UCIDA’s Position and Objectives for Cook Inlet Salmon Management

In an article published in April 2016, celebrating the 40th anniversary of the Magnuson-Stevens Act, the authors; Dr. Balsiger, Commissioner Cotten, Doug DeMaster and Chris Oliver wrote: “The goal is to get the most benefit from our fisheries for food and economic well-being, while conserving ecosystem health and fish stocks for continued productivity to benefit future generations of fishing families and coastal communities.”

UCIDA’s goal is to have that statement apply to Cook Inlet.

Current management of Upper Cook Inlet salmon undermines the optimum yield of salmon stocks in the region and the entire commercial salmon fishing industry.

Cook Inlet salmon have not been managed within the parameters of the ten National Standards under the Magnuson-Stevens Act. Bringing salmon management into compliance with the standards will have numerous benefits: sustainability; regulatory stability for both commercial and recreational sectors; reduced contention between user groups; and improved yields which will increase the food supply for the nation.

The lack of parameters has led to the so-called fish wars in which allocation and politics have overrun scientific management of the resource. This in turn has lead to the destabilization of the commercial fishing industry and is causing economic harm to the region’s coastal communities.

The state has not focused on a remedy for problems with optimum yield and salmon production that occurred in some systems. For example, the state’s response to freshwater salmon production problems like invasive pike predation and effects of urbanization, that have lead to a decline in some Mat-Su salmon stocks, has been to restrict commercial fishing in saltwater. This irrational approach creates a situation where everyone loses. Those affected salmon stocks continue to decline, leading to reduced harvests for all user groups and the loss of economic benefit.

Successful salmon management in Cook Inlet requires real time in-season monitoring and decision-making for optimizing the benefit of this renewable resource. It is not possible to stockpile surplus salmon for harvest at a later time. Migrating salmon heading for spawning grounds pass through Cook Inlet’s fishing grounds rapidly and once they move through, typically in a week or less, the opportunity for commercial harvest is gone forever. Sport fishing efforts are inherently inefficient; they do not, and cannot, harvest large surpluses of salmon. The resulting excess escapements do not benefit anyone in the short term and reduce production and future food supply from the salmon stocks in the long term.

Denying the commercial fishery a reasonable harvest opportunity on millions of sockeye and pink salmon and hundreds of thousands of chum salmon, in order to reduce the harvest of coho salmon by a few thousand fish, is not a zero sum game. It is enormously costly to the commercial fishing industry, with no measurable gain for others, and greatly reduces the potential food supply from our salmon resources.

Objectives

State management policies, management plans and in-season management practices that comply with the MSA, the 10 National Standards and other applicable federal law.

Provide reasonable opportunity for commercial harvest on all surplus stocks of salmon and optimize the food production from the Cook Inlet salmon resources.

Provide reasonable opportunity for recreational users to harvest salmon.

Develop and implement strategies and mitigation measures to rebuild those salmon stocks that have impaired production levels.