



Board of Fish Changes Course on Meeting Schedules

By Ernie Weiss, Aleutians East Borough Natural Resources Director

The Alaska Board of Fisheries will move all meeting cycles forward one year, rescinding an earlier decision to double up on meetings this coming year.

The Board met in a special online meeting March 8th to discuss future meeting schedules and consider a board generated proposal to extend sunset provisions by one year in three southeast Alaska salmon management plans. At the last special meeting of the Board on January 25th, the Board had decided to double up on meetings this coming year to get back on track, keeping future schedules in place and fitting the postponed meetings from this past year into this year's schedule. Yesterday the Board walked back that decision.

In a motion by member John Jensen, seconded by Abe Williams, the Board will push the all the Board meeting cycles forward one year and the current call for proposals that was due May 10th, 2021 will be pushed forward until April 11th, 2022. The agenda change request process will apply to all issues not scheduled for this year's cycle. Motion carried 7-0.

Board meetings now scheduled for this coming year:

- Work session in October 2021
- Prince William Sound finfish meeting beginning November 30th, 2021
- Southeast/Yakutat finfish meeting in January 2022
- Hatchery meeting and Statewide shellfish meeting in March 2022

The Board members all spoke in opposition to doubling up meetings and each withdrew support for their previous action. Member McKenzie Mitchell noted the 'overwhelming' public comment not supporting doubling up on meetings this year. Member John Wood noted the only entity that wanted to keep the meetings as scheduled was the Chignik Intertribal Coalition. Wood also requested the Alaska Department of Fish & Game to take a look at Chignik's concerns that fish are not returning, to determine if they have a valid request for a stock of concern designation.

The 32 on-time public comments included submissions from the Aleutians East Borough, Cities of King Cove and Sand Point, Concerned Area M Fishermen, United Fishermen of Alaska, Silver Bay Seafoods and the Pacific Seafood Processors Association. There were eight on-time Fish & Game Advisory Committee comments submitted. The only Record Copy (RC) for the meeting, besides ADFG documents, was a letter signed by 11 members of the Alaska House of Representatives, including Representative Edgmon and Speaker Stutes, opposing doubling up on meetings.

Doubling up on meetings would have been impossible under the flat funding for the Department in the Governor's budget, and would have put extreme strains on Department staff.

The Board of Fisheries and the Board of Game have both emphasized the importance of in-person meetings to the unique public process of the boards, when making decisions over the past year to postpone meetings due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Pacific cod meeting for the Alaska Peninsula/Chignik/ Aleutian Islands/Bering Sea is now scheduled for October 2022, and the Area M/Chignik finfish meeting is scheduled for February 2023. The Boards Support staff is expected to publish the revised updated meeting cycle schedule later today at:

<http://www.adfg.alaska.gov/index.cfm?adfg=fisheriesboard.main>

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