



## **RECORD BYCATCH OF SALMON IN GULF OF ALASKA SPARKS CONCERN: IMPACTS ON PNW FISH UNKNOWN**

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The North Pacific Fishery Management Council is proposing fast-track measures to address the potential impact of this year's record bycatch of chinook salmon by pollock boats and commercial fisherman in the Gulf of Alaska.

At a meeting last week in Anchorage, Alaska, the council called for an expedited analysis of the commercial bycatch of king salmon, which exceeded 54,000 fish in the Gulf of Alaska this year. It's a figure that alarms fisheries and sport fishing businesses, as runs are declining in Alaska's popular salmon fishing rivers.

"It is an alarming number," said Josh Keaton, fisheries manager with the National Marine Fisheries Service. "It's the highest salmon season catch in the Gulf of Alaska since 1991."

The total king salmon harvested, as of December 14, is 54,003 – a preliminary number that is subject to change.

The salmon taken by pollock trawlers and commercial fishing vessels totals about as many king salmon as returned to Alaska's Kenai River last year. In addition, it is unknown where the fish were headed when they were caught by the pollock trawlers. If the fish came from the Columbia River or Sacramento River, it raises even greater concerns due to the numerous Endangered Species Act listings in the Pacific Northwest.

Because the dead king salmon harvested have to be thrown back by law, it prevents fisheries managers from determining exactly where the fish were headed, which could be determined by genetic sampling.

While no ban on pollock fishing is being considered at this time, the council is looking at multiple management solutions.

"Proactive measures are being pursued, such as placing a hard-cap, prohibited species catch (PSC) limit, similar to what we have in place for halibut," Keaton said. "Once that limit is reached, commercial fishing is over for the rest of the year."

Some of the limits under consideration are a higher limit of between 15,000 and 30,000, or an even more stringent limit between 5,000 and 10,000 salmon.

"The council is seeking an expedited review and rulemaking to get something done quickly,"

he said.

In addition to the hard cap, Keaton said that the council is seeking expanded observer coverage on boats, and the formation of a bycatch control cooperative, which gives the fleet the tools to manage their chinook salmon harvesting.

“It would organize the fleet to more effectively manage their catch,” Keaton said. “It’s an organization to share information and to enforce some controls on a group. It gives fishermen the capability to form contracts on their own. It’s not a foreign concept and it has been going on in Alaska Fisheries for a long time; but the use of a control cooperative for bycatch is fairly new.”

The council is considering further measures, such as the full retention of salmon once they are caught, and other actions.

The North Pacific Fishery Management Council’s jurisdiction covers 900,000 square miles of ocean from 3-to-200 miles off Alaska’s shoreline. It manages the commercial fishing of cod, pollock, flatfish, mackerel, sablefish and rockfish. The council is comprised of 11 members: Six from Alaska, three from Washington, one from Oregon and a federal representative.

The council’s statement of the problem, a call for an expedited analysis of the issue, and a preliminary process to review measures will be published on the council’s website early next week at <http://alaskafisheries.noaa.gov/npfmc/>

