

Stakeholder Group- Environment/ Rural subgroup
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May 2006

REVISED: Per Stakeholder Meeting Notes of May 23, certain sections of this report have been revised.

Question: Salmon: status and trends and how has the visitor industry affected fish allocations in the Sitka area?

Chinook salmon: sport harvest of Chinook salmon in Southeast Alaska averaged 24,500 from 1977- 1990, and 71,000 from 2000-2004. Overall increases in harvest were primarily due to increases in outer coast fisheries near Sitka and Prince of Wales. In 2004, 54% of the sport harvest was taken by non-Alaskan residents.

Source: ADFG report to the board of fisheries January 2006: Overview of the sport fishery: Chinook salmon in Southeast through 2005.

Based on numbers provided the Stakeholder group by ADFG Sitka sport fish manager Bob Chadwick:

In area D (Sitka area—Baranof Island and West Chichagof) sport Chinook harvest has changed from 50% non resident (1993) to 64% non-resident (2004); Coho salmon from 47% non-resident to 91% non resident. Chinook harvest in area D by residents has grown from 6, 767 to 9,641 (although the number of marine angler days for this sector has decreased); non-resident harvest for same area and years has grown from 6,697 to 16,802 fish. Resident coho harvest has declined from 7,184 to 6,201 fish while nonresident harvest has increased from 6,409 to 62,882 fish. *Approximately 78% of Alaska charter operators have permanent mailing addresses outside Alaska—i.e. are non-resident.*

Chinook harvest: commercial harvest of Chinook salmon in Southeast Alaska
Chinook salmon abundance the past two years has been at a high level and subsequently the Southeast chinook quota has been raised. The troll fishery chinook harvest averaged 298,830 fish between 1970 and 1979 and between 2001 and 2005 averaged 300,477 fish. Chinook abundance tends to be cyclical and abundance is now beginning to drop (troll allocation has dropped 55,000 fish between 2005 and 2006), but is still relatively high. Coho harvest between 2001 and 2005 averaged 1.66 million fish. Coho abundance is never predicted pre-season, but is monitored during the season to ensure adequate passage of fish to inside waters for net fisheries and spawning. The troll fleet harvests approximately 61% of the annual commercial coho allocation. *Approximately 85% of the commercial troll permits are held by Alaskan residents.*

Sources: ADFG report to the Board of Fisheries; Patty Skannes pers. comm.; Commercial Fisheries Entry Commission.

Allocation background

The troll and gillnet fisheries were first restricted/closed in the mid-70s as a prelude to the US/Canada Salmon Treaty. In 1985, the United States and Canada signed the Pacific Salmon Treaty, which includes provisions for management and conservation of Chinook salmon stocks that inhabit the Pacific Coast, north of Southern Oregon. The treaty established harvest ceilings for Southeast Alaska Chinook salmon, excluding most hatchery fish. When the treaty was signed, only the commercial troll fleet was managed to stay within the annual quota for treaty fish; in 1987, treaty fish were allocated between all commercial gear groups and in 1992, allocations went into place for the sport fishery as well. In 1999, a new treaty agreement was negotiated that replaced the ceiling approach with abundance-based management.

Prior to 1992, sport harvest of Chinook was deducted from the treaty ceiling before the annual commercial troll allocation was established. In March of 1992, the Board of Fisheries allocated Chinook between the sport and troll fisheries. Beginning with the 1992 season, the net fisheries were given their existing allocation of 20,000 treaty Chinook and the remainder was split between the commercial troll fishery and the sport fisheries based on the Board of Fisheries designed allocation formula of 83% troll; 17% sport. An historic allocation would have given the trollers approximately 87%. The Board elected to provide the sport fishery room to grow and told trollers to work through a Task Force so that they could design management measures that would limit their harvest to the new quota. The sport allocation was increased to 20% in 1996 and has remained at this level ever since.

Prior to 2003, harvest overages in the sport fishery affected commercial management decisions (e.g., the August troll opening was cancelled one season to compensate for over harvest in the sport sector). In 2003, the Board of Fisheries “uncoupled” the two sectors, such that each is now managed to live within its allocation but overages in one sector do not affect management measures or the quota in another sector. This, and a menu of sport management options, has served to significantly reduce conflict between sport and commercial sectors.

Source: ADFG report to the Board of Fisheries, 2005

NOTE: One only partially resolved side effect of the troll/sport Chinook allocation is the inadequacy of mechanisms to enable sport fishermen to harvest their entire quota in high chinook abundance years. Since trollers are not allowed to harvest sport underages, Alaska loses fish during these years. Finding ways to deal with the underages has been challenging. This year the Board approved new sport fishing regulations that should help sport fishermen take their quota in high years.

Key points: Growth in visitor industry is one factor that has impacted a gradual shift in harvest of halibut from resident to nonresident in Sitka area in sport-caught, and a gradual shift of commercial to charter.. ADFG seeks to address this issue by applying more restrictive management measures to non-resident fishermen (e.g.annual limit on chinook) than to resident sport fishermen. Prior to 1996 and to a lesser extent up to 2003,

increases in the visitor industry also resulted in a gradual erosion of the commercial troll quota. Larger chinook quotas, establishment of the sport Chinook allocation in 1992, the “uncoupling” of the commercial troll and sport fisheries in 2003 and improved sport management options leading into the 2006 season have at least temporarily halted the commercial to sport (charter) reallocation.