

Kotzebue Subsistence Fisheries (3 Proposals)

PROPOSAL 40

5 AAC 01.130. Subsistence fishing permits.

Establish a subsistence sheefish permit in the Kotzebue Area, as follows:

5 AAC 01.130 Subsistence fishing permits. (a) Except as provided in this section, fish may be taken for subsistence purposes without a subsistence fishing permit.

(b) a subsistence sheefish fishing permit is required when fishing through the ice.

If adopted, this proposal would require subsistence fishers who are ice-fishing in the Kotzebue fishing district to carry free ADF&G-issued harvest records (permits) while fishing and record harvests on this permit in ink before leaving the fishing site. Similar permits are found in subsistence and personal-use fisheries throughout the state.

What is the issue you would like the board to address and why?

Sheefish harvests under ice (hooking through the ice, and nets set under ice, intended for catch of sheefish) during fall/winter/spring near Kotzebue.

Sheefish have long been an important subsistence resource to Kotzebue Sound area residents. In the dog-team days, the return of brighter sun in February often marked a time of dwindling food—and extra reliance on these large fat fish for people and for dogs.

Nowadays, a large and growing subsistence fishery for sheefish occurs through the ice in Hotham Inlet close to Kotzebue. A new user-group growing the fastest is non-local fishers who fly to Kotzebue, trade for snowmobile use, or hire a local guide or an outfitter, and then ship out boxes of fish on Alaska Air, NAC and other carriers. (NOTE: People using under-ice nets also ship out fish to sell or trade to dog mushers and others for dog food and for people food.)

The amount of sheefish harvested is poorly documented. Basically, catches are not reported, nor required to be reported, and there has been no stock assessment of sheefish spawning populations in the Kobuk or Selawik River by ADFG since 2018, and no subsistence catch survey since 2015.

Overharvest of sheefish is a growing concern, particularly as chum salmon runs decline and fishers focus more on non-salmon species. At the very least, we should attempt to gather reliable harvest data to understand this fishery better, and do our best to protect this important species. A required, free paper or online reported permit would be a start at documenting harvest pressure of this important local species.

Did you develop your proposal in coordination with others, or with your local Fish and Game Advisory Committee? Explain. Yes, we spoke to the Advisory Committee about our concerns about lack of numerical data on subsistence and sport harvests of sheefish, and to guides, and Trooper Steve Cantine, and we were assisted by Brendan Scanlon at ADFG with administrative coding and understanding of subsistence permitting, values, uses, requirements, and past surveys.

PROPOSED BY: Seth Kantner and Aakatchaq Schaeffer

(EF-F26-085)

PROPOSAL 41

5 AAC 01.120. Lawful gear and gear specifications.

5 AAC 70.011. Seasons and bag, possession, annual, and size limits for the Northwestern Area.

Allow the use of bow and arrow when subsistence fishing for non-salmon fish species in the Arctic-Kotzebue Area, as follows:

I am open to a variety of solutions to address this issue, including changing subsistence regulations or sport fishing regulations, and opening only the lower Noatak drainage to summer harvest or the entire subsistence or sport fishing management areas. I believe adopting one of the following changes to regulations would accommodate this request:

- Allow use of bow and arrow for subsistence harvest in the Arctic-Kotzebue Area. Proposed change in regulation required (that I'm aware of) would be:

*5AAC 01.120 (b) Fish other than salmon may be taken by set gillnet, drift gillnet, beach seine, fish wheel, pot, longline, fyke net, dip net, jigging gear, spear, **bow and arrow**, and lead, or, as specified in (f) of this section, by hook and line attached to a rod or a pole.*

OR

- Allow harvest of pike under sport fishing regulations, year-round, in the Noatak River Drainage. Change in regulations required (that I'm aware of) would be:

*5 AAC 70.011 (c) **(10) in the Noatak River Drainage, northern pike may be taken by bow and arrow year-round.***

What is the issue you would like the board to address and why? I would like the opportunity to harvest Northern pike using a bow and arrow during the summer in sloughs and lakes connected to the lower Noatak River. The current regulations do not allow for the harvest of Northern pike in Northwestern Drainages with bow and arrow May 1-August 31. Ice can be expected on waters of the lower Noatak from early October to late May, leaving September as the only practical time to attempt to harvest pike with a bow and arrow.

Use of bow and arrow allows for selective harvest of fish of a desirable size for consumption, without incidental catch of fish that are too small or too large. I do not anticipate an overall increase in harvest of pike in the Noatak drainage if use of bow and arrow were allowed in the summer as the harvest would likely be minimal, and would replace fish taken by other legal means (ie by hook and line or gill net under subsistence regulations).

Did you develop your proposal in coordination with others, or with your local Fish and Game Advisory Committee? Explain. No. I will attend the Kotzebue Advisory Committee fall 2025 meeting to discuss the issue.

PROPOSED BY: Wilhelm Wiese (EF-F26-161)

PROPOSAL 42

5 AAC 01.125. Waters closed to subsistence fishing and 5 AAC 03.350. Closed waters.

Close waters in the Kotzebue District adjacent to the end of the Kotzebue airport runway to subsistence and commercial fishing, as follows:

5 AAC 01.125 (c) is amended by adding a new subsection to read, as follows:

(c) In Subdistrict 1 of the Kotzebue District, marine waters from ADF&G markers located at the Weather Service Dome south of the airport runway to the NANA building and extending one mile offshore into Kotzebue Sound perpendicular to the beach will be closed to subsistence fishing.

5 AAC 03.350 is amended by adding a new paragraph to read, as follows:

(5) In Subdistrict 1 of the Kotzebue District, marine waters from ADF&G markers located at the Weather Service Dome south of the airport runway to the NANA building and extending one mile offshore into Kotzebue Sound perpendicular to the beach are closed to commercial fishing.

What is the issue you would like the board to address and why? Each year the department issues emergency orders closing waters adjacent to the end of the Kotzebue airport runway to subsistence and commercial fishing. This closure is promulgated to mitigate the potential hazard to aircraft flights in Kotzebue posed by birds being attracted to fishing gear. Adopting this closure into regulation will provide greater transparency and codify longstanding practices.

Did you develop your proposal in coordination with others, or with your local Fish and Game Advisory Committee? Explain.

PROPOSED BY: Alaska Department of Fish and Game

(HQ-F26-020)
