

FP21 07 Executive Summary

General Description	Proposal FP21-07 requests that the Federal Subsistence Board (Board) revise the Federal subsistence fishing regulations for the Bristol Bay Area by removing the scheduled fishing closures in the Egegik River at §___.27(e)(5)(iii). <i>Submitted by the Bristol Bay Native Association.</i>
Proposed Regulation	<p>§___.27(e)(5) <i>Bristol Bay Area</i></p> <p>* * * *</p> <p><i>(iii) In the Egegik River from 9 a.m. June 23 through 9 a.m. July 17, you may take salmon only during the following times: From 9 a.m. Tuesday to 9 a.m. Wednesday and from 9:00 a.m. Saturday to 9 a.m. Sunday.</i></p>
OSM Preliminary Conclusion	Support
Bristol Bay Subsistence Regional Advisory Council Recommendation	
Interagency Staff Committee Comments	
ADF&G Comments	
Written Public Comments	None

DRAFT STAFF ANALYSIS
FP21-07

ISSUES

Proposal FP21-07, submitted by the Bristol Bay Native Association, requests that the Federal Subsistence Board (Board) revise the Federal subsistence fishing regulations for the Bristol Bay Area by removing the scheduled fishing closures in the Egegik River at §__.27(e)(5)(iii).

DISCUSSION

The proponent is seeking updates to the Federal subsistence fishing regulations by removing existing closures to fishing for subsistence between June 23 and July 17. They state that there are no scheduled subsistence closures in the Egegik River under State regulations, making the Federal subsistence fishery more restrictive, and that resource scarcity is not an issue in these waters.

Existing Federal Regulation

§__.27(e)(5) *Bristol Bay Area*

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(iii) In the Egegik River from 9 a.m. June 23 through 9 a.m. July 17, you may take salmon only during the following times: From 9 a.m. Tuesday to 9 a.m. Wednesday and from 9:00 a.m. Saturday to 9 a.m. Sunday.

Proposed Federal Regulation

§__.27(e)(5) *Bristol Bay Area*

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~~*(iii) In the Egegik River from 9 a.m. June 23 through 9 a.m. July 17, you may take salmon only during the following times: From 9 a.m. Tuesday to 9 a.m. Wednesday and from 9:00 a.m. Saturday to 9 a.m. Sunday.*~~

Existing State Regulation

5 AAC 01.310. Fishing seasons and periods

(a) Unless restricted in this section and 5 AAC 01.325, or unless restricted under the terms of a subsistence fishing permit, fish, other than rainbow trout, may be taken at any time in the Bristol Bay Area.

Extent of Federal Public Lands/Waters

For purposes of this discussion, the phrase “Federal public waters” is defined as those waters described under 36 CFR 242.3 and 50 CFR 100.3. Federal public waters for the Egegik River comprise those waters adjacent to and within the boundaries of the Becharof National Wildlife Refuge. These waters start just downstream of the outlet of Becharof Lake.

Customary and Traditional Use Determinations

Rural residents of South Naknek, the Egegik District, and freshwater drainages flowing into the district have a customary and traditional use determination for salmon and freshwater fish for the Egegik District, including drainages flowing into the district.

Regulatory History

In December 2003, through Proposal F2004-15, a Customary and Traditional Use determination was made for salmon and freshwater fish for the Egegik District (OSM 2003). The Board adopted the proposal with the staff modification to include residents of South Naknek into the determination. There have been no other relevant regulatory actions related to the Egegik River.

Biological Background

The Egegik River watershed, which includes Becharof Lake and drains into the Egegik District in Bering Sea, is one of the major salmon producers in the Bristol Bay Area. The system supports populations of Chum, Coho, Chinook, Sockeye, and Pink salmon, as well as Dolly Varden, Arctic Lamprey, and Pond Smelt (Johnson and Blossom 2018). Sockeye Salmon are by far the largest salmon run in the system. Escapements to the Egegik River, not including those fish harvested by the commercial, subsistence and sport fisheries, have ranged in size from 927,000 to 2,601,000 Sockeye Salmon between 1998 and 2018 (Salomone et al. 2019). The escapement goal for the system is a range from 800,000 to 2,000,000 Sockeye Salmon. There are no specific biological concerns for any of the Egegik salmon runs at this time.

Harvest History

A State subsistence permit is required for subsistence salmon harvest in the Bristol Bay Area under both Federal and State regulations. Annual harvest is reported in the Area Management Reports that are provided by the Alaska Department of Fish and Game, Division of Commercial Fisheries, the most recent covers through the 2018 season (Salomone et al. 2019). The number of subsistence permits issued for the Egegik District have declined over the last 20 year reporting period, with an average of 44 permits issued between 1998 and 2007, and 34 between 2008 and 2017. The primary salmon

species harvested is Sockeye Salmon. The declining numbers of permits has carried over to declining harvests reported. For Sockeye Salmon, the 1998-2007 harvest averaged 2,020 fish, while the 2008-2017 harvest averaged 1,283 fish. For Chinook, Chum, Pink, and Coho the 1998-2007 averages are 93, 100, 22, and 596, while the 2008-2017 averages are 84, 22, 5, and 266, respectively. The average composition of salmon harvested in Egegik River is 2% of the total Bristol Bay Area salmon harvest from 1998-2007.

While the trend for reported subsistence harvest appears to be declining, it does not appear that this is based on declining returns because the Sockeye Salmon escapements for the system over the two time periods actually show a very slight increasing trend (1998-2007: 1,281,518 fish; 2008-2017: 1,335,777 fish). Rather, it appears that reported participation in this fishery has declined.

Commercial catches of Sockeye Salmon in the Egegik District over this period have ranged from 2,291,502 to 11,980,502 Sockeye Salmon. The 20-year (1998-2017) average commercial harvests for the other salmon species are: 636 Chinook Salmon; 69,510 Chum Salmon; 956 Pink Salmon; and 13,181 Coho Salmon.

Effects of the Proposal

Federal subsistence fishing regulations for the Egegik River currently restrict harvest opportunities between June 23 and July 17 to 9 a.m. Tuesday to 9 a.m. Wednesday and 9 a.m. Saturday to 9 a.m. Sunday. If the Board adopts this proposal, these restrictions will be removed and harvest opportunity will be available at all times. This would align with current State subsistence regulations in place for this area. It is unlikely that this change would result in a substantial increase in harvest since Federally qualified subsistence users can travel the short distance to harvest fish under State regulations and there is only a small portion of the Egegik River that is within or adjacent to Becharof National Wildlife Refuge.

OSM PRELIMINARY CONCLUSION

Support Proposal FP21-07

Justification

Removal of this restriction for the Egegik River will provide additional harvest opportunity and more closely align with State subsistence regulations in the area. There would be no real effect in harvest after aligning Federal and State regulations. Current use of these resources for subsistence purposes is small compared to the run sizes and harvest in adjacent commercial fisheries. There are no conservation concerns at this time.

LITERATURE CITED

Fall, J.A., T.M. Krieg, and D. Holen. 2009. Overview of the subsistence fisheries of the Bristol Bay Management Area. Alaska Department of Fish and Game Division of Subsistence Special Publication No. BOF 2009-07, Anchorage.

Johnson, J. and B. Blossom. 2018. Catalog of waters important for spawning, rearing, or migration of anadromous fishes - Southwestern Region, Effective June 1, 2018. Alaska Department of Fish and Game, Special Publication No. 18-06, Anchorage, AK.

OSM. 2003. Staff analysis FP04-15. Pages 151-170 *in* Federal Subsistence Board Meeting Materials. December 9-11, 2003. Office of Subsistence Management, USFWS. Anchorage, AK. 415 pp.

Salomone, P., T. Elison, T. Sands, J. Head, and T. Lemons. 2019. 2018 Bristol Bay annual management report. Alaska Department of Fish and Game, Fishery Management Report No. 19-12, Anchorage, AK.