



I am writing on behalf of the Alaska Salmon Alliance (ASA) to request you join our effort to keep the historic salmon drift gillnet fishery open in Cook Inlet. As hard as it might be to believe, the State of Alaska has recently submitted a proposal to do just that – close the historic salmon fishery in Cook Inlet in order to avoid following mandated best practices for managing salmon fisheries. This letter is to provide background on the issue and request your support to keep the historic salmon fishery healthy for the benefit of our local industry and our communities.

By way of background, ASA is an organization focused on public education, promoting the value of scientifically based salmon management to preserve habitats and create predictable harvests for all salmon users in the Cook Inlet region. Alaska Salmon Alliance promotes long-term sustainability and is a source for accurate information about the salmon industry. The Alaska Salmon Alliance Mission is to advocate for the salmon economy; for a thoughtful, process-oriented allocation of Cook Inlet salmon for the benefit of all Alaskans.

A general review of how we got here involves several years of effort by local commercial fishers to get the State of Alaska to follow federally mandated salmon management practices. Briefly, two local fishing organizations filed a lawsuit requesting that the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS), the federal agency in charge of all anadromous fish species (including salmon), fulfill its federally mandated oversight role in managing all Cook Inlet salmon stocks. The lawsuit filed by UCIDA and CIFF, went to the Ninth Circuit court and then all the way to the US Supreme Court and the fishing organizations won. The courts said that the NMFS must prepare a fishery management plan (FMP) for the entire Cook Inlet salmon fishery and then the agency could legally delegate authority to the State of Alaska for in-season management of the fishery.

As a result of that decision by the courts, the NMFS and the North Pacific Fishery Management Council (Council) and stakeholders have spent 3 years trying to work out the details for an FMP that complies with the federal law and the court order. The Council is required to take final action on the new FMP in December of this year.

The Magnuson-Stevens Act (MSA) is the primary law at issue. The MSA is the primary federal law that governs marine fishery management and provides for optimal exploitation of coastal fishery resources. The MSA has been in existence for over forty years and is the “gold standard” in sustainable fishery management for the entire nation. The MSA requires, among others, that fishery resources be managed on the basis of Maximum Sustainable Yield (MSY) and that FMP’s be based on the best available science.

Meeting those requirements in the new court-ordered FMP will require the State of Alaska (ADFG and BOF) to make fundamental changes in the way they manage the Cook Inlet fishery. Rather than work to meet the requirements of federal law, the State has decided to take punitive action against the Cook Inlet commercial fishing industry and is now trying to close most of the area where the Cook Inlet fleet fishes.

At the last meeting of the Council, on October 12<sup>th</sup>, after all public testimony had been taken, the State of Alaska introduced a 4<sup>th</sup> Alternative for the Council to consider for the new FMP. Alternative 4 would close all federal waters in Cook Inlet to commercial fishing. Federal water (called the EEZ for Exclusive

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Economic Zone) in Cook Inlet is the southern half of the Inlet, including almost everything south of Kalgin Island.

If approved by the Council, Alternative 4 would essentially close the fishery. The area south of Kalgin Island is where most of the drift fleet harvest occurs and there is no way to make up for that lost harvest. This would force all Cook Inlet drift fishermen out of business and force the remaining processing plants to close. The consequences of that action are unfathomable, the commercial salmon fishery here has been the backbone of the economy for over a hundred years. Thousands of jobs in the communities of our Borough will be lost, the capital investment in the fishery and support businesses will be lost and other fisheries will also have to close when the processing companies leave the Kenai Peninsula.

This issue is important for many reasons, not the least is the dramatic negative impact of the State of Alaska's goal to get Alternate 4 approved. In 2015, the McDowell Group published a report titled "The Economic Impact of the Seafood Industry in Southcentral Alaska". In that report they document that the seafood industry directly employs over 10,000 people seasonally in the region and has an annual economic output of \$1.2 billion. They state that salmon is the foundation of the region's seafood industry accounting for 85 % of the total wholesale value.

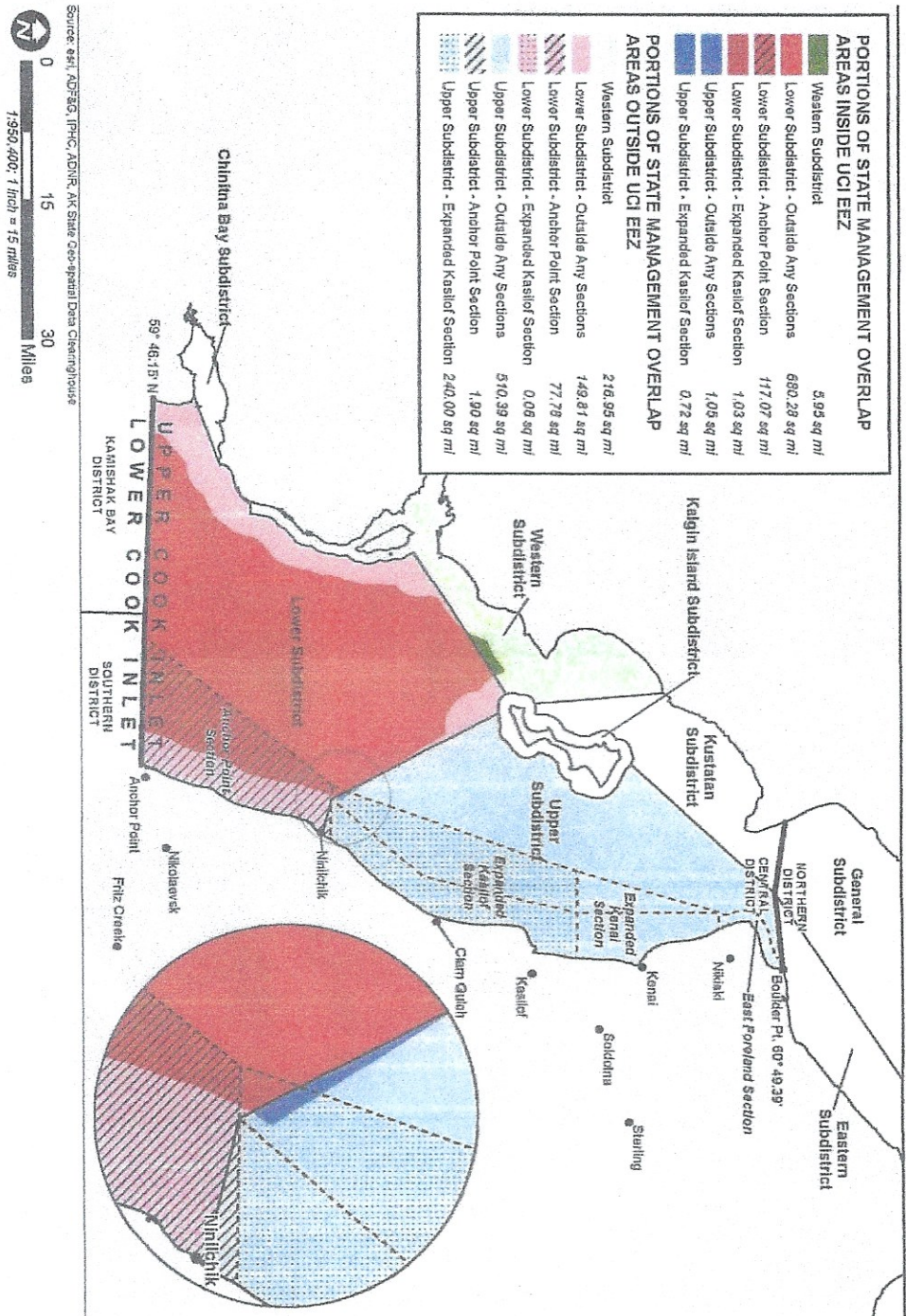
OUR ASK – we respectfully request you and your city council engage in this issue to defeat the State of Alaska's Alternative 4 at the December 2020 NPFMC meeting 7<sup>th</sup> – 11<sup>th</sup> . We know your voice will help influence a decision to continue the fishery while ensuring long and healthy salmon runs for future generations and the economic viability of our communities.

ASA will be contacting you to follow up on this important matter. Until then, I am available to provide any addition questions should you have any.

Respectfully,

Nate Berga, President  
ASA

Figure 4-34 Map of coincidence of Cook Inlet EEZ with ADF&G management areas and nearby Alaska communities engaged in the UCI salmon drift gillnet fishery, 2009–2018.



Source: Esri, ADF&G, IPHC, ADIR, AK State Geospatial Data Clearinghouse

Source: Developed by Wislow Research based on ADF&G and NOAA supplied boundary data and ADF&G base map.