Norton Sound-Subsistence Fisheries (8 Proposals)

PROPOSAL 28

5 AAC 01.170. Lawful gear and gear specifications.

Define beach seine gear specifications in effect when Norton Sound-Port Clarence subsistence fisheries are closed and immediately reopened with the nonretention of specific salmon species, as follows:

5 AAC 01.170(m) is amended to read as follows:

(m) During times when the commissioner determines that it is necessary for the conservation of specific salmon species, the commissioner may, by emergency order, close the fishing season in any portion of the Norton Sound-Port Clarence Area and immediately reopen the season in any portion of the Norton Sound-Port Clarence Area to subsistence fishing with beach seines and require that specific salmon species caught with a beach seine be returned immediately to the water alive[.]**; a beach seine may not be constructed of monofilament web and may not exceed:**

(1) 50 fathoms in length;
(2) 100 meshes in depth;
(3) a mesh size of three and one-half inches stretched measure.

What is the issue you would like the board to address and why? Currently, when the subsistence fishery is restricted to use of beach seine gear with nonretention of a specific salmon species for conservation, there are no specifications of how beach seines can be constructed. Defining beach seine specifications will ensure that beach seines are constructed in a manner that will allow for live release of nontarget salmon species.

Did you develop your proposal in coordination with others, or with your local Fish and Game Advisory Committee? Explain.

PROPOSED BY: Alaska Department of Fish and Game (HQ-F26-022)

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PROPOSAL 29

5 AAC 01.180. Subsistence fishing permits; annual limits for salmon.

Establish a seasonal harvest limit of 25 sockeye salmon for the Sinuk River subsistence fishery as follows:

Proposed Regulation: Given the concerning state of the Sinuk River red salmon population and the historical mismanagement of this fishery, I propose the following regulatory changes:

1. **Implement a Strict Harvest Limit**: Establish a **seasonal harvest limit of 25 red salmon per permit holder**. This conservative limit will allow for more cautious management of the run and help prioritize escapement, ensuring that enough salmon reach the spawning grounds.

2. **Prevent Overfishing:** There should be no increases in harvest limits beyond the initial 25 red salmon per permit holder. Given the Sinuk River's vulnerability, any increase in the harvest limit could push the population closer to collapse, especially considering the ongoing fishing pressure from nearby rivers. By maintaining this strict limit, we can protect the population and avoid potential overexploitation.

Rationale: The Sinuk River's red salmon population is inherently vulnerable due to its small size and the high fishing pressures from nearby systems. It is clear that the river's salmon run has not been managed with the level of caution it requires. The removal of the camera at Glacial Lake without adequate alternatives for monitoring the population—has left a significant gap in data, making it difficult to assess the true status of the run.

Furthermore, the absence of any harvest restrictions has exacerbated the risk of overfishing. With no limits in place, the potential for high levels of catch by a few permit holders could rapidly deplete the population, leading to irreversible damage. The Sinuk River's red salmon population is already under stress, and without immediate intervention, the fishery could collapse under unsustainable practices.

Conclusion: The proposed regulatory changes are essential to safeguard the Sinuk River's red salmon population. By implementing a strict harvest limit of 25 red salmon per permit holder and committing to sustainable, precautionary management practices, we can prevent the collapse of the fishery. The Sinuk River needs immediate and long term intervention, the red salmon population could continue to decline. I respectfully urge the Alaska Board of Fisheries to adopt this proposal to ensure that the Sinuk River's red salmon population remains viable for future generations.

What is the issue you would like the board to address and why? Introduction: The red salmon run on the Sinuk River, west of Nome, has shown a marked decline over the past several years. Historical data from the ADF&G indicated run sizes ranging from approximately 800 to 3,000 fish, significantly lower than those in neighboring systems such as the Pilgrim River, which can support runs of 60,000 to 80,000 fish. However, since the removal of the Glacial Lake camera, there has been no reliable data to track the current state of the Sinuk River's red salmon population. This lack of data, combined with the increasing pressure from other fisheries, raises serious concerns about the future sustainability of this run.

Issue: In 2024, the red salmon fishery on the Sinuk River was closed abruptly with minimal notice to the public. ADF&G staff did not provide advance warning or information regarding the declining state of the run. While closures are necessary in response to population declines, the lack of communication and foresight points to a reactive, rather than a proactive, approach to management.

Additionally, the Sinuk River is experiencing increasing fishing pressure, particularly when the Pilgrim River, a nearby system, faces restrictions. With no harvest limits in place, a small number of permit holders could potentially overharvest a significant portion of the Sinuk River's already vulnerable run. For instance, if six permit holders each harvest 100 red salmon during a low-run year, this could decimate up to 75% of the entire run. This is not sustainable management—this is depletion.

Population Vulnerability and Mismanagement: Unlike the much larger Pilgrim River, the Sinuk River is at a higher risk of collapse due to its smaller, more fragile salmon run. The current management approach, which has allowed open access without clear, harvest restrictions, has failed to account for this vulnerability. It is possible that the Sinuk River has been mismanaged for years, leading to its current precarious state. The lack of proactive monitoring, combined with an insufficient harvest control system, has put the fishery at risk.

This situation demands a serious reevaluation of how the Sinuk River is managed. The proposed regulations aim to address this by instituting a harvest limit that reflects the fragility of the run and

prioritizes the long-term health of the population. It is not enough to react to closures after the fact; we need to implement a management system that protects the run from further depletion.

Did you develop your proposal in coordination with others, or with your local Fish and Game Advisory Committee? Explain.

PROPOSED BY: Brandon Ahmasuk (EF-F26-011)

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PROPOSAL 30

5 AAC 01.175. Waters closed to subsistence fishing.

Increase waters closed to subsistence fishing in the Sinuk River, as follows:

Proposed Solution: To ensure the safety of subsistence fishers and to improve the efficiency of the fishery, I propose relocating the current seining location to a point much further downstream, beyond the upper sections of the river. The new location should be situated at least 9 miles downstream from the current Boulder Creek site, where the river widens, the current slows, and conditions are more suitable for effective seining. I suggest moving the seining location point below Camp Creek. Most of if not all safe and productive seining happens below this point.

Beach seining for red salmon on the Sinuk River allowed below Camp Creek located approximately 7.64 miles from the river mouth.

What is the issue you would like the board to address and why? Introduction: The Sinuk River, west of Nome, is a vital resource for subsistence fishers, and its fishery is of great importance to the local community. However, the current upper seining location set by ADF&G at Boulder Creek is problematic for both safety and efficiency. Individuals unfamiliar with the river are seining far upriver, that can create significant hazards that compromise both the safety of boaters and the ability of other subsistence users to access appropriate fishing areas downstream. Given the narrow, shallow, and fast-moving upper reaches of the Sinuk River, this location is not suitable for effective and safe seining, and it is time to consider relocating it to a safer, more effective location further downstream.

Issue: Currently, some individuals, particularly those new to the river, are attempting to seine too far upriver, where the river's physical conditions are not conducive to safe or effective fishing. These actions create serious safety hazards, including situations where the river is blocked off by seining nets in an unsafe manner. For example, on one occasion, I encountered a seining net that was anchored across a narrow bend of the river on both sides, with anchor lines positioned 2-3 feet above the water. As our boat attempted to navigate the bend, we narrowly avoided a dangerous collision with the unmanned seining net, with our crew at risk of being struck by the anchor lines. This incident highlights the serious safety risks posed by seining in the upper reaches of the river, particularly when individuals unfamiliar with the area do not understand the challenges the river poses or safe seining practices. The upper Sinuk River itself is challenging to navigate with jet boats. In swift currents, particularly in narrow channels with high velocity, jet boats have a reduced "grip" on the water. Unlike traditional propeller-driven boats, which have more direct contact with the water and can rely on more rudder movement for turning, jet boats rely on the force of the water exiting the jet nozzle to create directional control. When the boat is moving at speed through fast-moving water, the stream of water exiting the nozzle can be disrupted by the current, making it harder to turn or even causing the boat to feel "sluggish" or even slide in its response. In the upper reaches of the Sinuk River navigation is challenging.

Additionally, the river is too shallow, narrow, and rocky in the upper sections, with swift currents that make successful seining nearly impossible. As a result, those attempting to seine in these areas often find themselves unable to stop or turn around in time, risking dangerous collisions with other boats or nets. The current seining location at Boulder Creek—set by local ADF&G staff—is located too far upstream, contributing to these safety hazards and inefficiencies.

Rationale:

1. **Safety Concerns:** The current location at Boulder Creek creates significant safety risks, particularly for boaters and subsistence users who are trying to access downstream fishing spots. By moving the seining location further downstream, we can eliminate the hazards posed by swift, narrow, rocky, shallow bends and reduce the risk of collisions and dangerous encounters
2. **Physical Conditions of the River:** The upper portion of the Sinuk River is simply not suited to effective seining. The upper portion of the river is too shallow, too narrow, too many boulders, and too swift for successful fishing. The downstream location will provide conditions that are more conducive to both safe travel and successful seining, maximizing the effectiveness of the fishery while reducing risks.
3. **Practicality:** Local knowledge and years of experience indicate that more than halfway down the river, or approximately 9 miles from the bridge, is the optimal location for seining. This area is safer, with better access, and provides more consistent conditions for subsistence fishers. Relocating the seining area will not only improve safety but will also enhance the overall efficiency and sustainability of the fishery.

Conclusion: Relocating the seining location to a point further downstream is a practical, commonsense solution to the current issues facing the Sinuk River fishery. By addressing the safety hazards in the upper reaches of the river and improving access for subsistence users, we can ensure that the Sinuk River remains a valuable and sustainable resource for the local community. I strongly urge the Alaska Board of Fisheries to adopt this proposal and work towards

Did you develop your proposal in coordination with others, or with your local Fish and Game Advisory Committee? Explain.

PROPOSED BY: Brandon Ahmasuk (EF-F26-012)

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PROPOSAL 31

5 AAC 01.175. Waters closed to subsistence fishing.

Expand waters closed to subsistence fishing for salmon in the Sinuk River, as follows:

5AAC01.175 Waters close to subsistence fishing

(1) The following waters are closed to subsistence fishing for salmon, except when fishing with a hook and line attached to a rod or pole:

(2) the Sinuk River upstream from an ADF&G regulatory marker located at the confluence of [Boulder} Camp Creek;

What is the issue you would like the board to address and why? The net fishing closure for subsistence salmon fishing needs to be extended downstream for safety and conservation reasons. The Sinuk River is a swift, difficult river to run nets in. Avoiding conflicts among fishers in chutes and riffles has been a problem. The original direction by the BOF was to close potential chum salmon spawning beds. Moving the netfishing area to below Camp Creek meets both those goals.

Did you develop your proposal in coordination with others, or with your local Fish and Game Advisory Committee? Explain. Yes, there was confusion about the original proposal brought by one of the NNSAC members and this idea was endorsed unanimously by the AC.

PROPOSED BY: Northern Norton Sound F&G Advisory Committee (EF-F26-123)

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PROPOSAL 32

5 AAC 01.160. Fishing seasons and periods.

Repeal the subsistence fishing schedule in the marine waters of west of Cape Nome in Subdistrict 1 of the Norton Sound District, as follows:

Allow those fishing in Subdistrict 1 marine waters west of Cape Nome to fish 7 days a week – identical regulations to those east of Cape Nome in this subdistrict.

5 AAC 01.160. Fishing seasons and periods

(a) In the Port Clarence District, fish may be taken at any time, except as specified by emergency order.

(b) In the Norton Sound District, fish may be taken at any time, except as follows:

(1) in Subdistrict 1,

(A) in fresh water, from June 15 through August 31, set gillnets may be used to take salmon only from 6:00 p.m. Wednesday until 6:00 p.m. Monday;

(B) ~~in marine waters, west of Cape Nome, unless modified by emergency order to ensure reasonable opportunity for subsistence uses of available surpluses of salmon, from June 15 through August 15, set gillnets may be used to take salmon from 6:00 p.m. Wednesday until 6:00 p.m. Monday;~~

What is the issue you would like the board to address and why? Regulations for Subdistrict 1 unnecessarily limit subsistence opportunity for salmon fishers in marine waters west of Cape Nome between June 15 – August 15. East of Cape Nome, fishers may fish 7 days a week. West of Cape Nome, the open period is from 6 p.m. Wednesday to 6p.m. Monday. Restrictions were first put in place nearly three decades ago to protect chum returns to the Nome, Snake, and other rivers west of Cape Nome with conservation concerns. The Board has gradually eased restrictions as chum salmon returns in the Subdistrict 1 have improved. Further liberalization of the fishing period is warranted.

It should be noted that those fishing marine waters west of Cape Nome are not only catching chum salmon — we also harvest pinks, a few sockeye, and an occasional chinook salmon. These fish are not just bound for Subdistrict 1 rivers. We are also likely taking salmon bound for rivers in the Kotzebue and Arctic Districts.

Those who fish west of Cape Nome (either because of fish camp location or the shorter distance from town) now contend with extremely challenging weather conditions during the season that: 1) already limit the amount of time one can fish using a set gillnet 2) impact efforts to make dry fish. It is stormier, weather changes rapidly, and we now have to jump on any opportunity when both conditions are present and hope the fish are moving through then. Good conditions in which to fish and preserve using this technique often do not coincide with the fishing period. Even those of us who can afford to take time off work to take advantage of good conditions sometimes struggle to harvest fish and process them.

Allowing additional fishing time should not pose a conservation concern, given the improvements in returns of chum salmon in the Nome subdistrict and long-term shifts in locations used by Nome residents to fish for salmon such as the Pilgrim River.

Did you develop your proposal in coordination with others, or with your local Fish and Game Advisory Committee? Explain. It was presented for comment at the March 2025 Northern Norton Sound advisory committee meeting in Nome.

PROPOSED BY: Nicole Braem (EF-F26-130)

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PROPOSAL 33

5 AAC 01.172. Limitations on subsistence fishing gear.

Prohibit the retention of king salmon when subsistence fishing with a beach seine in the Pilgrim River, as follows:

In coordination with management practices for the conservation of the Pilgrim River king salmon stock, it is recommended for the non-retention of king salmon through subsistence practices when beach-seining while targeting other species like sockeye salmon.

What is the issue you would like the board to address and why? The northern latitudinal limit for king salmon is near southern Norton Sound, however, king salmon are present in the Pilgrim River, Port Clarence District in small numbers. The five and 10-year average for king salmon escapement on the Pilgrim River is 30 and 55 kings, respectively. Current regulations in the Port Clarence District for the Pilgrim River state that the annual limit for king salmon is three fish and 25 fish for sockeye salmon, unless modified by the commissioner by emergency order.

The Pilgrim River receives significant subsistence pressure from Nome-area residents seeking sockeye salmon, largely through beach seining efforts. While these fishers are not targeting king salmon, the current regulations allow for, and result in, their harvest up to an annual limit of three king salmon. Pilgrim River continues to exhibit a low abundance of king salmon due to overall production of the stock. This proposal would address management actions for non-retention of king salmon through subsistence practices when beach-seining while targeting other species such as sockeye salmon to conserve and sustain what king salmon stock is available at the Pilgrim River.

Did you develop your proposal in coordination with others, or with your local Fish and Game Advisory Committee? Explain. This proposal has been endorsed by the Northern Norton Sound Advisory Committee.

PROPOSED BY: Norton Sound Economic Development Corporation (EF-F26-052)

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PROPOSAL 34

5 AAC 01.180. Subsistence fishing permits; annual limits for salmon.

Reduce the subsistence fishing annual limit for Pilgrim River king salmon, as follows:

In coordination with management practices for the conservation of the Pilgrim River king salmon stock, it is recommended to reduce the annual limit of king salmon from three fish to one fish. Regulatory language would suggest as follows:

(g)In the Port Clarence District, in the following waters, the annual limits for salmon are as follows:

(1)in the Pilgrim River, the annual limit for

(A)king salmon is one fish

What is the issue you would like the board to address and why? The northern latitudinal limit for king salmon is near southern Norton Sound, however, king salmon are present in the Pilgrim River, Port Clarence District in small numbers. The five and 10-year average for king salmon escapement on the Pilgrim River is 30 and 55 kings, respectively. Current regulations in the Port Clarence District for the Pilgrim River state that the annual limit for king salmon is three fish. Pilgrim River continues to exhibit a low abundance of king salmon due to overall production of the stock. This proposal would address management actions to reduce king salmon retention through subsistence practices to conserve and sustain what stock is available.

Did you develop your proposal in coordination with others, or with your local Fish and Game Advisory Committee? Explain. This proposal has been endorsed by the Northern Norton Sound Advisory Committee.

PROPOSED BY: Norton Sound Economic Development Corporation (EF-F26-050)

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PROPOSAL 35

5 AAC 01.172. Limitations on subsistence fishing gear.

Repeal the requirement for hook and line subsistence fishermen to follow sport fishing bag and possession limits in the northern Norton Sound area, as follows:

Remove the requirement that those subsistence fishing for salmon using rod and reel in flowing waters that drain into northern Norton Sound from Cape Prince of Wales to Bald Point (between Elim and Koyuk) keep to sport fish bag limits. Suggested language:

5 AAC 01.172. Limitations on subsistence fishing gear

(a) Except when fishing through the ice, for subsistence fishing in state waters of, and all flowing waters that drain into, northern Norton Sound from Cape Prince of Wales to Bald Point (between Elim and Koyuk) with a hook and line attached to a rod or a pole, the following provisions apply:

(1) the methods and means specified in 5 AAC 70.011, 5 AAC 70.030, and 5 AAC 75.022; and

(2) the bag and possession limits [for non-salmon fish], by species, specified in 5 AAC 70.011.

What is the issue you would like the board to address and why? Rod and reel has been recognized by the Board of Fish as a legal subsistence gear type in all flowing waters that drain into northern Norton Sound from Cape Prince of Wales to Bald Point (between Elim and Koyuk) under 5AAC 01.172(a). As a result, Alaska residents in multiple communities are not required to purchase a sport fishing license to use this method to harvest fish. However, under that same section of code, 5AAC 01.172(a)(2), we are required to adhere to sport fish bag and possession limits per 5 5 AAC 70.011.

In Norton Sound Subsdistrict, the sport fish bag limits for salmon are different than those under we fish under by the subsistence permit required to fish in Norton Sound Subdistrict 1. The sport fish bag limits are much more restrictive than the subsistence limits, and unnecessarily so. For example, under the subsistence permit, using a setnet, we can take up to 20 coho annually from Bonanza Channel. Under the rules governing subsistence rod and reel fishing, we can only take 3 coho per day at the same location. As a result, we would have to spend 5 days fishing using rod and reel to catch as many coho as setting a net. This is very inefficient, we would spend more time and gas. Not everyone has a net and boat.

Elsewhere in the area where rod and reel has been determined to be a subsistence gear type, subsistence permits are also required.

My memory of the reason for this requirement that subsistence fishers using rod and reel in this area keep to sport fish bag limits is that it is related to law enforcement concerns about how to distinguish between a sport and subsistence fisher in the field. Because subsistence salmon fishers are required to get a permit and are required to record our catch before leaving our fishing location – we have the subsistence permit in the field. Law enforcement can easily determine who is subsistence fishing.

Did you develop your proposal in coordination with others, or with your local Fish and Game Advisory Committee? Explain. I presented this proposal for discussion and comment at the Northern Norton Sound advisory committee meeting in March 2025.

PROPOSED BY: Nicole Braem (EF-F26-027)

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