

ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE



REPRESENTATIVE LES GARA

Public Comment: Reconsider Kenai Subsistence Proposal and Issue Subsistence Rules That Do Not Endanger Prized Wild Rainbow Trout and Dolly Varden, and Do Not Threaten the Dwindling Run of Prized Kenai King Salmon

January 26, 2015

Office of Subsistence Management
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
1011 E. Tudor Road, Mail Stop 121
Anchorage, Alaska 99503

Dear Members of the Federal Subsistence Board:

As an Alaskan who fishes, and who represents thousands who fish the Kenai River, I am asking the board to reconsider the new management strategy allowing a subsistence fishery in the Kenai River drainage. Fishing brings Alaskans together, and the proposed ruling will create division and anger within our community, pitting Alaskans against Alaskans. I ask that you distribute this comment to all members of the Federal Subsistence Board.

As someone who is intimately familiar with the Kenai River, I am alarmed by the proposal to allow gillnets to spread halfway across the Kenai River and at the area below Skilak Lake known as "Rainbow Alley". This area is prized by the thousands of Alaskans who use it as recreational area for summer and fall fishing. It is one of the few places on the road system where people of modest means can catch 25 and 30 inch trout and char. Spreading a gillnet across this area frequented by trout and dollies will kill off substantial numbers of these prized fish- a result referred to as "bycatch." The board's proposal also allows gillnets that are far too big and far too lethal.

The board's proposal should not include King Salmon so long as we are working hard to re-establish what was once a run so ample that Alaskans flocked to the Kenai River to try to catch this uniquely large strain of King Salmon.

We can allow a subsistence fishery for sockeye salmon that ensures local subsistence users can stock their freezers with the nourishment that comes from these fish. The Kenai and Kasilof Rivers return over a million sockeye salmon a year, leaving enough for subsistence, commercial and sport fishermen if managed properly.

But the Kenai River will be massively degraded as a fishery for Alaskans under this proposal- a proposal that will kill 20 – 30-inch trout and char, and keep us from rebuilding Alaska’s once vibrant King Salmon run. I urge the board to reconsider their decision on this matter.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Les Gara", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Representative Les Gara

Cc: Governor Bill Walker
Pat Pourchot, Special Assistant to the Secretary of the Interior for Alaska Affairs
Sam Cotten, Commissioner, Department of Fish and Game
Robert Begich, Department of Fish and Game
Kenai River Sport Fishing Association
Robert Ruffner, Executive Director, Kenai River Watershed Forum
Alaska Troutfitters Fly Shop, Cooper Landing
Kenai River Professional Guide Association
Kenai River Special Management Area Advisory Board