistence Regional Advisory Council represents 31 Bristol Bay subsistence communities and rural residents. The Regional Council is authorized by the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act and chartered under the Federal Advisory Committee Act. ANILCA in Section 805 and the Regional Council's charter recognize the Regional Council's authority to "initiate, review and evaluate proposals for regulations, policies, management plans, and other matters related to subsistence uses of fish and wildlife on public lands within the region" and to "provide a forum for the expression of opinions and recommendations ... (on) any matter related to the subsistence uses of fish and wildlife on public lands within the region."

The Regional Council, during its recent public meeting on October 6-7, 2008 in Dillingham, Alaska, addressed the agenda topic of Salmon By-catch Environmental Impact Statement, Bering Sea/Aleutian Islands Pollock Fishery which resulted in the enclosed Regional Council resolution. If you have any questions, please contact me or our regional coordinator, Donald Mike, at (907) 786-3629.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,



Randolph Alvarez, Chair

enclosure

cc: Eastern Interior Alaska Subsistence Regional Advisory Council  
Western Interior Alaska Subsistence Regional Advisory Council  
Yukon-Kuskokwim Delta Alaska Subsistence Regional Advisory Council  
Northwest Arctic Alaska Subsistence Regional Advisory Council  
Michael R. Fleagle, Chair, Federal Subsistence Board  
Peter J. Probasco, Assistant Regional Director, Office of Subsistence Management

**Bristol Bay Alaska Subsistence Regional Advisory Council  
c/o U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service  
1011 East Tudor Road, MS 121  
Anchorage, Alaska 99503  
Phone: (907) 786-3888, Fax: (907) 786-3898  
Toll Free: 1-800-478-1456**

**A resolution from the Bristol Bay Alaska Subsistence Regional Advisory Council to the North Pacific Fishery Management Council regarding Chinook salmon by-catch in the Bering Sea pollock fisheries.**

*Whereas*, In past years the Bristol Bay Alaska Subsistence Regional Advisory Council (BBRAC) has supported a by-catch limit of no more than 38,000 Chinook salmon in the Bering Sea pollock fisheries.

*Whereas*, The BBRAC recognizes that many of the communities in the Bristol Bay Region benefit from the Bering Sea pollock fisheries through the Community Development Quota system.

*Whereas*, The BBRAC requests the North Pacific Fisheries Management Council (NPFMC) and NOAA to note that in the 2007 and 2008 seasons, several Bristol Bay rivers did not achieve the Chinook salmon escapements forecasted by the Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ADF&G).

*Whereas*, Poor or reduced escapements of Chinook salmon into Bristol Bay rivers can have significant effects on the Region's subsistence, commercial and sport fisheries.

*Whereas*, The BBRAC is very appreciative of the work done to date by NOAA staff and the NPFMC to collect and analyze data, and actions taken to reduce salmon by-catch. The BBRAC thanks the staff for attending our fall 2008 meeting to explain the Bering Sea Chinook salmon by-catch issue.

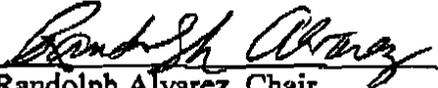
**Therefore be it resolved:**

The BBRAC requests the NPFMC to adopt regulations designed to significantly minimize the by-catch of all salmon species in the Bering Seas pollock fishery.

The BBRAC continues to support a Chinook salmon by-catch not to exceed 38,000 fish annually.

The BBRAC supports hard caps and other regulations that are conservative and preserve the salmon stocks.

The BBRAC supports NPFMC, NOAA, and ADF&G efforts to conduct additional data collection and analyses to refine regulations that minimize salmon by-catch in the Bering Sea trawl fisheries.

  
Randolph Alvarez, Chair

10-28-08  
Date

cc: Eastern Interior Alaska Subsistence Regional Advisory Council  
Western Interior Alaska Subsistence Regional Advisory Council  
Yukon-Kuskokwim Delta Alaska Subsistence Regional Advisory Council  
Northwest Arctic Alaska Subsistence Regional Advisory Council  
Michael R. Fleagle, Chair, Federal Subsistence Board  
Peter J. Probasco, Assistant Regional Director, Office of Subsistence Management

ALASKA FEDERATION OF NATIVES, INC.

2008 ANNUAL CONVENTION

RESOLUTION 08-17

- TITLE: REQUESTING THE NORTH PACIFIC FISHERY MANAGEMENT COUNCIL AND THE NATIONAL MARINE FISHERIES SERVICE TO TAKE EMERGENCY AND PERMANENT ACTION TO REGULATE SALMON BYCATCH IN THE BERING SEA POLLOCK FISHERY
- WHEREAS: The Alaska Federation of Natives (AFN) takes an active role whenever the traditional Subsistence Way of Life and the economic stability of our Native villages are threatened; and
- WHEREAS: The 2008 Chinook salmon returns on many river systems in Alaska, including the AVCP Region, were far below the number necessary for conservation, to meet international treaty requirements to provide for the needs of the Indigenous people in Canada, and far below the number of Chinook salmon necessary to meet the subsistence needs of Alaska Native families and to provide for commercial opportunities essential to meet the financial needs of the Alaska Native families; and
- WHEREAS: Specifically, on the Yukon River, the Alaska Department of Fish & Game, in cooperation with the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, opened the 2008 subsistence salmon harvest season with window regulations in place for the entire Yukon River; for the AVCP region that meant two 36-hour open periods a week; and
- WHEREAS: The return of the Yukon River Chinook salmon began fearfully slow and required even further restrictions placed on the Yukon in-river subsistence fishermen and their families (i.e., from the two 36-hour openers in the Lower River districts down to two 18-hour openers) for fear that the “run abundance would not support the customary subsistence harvests and meet escapement goals in Alaska and meet the interim management escapement goal of at least 45,000 fish into Canada agreed to by the Yukon River Panel,” (taken from the ADFG/USFWS 2008 Yukon River Summer Salmon Fishery News Release #14, dated June 22, 2008), and, in the lower river districts, the mesh size was reduced to a maximum of 6-inch stretch mesh in order to conserve Chinook salmon; and
- WHEREAS: By the end of the 2008 season, it was determined that the total Yukon River run was approximately 151,000 Chinook salmon (36% below the most recent 5-year average) and was not enough to satisfy all of the historical needs, including Subsistence; and
- WHEREAS: Since 2001 to date, the minimum number of Chinook salmon intercepted and wasted by the Bering Sea Pollock fishery is over 450,000, most notably the 2007 record high bycatch amount of 122,000; and

WHEREAS: In the meantime, the Bering Sea Pollock fishery continues to fish without any regulatory restrictions, further endangering our future Chinook salmon resources and our ability to meet our subsistence and small scale in-river commercial fishery needs; and

WHEREAS: At their June meeting in Kodiak, the North Pacific Fishery Management Council (NPFMC) and the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) determined that the NPFMC would likely not take final action regulating bycatch in the Pollock fishery until April 2009, and that the regulations will probably not be implemented until the start of the 2011 Pollock fishery season; and

WHEREAS: Subsistence and commercial Chinook users cannot wait until 2011 for effective management measures to be implemented, for fear of another season such as 2007, where 120,000+ Chinook salmon were wasted in the Bering Sea Pollock fishery, and for additional years of no commercial fishing and going without meeting subsistence needs; and

NOW THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED by the delegates to the 2008 Annual Convention of the Alaska Federation of Natives that AFN encourage the NPFMC and the NMFS take action, through emergency authority, to regulate the 2009 Bering Sea Pollock fishery, and to implement permanent regulations applicable for the 2010 Pollock fishery, and that such regulations restrict the Chinook bycatch so as to ensure the conservation and rebuilding of Western Alaska Chinook salmon stocks and to ensure and prioritize the restoration of thriving subsistence and commercial Chinook salmon fisheries in Alaska; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that a hard cap of no more than 30,000 Chinook salmon be put in place in order to further protect our fully utilized salmon stocks.

SUBMITTED BY: ASSOCIATION OF VILLAGE COUNCIL PRESIDENTS

COMMITTEE ACTION: DO PASS

CONVENTION ACTION:

**Eastern Interior Alaska Subsistence  
Regional Advisory Council  
c/o Office of Subsistence Management  
101 12th Avenue, Room 110  
Fairbanks, Alaska 99701  
Phone: 1-(907)-456-0277 or 1-800-267-3997  
Fax: 1-(907)-456-0208  
E-mail: Vince\_Mathews@fws.gov**

January 30, 2009

Robert D. Mecum, Acting Administrator  
Alaska Region, National Marine Fisheries Service  
National Oceanic Atmospheric Administration  
Post Office Box 21668  
Juneau, Alaska 99802

Re: Comments and Recommendations on the Draft Environmental Impact Statement for the Bering Sea Chinook Salmon Bycatch Management

Dear Mr. Mecum:

The Eastern Interior Alaska Subsistence Regional Advisory Council has a keen interest in the sustainability of the returning salmon to Western Alaska, especially the Yukon and Tanana rivers. The Regional Council represents thirteen villages along the Yukon or Tanana rivers and an additional seventeen villages within the Eastern Interior Region. All of these villages are heavily dependent on subsistence caught salmon for personal and community consumption and for their livelihoods. Every community within our Region, through sharing or trading, utilizes returning salmon as a significant part of their subsistence diet. The dramatic rise in salmon bycatch, especially the Chinook salmon with the Bering Sea/Aleutian Islands pollock fishery cannot continue to threaten the future sustainability of the Yukon River salmon stocks, as well as the continuation of a subsistence way of life in Interior and Western Alaska.

The Regional Council appreciated the presentation from Dr. Diana Stram and the discussions with North Pacific Fishery Management Council (NPFMC) members Gerry Merrigan and Duncan Fields during its public meeting on October 14, 2008 in Nenana, Alaska. Based on the presentation and discussions, past Regional Council discussions, and personal knowledge of the Regional Council members the Regional Council unanimously adopted the following recommendations for the DEIS:

1. A Chinook salmon hard cap of 29,323 should immediately be implemented to protect Western Alaska Chinook salmon. This is the only proposed bycatch cap that uses the average bycatch numbers in the years prior to the United States-Canada Yukon River Salmon Agreement of 2001, therefore, the cap which comes closest to complying with the international agreement. The parties to the Agreement are required to increase the in-

river run of Yukon River origin salmon by reducing marine catches and by-catches of Yukon River salmon. They shall further identify, quantify and undertake efforts to reduce these catches and by-catches.

2. The economic penalties on the BSAI fishing industry must be implemented and strictly enforced to prevent high Chinook salmon bycatch. The penalties should apply to the individual trawler vessel and not across the fleet or industry.
3. The North Pacific Fishery Management Council should recommend to the industry that it bear the cost of improved sampling methods and cost of analyzing these samples for genetic studies on the Chinook salmon stocks impacted by the industry's bycatch. This should also be tied to the economic incentives to improve the overall commercial fishery.
4. The North Pacific Fishery Management Council should modify the food bank program to distribute the bycatch salmon to include the Western and Interior Alaska communities. The Regional Council wants it clearly understood that this Western and Interior Alaska distribution would by no means be considered a substitution or replacement of the active in-river subsistence fisheries.
5. The Regional Council is very concerned about the length of time it takes to have a management action implemented when there are clear concerns regarding conservation and sustainability of the Chinook salmon stocks. The Regional Council will be submitting a letter to the Executive Director of the North Pacific Fishery Management Council on this concern for timely management actions.

The Regional Council is authorized by the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act and chartered under the Federal Advisory Committee Act. Section 805 in ANILCA and the Regional Council's charter establish the Regional Council's authority to initiate, review and evaluate proposals for regulations, policies, management plans, and other matters related to subsistence uses of fish and wildlife on public lands within the region and to provide a forum for the expression of opinions and recommendations on any matter related to the subsistence uses of fish and wildlife on public lands within the region.

Thank you for the opportunity to present the Regional Council's recommendations on the DEIS. We and the residents of the Eastern Interior Region look forward to a substantial reduction in BSAI salmon bycatch. A substantial reduction would rebuild the Yukon and Tanana rivers salmon stocks so that, first and foremost, biological escapement needs would be met, the subsistence needs of Alaska and Canada would be met, and allow the Yukon and Tanana rivers' commercial fisheries to return. Continuation of a subsistence way of life and the economic underpinnings of our villages depend on viable and sustainable salmon stocks. If you have any questions or need additional information please, contact me or our council coordinator, Vince Mathews (contact information in letterhead). I can be reached directly at 1-907-883-2833.

Sincerely,



Sue Entsminger, Chair

cc: Eric Olson, Chair, North Pacific Fishery Management Council  
Michael R. Feagle, Chair, Federal Subsistence Board  
Peter J. Probasco, Assistant Regional Director, Office of Subsistence Management  
Rod Campbell, Fisheries Liaison, OSM  
Larry Buklis, Chief, Fisheries Division, OSM  
Tim Jennings, Fisheries & Ecological Service, Fish and Wildlife Service  
Ann Wilkinson, Chief, Council Coordination Division, OSM  
Jill Klein, Executive Director, Yukon River Drainage Fisheries Association  
David Bedford, Deputy Commissioner of Fisheries, ADF&G  
Jack Reakoff, Chair, Western Interior Alaska Subsistence Regional Advisory Council  
Lester Wilde, Chair, Yukon-Kuskokwim Delta Subsistence Regional Advisory Council  
Eastern Interior Alaska Subsistence Regional Advisory Council members

**Western Interior Alaska Subsistence  
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Fax: 1-(907)-456-0208  
E-mail: Vince\_Mathews@fws.gov**

January 30, 2009

Robert D. Mecum, Acting Administrator  
Alaska Region, National Marine Fisheries Service  
National Oceanic Atmospheric Administration  
Post Office Box 21668  
Juneau, Alaska 99802

Re: Comments and Recommendations on the Draft Environmental Impact Statement for the Bering Sea Chinook Salmon Bycatch Management

Dear Mr. Mecum:

The Western Interior Alaska Subsistence Regional Advisory Council has a keen interest in the sustainability of the returning salmon to Western Alaska, especially the Yukon and Kuskokwim rivers. The Regional Council again strongly recommends that the Bering Sea/Aleutian Islands pollock fishery salmon bycatch be reduced immediately. Rural subsistence and commercial fishermen across the Yukon and Kuskokwim river drainages are facing another difficult Chinook salmon fishing season in 2009 when the conservation burden to meet escapement needs in Alaska and Canada may result in subsistence families not meeting their Chinook salmon needs.

The twenty-seven villages along the Yukon and Kuskokwim rivers, within the Western Interior Region the Regional Council represents, heavily depend on subsistence caught salmon for personal and community consumption and for their livelihoods. Every community within our Region, through sharing or trading, utilizes returning salmon for a significant part of their subsistence diet. The dramatic rise in salmon bycatch, especially of Chinook salmon, by the Bering Sea/Aleutian Islands pollock fishery cannot be allowed to continue to threaten the future sustainability of the Yukon River salmon stocks and the continuation of a subsistence way of life in Interior Alaska. The continuing decline in the returning salmon stocks has to stop and a key component with reversing this decline is the immediate reduction in the BSAI Chinook bycatch.

The Regional Council appreciated the presentation from Dr. Diana Stram and Nicole Kimball, and the discussions with North Pacific Fishery Management Council members Sam Cotton and Dave Benson during our public meeting on October 27, 2008 in McGrath, Alaska. Based on the presentation and discussions, past Regional Council discussions, and personal knowledge of the

Regional Council members, the Regional Council unanimously adopted the following recommendations for the DEIS:

1. The Regional Council recommends a hard cap of 29,323, which represents the long-term historic range of Chinook salmon bycatch. A hard cap within the 10-year average 29,000 – 38,000 would be acceptable to the Regional Council.
2. The Regional Council does not support the high cap of 68,000 fish in the preferred alternative. This figure represents the average of the three highest bycatch years on record. This cap level is unacceptable.
3. If the higher cap figures are adopted, selling or trading the caps should not be allowed within the fishery. Such activity would result in reaching the higher cap figures instead of providing incentive for the fishing industry to have bycatch amounts below the caps.
4. All salmon bycatch should be processed and returned to the Alaskan communities within the rivers of origin by apportionment by percentage of the bycatch. This bycatch distribution to Alaska would not replace the subsistence activities of the people of Western and Interior Alaska.
5. The Regional Council requests a review of the pollock quota and consideration of season time reductions to protect the pollock fish stocks. Our concern is that as the desired commercial fish stock becomes less abundant more fishing effort follows, which results in additional salmon bycatch.

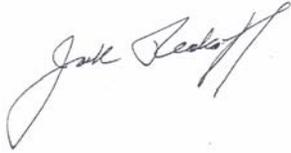
The subsistence and commercial in-river fishermen and their communities are incurring extreme expense from the increasing fishing restrictions, high fuel costs, and their decreasing catch per unit of effort from the pollock fishery's salmon bycatch. Rural villages are declining in population because of the increasing high cost of living in rural Alaskan communities. Couple these challenges with the declining size of the returning Chinook salmon and fewer large females reaching the spawning grounds and we may be looking at a serious conservation concern that may result in a serious burden on subsistence fishermen they are unable to withstand.

The Regional Council is authorized by the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act and chartered under the Federal Advisory Committee Act. Section 805 of ANILCA and the Regional Council's charter establish the Regional Council's authority to initiate, review and evaluate proposals for regulations, policies, management plans, and other matters related to subsistence uses of fish and wildlife on public lands within the region and to provide a forum for the expression of opinions and recommendations on any matter related to the subsistence uses of fish and wildlife on public lands within the region.

Thank you for the opportunity to present the Regional Council's recommendations on the DEIS. We and the residents of the Western Interior Region look forward to a substantial reduction in the BSAI salmon bycatch. A substantial reduction would rebuild the Yukon River salmon stocks so that, first and foremost, biological escapement needs would be met, the subsistence needs of Alaska and Canada would be met, and the Yukon and Kuskokwim rivers' commercial fisheries would return. Continuation of a subsistence way of life and the economic underpinnings of our villages depend on viable and sustainable salmon stocks.

If you have any questions or need additional information please, contact me or our council coordinator, Vince Mathews (contact information in letterhead). I can be reached directly at 1-907-678-2007.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Jack Reakoff". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large loop at the end.

Jack Reakoff, Chair

cc: Eric Olson, Chair, North Pacific Fishery Management Council  
Michael R. Feagle, Chair, Federal Subsistence Board  
Peter J. Probasco, Assistant Regional Director, Office of Subsistence Management  
Rod Campbell, Fisheries Liaison, OSM  
Larry Buklis, Chief, Fisheries Division, OSM  
Tim Jennings, Fisheries & Ecological Service, Fish and Wildlife Service  
Ann Wilkinson, Chief, Council Coordination Division, OSM  
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David Bedford, Deputy Commissioner of Fisheries, ADF&G  
Sue Entsminger, Chair, Eastern Interior Alaska Subsistence Regional Advisory Council  
Lester Wilde, Chair, Yukon-Kuskokwim Delta Subsistence Regional Advisory Council  
Western Interior Alaska Subsistence Regional Advisory Council members