



***Southeast Alaska
Subsistence Regional
Advisory Council***

**Don Hernandez, Chairman
1011 E. Tudor Road, MS121
Anchorage, Alaska 99503**

**In Reply Refer To:
R26051**

MAY 21 2026

USDA-USFS Craig Ranger District
ATTN: District Ranger Chris Dowling
504 9th Street
Craig, Alaska 99921-0135

Dear Ranger Dowling,

I am writing to you on behalf of the Southeast Alaska Subsistence Regional Advisory Council (Council). As you are aware, the Council represents the federally qualified subsistence user and has, for years, consistently reviewed resource management actions that may impact subsistence resources critical to those users. This Council has valuable and relevant knowledge of the issues on Prince of Wales Island and would like to share that knowledge and provide a voice for the subsistence user regarding special use permits issued for guided Steelhead fishing in Unit 2.

At its winter 2026 meeting in Juneau (March 10-13, 2026), the Council was made aware of local concerns regarding guided Steelhead fishing on Prince of Wales Island. We learned that the United States Forest Service (USFS) has implemented some strategies to help address these concerns, including: the identification of guides through their vehicles to help monitor the user groups targeting this species, allowing guided harvests on weekdays only, and encouraging sport fishers to finish fishing by noon every day and to spend no more than four hours on any given stream to spread out the guided use on these Steelhead streams.

The USFS further advised that there has been a change in permitting this year and that guided freshwater fishing will be allowed from April 1 to May 15, whereas last year it ended on April 30. Our Council was informed that the permitting change followed a formal special-use permit request submitted by an Oregon-based guide outfitter to conduct guided steelhead fishing during the first two weeks of May. The Council recognizes that some subsistence users may perceive this change as going against the unwritten agreement previously entered into which prohibited guided sport fishing of Steelhead in May.

The Council formally objects to any changes to the unwritten agreement that prohibited guided sport fishing for Steelhead in May if this change was not first discussed with the local communities or Tribes on Prince of Wales Island. The Council strongly believes that there should have been some notice, consultation, and coordination with local communities and Tribes regarding any changes in this permitting practice.

The Council would like more information on the current USFS policy of issuing special use permits for guided Steelhead fishing and what agreements, official or unofficial, may be in place regarding these permits. The Council does not believe that the intent of the meetings that established limited guided sport fishing for this species in May was to eliminate guided sport fishing for Steelhead, but to limit those opportunities so that a subsistence priority can be recognized. It is important that subsistence users have access and opportunity to continue their subsistence use of Steelhead. If sport/guided anglers are allowed opportunities through the middle of May, it is likely that the catch-and-release pressure on small streams will make it more difficult for subsistence users to meet their needs. The Council supports necessary opportunities for Unit 2 subsistence users on Prince of Wales Island to fish Steelhead on local streams and looks forward to hearing how the USFS can help achieve a balance for all users who rely on Steelhead, while providing for a subsistence priority.

We appreciate the opportunity to convey our concerns about the Steelhead fishery on Prince of Wales Island. If you have any questions regarding this letter, they can be addressed through our Council Coordinator DeAnna Perry at 907-209-7817 or deanna.perry@usda.gov.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Don Hernandez", written over a light-colored rectangular background.

Don Hernandez
Chair

cc: Federal Subsistence Board
Southeast Alaska Subsistence Regional Advisory Council Members
Office of Subsistence Management
Interagency Staff Committee
Administrative Record