ISSUE PAPER ON SUBSISTENCE KING SALMON DRIFT
GILLNETTING YUKON AREA SUBDISTRICT 4-A
(PROPOSAL #463)

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INTRODUCTION

Proposal #463, submitted by the Galena Fish and Game Advisory Committee (communities of Kaltag, Nulato, Galena, and Koyukuk), requests that the Board of Fisheries legalize the taking of subsistence king salmon by drift gill net in subdistrict 4-A the Yukon River fishery. The proposed regulation would allow up to a 100-ft. drift gill net to be used during a 10 fishing-day period prior to the opening of the commercial fishing season. Commercial buying usually begins about July 1. This issue paper addresses responses to an informal user survey conducted by the Subsistence Section, Alaska Department of Fish and Game, regarding traditional use and user preferences and attitudes toward the proposal. A table showing harvest trends from 1961 to 1979 is included as Appendix A.

METHODOLOGY

Subsistence fishermen in the villages of Ruby, Galena, Koyukuk, Nulato, and Kaltag were informally surveyed between October 1 and November 15, 1980.

Table I. Households surveyed by village:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Village</th>
<th>Total Households in Village</th>
<th># Households Surveyed</th>
<th>% of Households Surveyed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kaltag</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nulato</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Koyukuk</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Galena</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ruby</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>83</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The survey form (see Appendix B) was prepared to solicit comments on the proposal and to gather data on traditional use, user preferences, and attitudes toward the proposal. Personal interviews were conducted by the researcher for each household that fished subsistence in 1980. The interview was done in conjunction with the annual subsistence fish
harvest survey conducted by the Subsistence Section. The villages of Ruby, Galena, Koyukuk, Nulato, and Kaltag were visited during the months of October and November while families were waiting for the river to freeze over so trapping could begin. The researcher gained cooperation from all persons interviewed.

RESULTS

Historic use of drift nets in certain Yukon River villages is established in the literature (Frenchen 1951). The households surveyed indicated that drift netting was common about 30-40 years ago and was accomplished by using two canoes. This was a rather dangerous undertaking as the net could be caught on a snag and possibly overturn the manpower craft.

Drift netting using "kicker"-powered boats came into use 5 or 6 years ago. The two villages most concerned about prohibitions on drift netting are Kaltag and Nulato, where there has been traditional drift net use. Koyukuk and Galena residents, additionally, now see drift netting as a viable solution for the problems of new fishermen facing the increased competition for set net sites. Ruby residents report that they are not experiencing this competition as yet and appear to be satisfied with their fishing methods and number of king salmon set net sites. They do not, however, object to other fishermen in Y4-A drift netting for kings, and the Ruby Advisory Committee has gone on record in support of proposal #463.

The value of the king salmon as an eating fish, in the minds of local residents, has no match. A valued staple of every household, king salmon heads and backbones are dried even for dog food, although people never use the meat for dog food. Although most of the fish is processed by smoking, bellies are salted, and half-dried filets (called giyoga) are baked and eaten as a staple all summer. Many families are also putting up fish in jars. With all the villages (except Koyukuk) now hooked up to electricity, more king salmon is put away frozen.

Several people in the villages commented on the increased runs and attributed them to the 200-mile limit. Kaltag is now reportedly catching a large trout (perhaps Dolly Varden) that wasn't available before.

If allowed to drift net, villagers argue, they would catch only as much as they could handle and process. King salmon spoils quickly if the weather is warm because of the high oil content and must be processed as soon as possible. A commercial market does not exist that early in the season.

DISCUSSION

Residents of the villages of Kaltag, Nulato, Koyukuk, and Galena expressed similar concerns about the current regulation system which prohibits subsistence drift gill netting in Y4-A:
1. Kaltag and Nulato have few king salmon set net and fishwheel sites. These sites have been fished by the same family for generations and do not allow entry of new subsistence fishermen into the fishery. These sites, however, have the sandbars which are necessary starting points for drifting.

2. Some people prefer to subsistence fish in June as they are busy later fishing the summer chum (commercially or for subsistence). The Yukon River water levels are high at that time and set nets fill up with drift; subsistence king salmon harvest, as a result, is minimal.

3. Many people stated that drift netting was the only way to catch the large strong king with the rich meat. Most set nets catch the weak fish near the shore, averaging under 20 lbs., while the fishwheel often catches the small jack king.

4. Fishing effort has decreased with the 2-day-on, 1-day-off, 2-day-on schedule. Many women and older people felt it was too strenuous to follow that schedule so put less effort into fishing, averaging 2-day weeks. Another factor, the increased cost of gas used to set nets, made people feel as though the trips were wasteful when they would return home with an empty boat.

5. Commercial sale of king salmon, residents argue, should be prohibited unless subsistence users have first priority. Only one fisherman during the commercial season sells his kings and only when his family cannot keep up with the cutting and drying.

With the exception of two families in Ruby, no one commercially sells king salmon strips. They are used as a barter item between families in the same village and often sent to relatives living in other villages or in Anchorage or Fairbanks.

The following comments summarize local attitudes toward the proposal:

"Drift netting would allow the working person to go out and get what he needs without having to worry about checking, setting, and pulling a set net."

"We would not need to drift net if we could keep our nets in five days straight."

"I never caught a king over 20 lbs. with a set net."

"Drift netting is OK so long as people don't sell kings."

"King salmon is only used for eating fish."

"Drift netting is good for people with temporary fishing sites."

"I didn't fish much this year but would put more effort if I could drift net."
"It's the only way to get good kings."

"Only for subsistence fishing though. Don't let commercial fishing take over."
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Month</th>
<th>Camp</th>
<th>In</th>
<th>Out</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>April</td>
<td>31,164</td>
<td>21,610</td>
<td>32,970</td>
<td>22,817</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May</td>
<td>2,231</td>
<td>2,000</td>
<td>1,500</td>
<td>3,476</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>June</td>
<td>348</td>
<td>325</td>
<td>468</td>
<td>276</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>July</td>
<td>2,000</td>
<td>2,000</td>
<td>2,000</td>
<td>2,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>August</td>
<td>2,000</td>
<td>2,000</td>
<td>2,000</td>
<td>2,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>September</td>
<td>2,000</td>
<td>2,000</td>
<td>2,000</td>
<td>2,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>October</td>
<td>2,000</td>
<td>2,000</td>
<td>2,000</td>
<td>2,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>November</td>
<td>2,000</td>
<td>2,000</td>
<td>2,000</td>
<td>2,000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Note:**
- Includes Black River catches.
- Includes Shinglehouse Fish camp catches.
- Includes Howo Fish camp catches.
- Includes Minto Fish camp catches.
- Data by village obtained from annual reports. Subtotals includes revised catch data.
- Catch by village not available.
The Fish and Game Advisory Board of Kaltag, Nulato, Koyukuk and Galena has proposed to the Board of Fish that subsistence king salmon drift-net fishing be allowed in units 4A and 4B for 10 fishing days prior to the opening of the commercial fishing season. These questions are to gather information that will help the Board make their decision.

How long have you fished for king salmon? _____ yrs.

What method do you use?
- Drift net_____
- Set net_____
- Fish Wheel_____

What method have you traditionally used?
- Drift net_____
- Set net_____
- Fish wheel_____

What type of fishing site do you have? ____________________________

How much king salmon do you put away?
- Dried____________________
- Frozen__________
- Smoked__________
- Salted___________

Do you fish for relatives not in this household? ______
If yes, how many? ______

Were you able to put up enough for your family's needs this year? _____

Do you sell fresh king salmon? _____
Do you sell smoked king salmon strips? _____

What problems with king salmon subsistence fishing did you run into this year? Was fishing more difficult this year than previous years?

What changes would you like to recommend for king salmon subsistence fishing that would improve your method of fishing?

Comments: