

## RESPONSES TO QUESTIONS FROM COUNCIL MEMBERS ABOUT FP21-10

### 1. Has there been an actual count of underserved users in Cordova? How many people cannot access or harvest fish?

Currently, there is no count of underserved users, and no information is available at this time regarding who has access to boats and who does not. As a possible indicator of need, the proponent collected 157 letters of support for the proposal and submitted them to the Southcentral and Eastern Interior Regional Advisory Councils. Safe access to the State subsistence gillnet fishery requires a seaworthy boat and expensive specialized gear, which not everyone has access to. The Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ADF&G) surveyed Cordova residents regarding their harvest and use of subsistence resources in 2014. Twenty-six percent of households indicated that they did not get enough salmon. Sockeye Salmon (20 percent of households) and Chinook Salmon (15 percent of households) were the salmon species that people most frequently reported needing (Fall and Zimpelman 2016:249, 257). Lack of ability to access the State subsistence fishery in Prince William Sound was mentioned as an issue for some residents (Fall and Zimpelman 2016:202).

Identifying and quantifying the count of underserved users in Cordova does not fall under the purview of the Federal Subsistence Management Program. The Federal Subsistence Board focuses on continuation of opportunity for subsistence uses by Federally qualified subsistence users.

### 2. How many residents of Cordova don't have access to a boat?

The total population of Cordova in 2020 was 2,316 people. It is not known how many people do not have access to a seaworthy boat that is capable of fishing the saltwater State subsistence gillnet fishery. Prior to the Southcentral Regional Advisory Council meeting on October 7–8, 2020, 157 letters of support from Cordova residents were submitted to the Southcentral Council Chair. Seven of these letters were unique letters citing the lack of access to Copper River Sockeye and Chinook salmon by Cordova residents that do not own boats. Additionally, a form letter signed by 150 Cordova residents stated:

*I am writing to express my support for FP21-10, a proposal to allow a Federal subsistence dipnet season on the lower Copper River. Currently, opportunities to harvest Copper River salmon for subsistence are limited to a State subsistence gillnet fishery on the Copper River flats which requires a boat to access the fishery, and is only open 3 periods/week, and typically requires competing with the commercial gillnet fleet on 2 of those 3 open periods. This would allow an opportunity to harvest the healthiest and most nutritious salmon available in our area, by the rural residents that depend on natural resources the most.*

**3. Does the Tribe have a system of gillnetting for the community, and can anyone be a part of this community harvest?**

The Native Village of Eyak (NVE) does have a system in place to proxy subsistence fish for elders in the community under State regulations. Alaska's proxy laws allow Alaska residents to harvest fish and shellfish for other Alaska residents who meet at least one of the following four criteria:

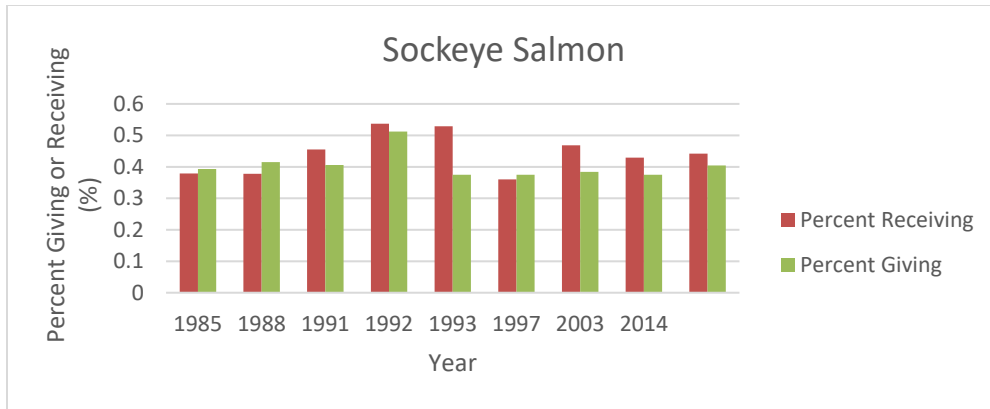
- 65 years of age or older
- Legally blind (affidavit required)
- 70% or greater physically disabled (affidavit required)
- Developmentally disabled (affidavit required)

The intent of the proxy fishing program is to provide food for Alaska residents who are unable to harvest fish for themselves due to one of the above four conditions. Proxy fishing is allowed in State managed sport, personal use, and subsistence fisheries. The NVE has a boat for harvesting fish for tribal members/elders who qualify under these criteria; however, there is no community harvest system in place, and people who do not meet the proxy criteria are not eligible to receive fish.

**4. How many families have no access to boats for subsistence gillnetting? What role does “sharing” play in the subsistence use of salmon in Cordova?**

Currently, there is no information regarding how many families do not have access to boats for subsistence gillnetting. One indication for families without boats was the 157 letters of support from Cordova residents who stated they did not have access to a seaworthy boat to participate in the State subsistence gillnet fishery. Some voiced concern of having to compete in the vicinity of commercial vessels during three very tight windows of opportunity. As mentioned earlier in the 2014 subsistence study, lack of access to the State subsistence fishery in saltwater is an issue for some Cordova residents (Fall and Zimpelman 2016: 220).

There is some evidence of sharing fish within the community and during the years 1985 through 2014, the sharing of Sockeye Salmon (**Figure 1**) has not fluctuated much (average of 40% sharing and 44% receiving: Community Subsistence Information System).



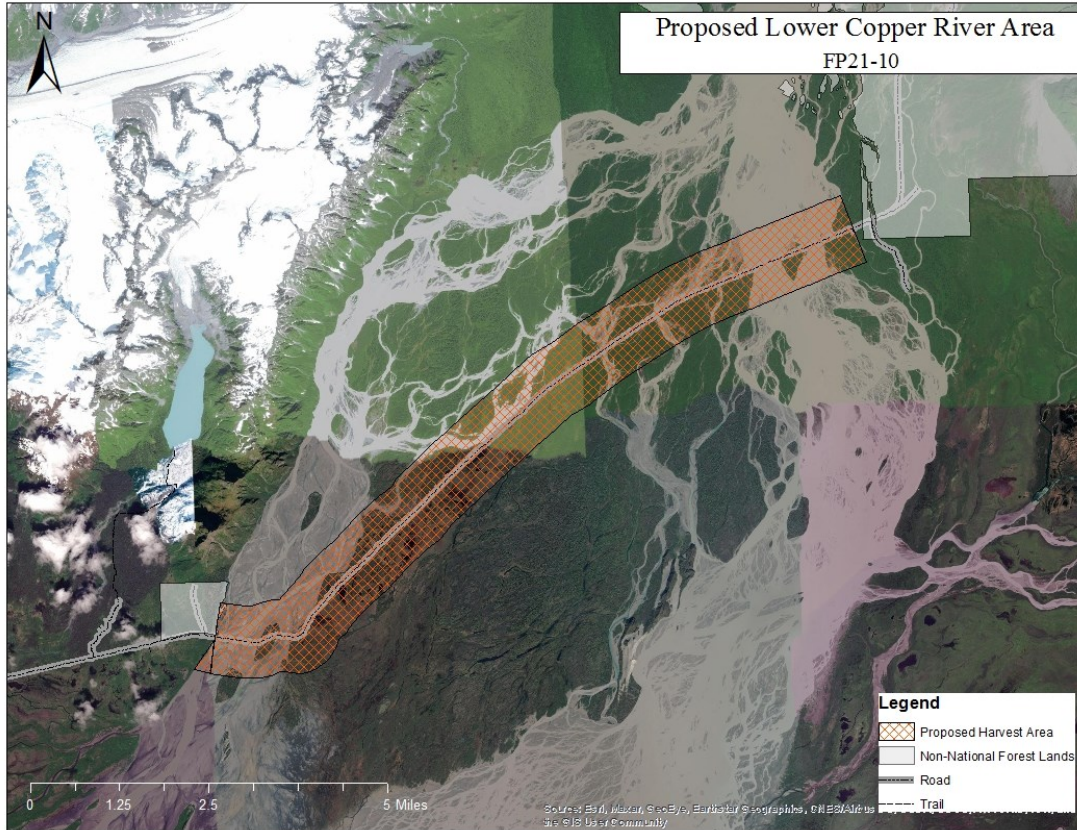
**Figure 1.** Harvest sharing of Sockeye Salmon in Cordova from years 1985 to 2014.

**5. How was the harvest estimate of 2000 Sockeye Salmon determined in the FP21-10 analysis?**

The proposed regulatory change would be expected to have minimal biological effects on fish stocks. The projected harvest would be the smallest of any user group in the Copper River system, up to 2,000 Sockeye Salmon annually. This estimate is based on the State subsistence gillnet fishery, which harvests an average of 3,159 Sockeye Salmon per year. It is open to all State residents, although functionally, it is accessible to those in Cordova with capable seaworthy boats. A significant portion of commercial gillnet fishermen live in Cordova in summer only, participate in the State subsistence gillnet fishery, and do not qualify as a rural Federally qualified subsistence user. Therefore, if FP21-10 were adopted, there would be a smaller pool of eligible users who utilize a less efficient means of harvest (dipnet versus 50 fathom gillnet). The analyst estimated that harvest under FP21-10 would be 2/3 of the harvest of the State subsistence gillnet fishery. This estimate of harvest represents only 0.1% of the total Sockeye Salmon harvest from the Copper River. If perhaps 2,000 Sockeye Salmon is an underestimate and the actual harvest was 4,000 Sockeye Salmon, that would still only be 0.2% of total Copper River Sockeye Salmon harvest. Additionally, some of the harvest from this fishery would replace harvest from the State subsistence gillnet fishery, so it would not be purely additive to existing State harvest.

**6. Would dip netting be allowed from boats in the newly proposed FP21-10 subsistence fishery?**

Yes, as currently proposed the new subsistence fishery on the Copper River would allow dip netting from boats to harvest fish. The proposed area of this fishery would be limited to ½ mile above and ½ mile below the Copper River Highway for approximately 11 miles (**Figure 2**). The intent of the proposal is to afford those without large seaworthy boats an opportunity to access the Copper River and harvest their fish using a dip net either on shore or with a river suitable boat.



**Figure 2.** The proposed Lower Copper River Area defined as the area from a boundary one-half mile upstream of the Copper River Highway to a boundary extending one-half mile downstream of the Copper River Highway, from the West bank of the river near highway mile 27 to the East bank of the river near highway mile 38.

**7. Is dip netting from a boat legal or is it trawling?**

Dip netting from a boat is not considered trawling under Federal subsistence regulations, which would cover this fishery. Trawling methods include larger nets such as beam, otter, or pelagic trawls, which are much larger than standard dip nets and are pulled through the column of water. Dip netters from a boat can choose to be stationary and allow the water and fish to pass through the net, drift downriver with the dip net, or be under power and drift across current. All methods are allowed.

**8. A \$250,000 depth sounder was able to work in the Copper River, does anyone know the brand or anything about it? Is it legal to use for subsistence or not?**

There was reference to a \$250,000 fish finder being used to find salmon in the Copper River during the fall 2020 Southcentral Regional Advisory Council meeting. This discussion was regarding a scientific research tool known as a DIDSON LR300 sonar, which investigators such as the ADF&G and the NVE use to enumerate adult populations of salmon in turbid rivers. This sonar is not typically used by fishermen due to the extreme cost; however, sonars on boats have become quite sophisticated and allow for better images and side-scanning ability.

Recently, the Board adopted a new regulation for the Upper Copper River District prohibiting the use of a fish finder while you are fishing from a boat or other watercraft, you may not use any device that indicates bathymetry and/or fish locations, e.g., fish finders. These devices do not have to be removed or uninstalled from a boat or watercraft and can still be used for navigational purposes if needed. This regulation does not apply to the proposed Lower Copper River area.

**9. From the numbers of fish coming into the Copper River area, we need to think about this and provide for all subsistence users first out of a meager bag.**

The State Copper River Sustainable Escapement Goal is 360,000–750,000 Sockeye Salmon, and the Copper River Delta Sustainable Escapement Goal (SEG) is 55,000–130,000 Sockeye Salmon. Since 1998, the ADF&G has successfully met or exceeded the minimum threshold of the SEG range for Sockeye Salmon in the Copper River annually, and subsistence restrictions in the form of closures are not expected at this time. If a low run is observed, in-season managers hold the authority delegated by the Board to issue emergency special actions when necessary to ensure the conservation of healthy fish populations, to continue subsistence uses of fish, to continue viability of a fish population, or for public safety reasons. During emergency special actions, closures to other non-subsistence uses will be implemented first and preserve the subsistence priority for Federally qualified subsistence users.

**10. How many Cordova residents do not have access to other subsistence openings?**

Currently, the number of people who do not have access to other subsistence openings is unknown. All residents of Cordova are eligible to participate in the State subsistence openings in marine waters; however, they are limited if they do not have a seaworthy boat or do not wish to compete with commercial fishing vessels in a limited opening.

**11. Do those with boats share their subsistence with those less fortunate?**

It is thought that a fair amount of sharing occurs with subsistence caught fish. There is more information about sharing in the answer to Question 4 above.

**12. How many fish are taken in the other subsistence openings in the Cordova Area?**

Currently, under the State subsistence gillnet fishery that requires a seaworthy boat, the average annual harvest is 3,163 Sockeye Salmon and 491 Chinook Salmon (Botz et al. 2021).

Three other small river systems (Alaganik Slough, Eyak River, and Ibeck Creek) are the primary harvest locations supporting a small Federal subsistence fishery in the Copper River Delta in which rod and reel is the most commonly employed harvest method. Typically, fewer than 100 permits are issued each year, with an annual average of 34 permits reported fished between 2007 and 2019. Average annual reported harvest in this fishery during that period was 87 Sockeye and 399 Coho salmon. These three river systems are easily accessible from Cordova by road, but present smaller runs of fish and as the harvest numbers indicate, Coho Salmon is the main species harvested. According to Fall and Zimpelman (2016: 261), “Cordova survey respondents said that it has become increasingly difficult to compete with non-local

sport fisheries who heavily target Coho Salmon. Coho Salmon is particularly important to the community in that it is one of the only species of salmon available from road accessible streams such as Alaganik Slough and Ibeck Creek”.

### References

Botz, J., C. W. Russell, J. Morella, and S. Haught. 2021. 2020 Prince William Sound area finfish management report. Alaska Department of Fish and Game, Fishery Management Report No. 21-18, Anchorage.

Fall, J.A. and G. Zimpelman. 2016. Update on the Status of Subsistence Uses in Exxon Valdez Oil Spill Area Communities, 2014. ADF&G, Division of Subsistence, Technical Paper No. 412, Anchorage, AK.