



UNITED FISHERMEN OF ALASKA

211 Fourth Street, Suite 110
Juneau, Alaska 99801-1172
(907) 586-2820
(907) 463-2545 Fax
E-Mail: ufa@ufa-fish.org
www.ufa-fish.org

Testimony submitted to the Subcommittee on Oceans, Atmosphere, Fisheries, and Coast Guard of the Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation

April 15, 2010

Good morning Madam Chair and Members of the Committee.

I am Joe Childers, President of the United Fishermen of Alaska (UFA). UFA is an umbrella association representing 37 member fishing organizations that collectively represent every gear group and every species commercially fished in every region of Alaska.

Commercial salmon fisheries employ approximately 20,000 fishermen and crew who actively harvest five species of salmon, Chinook, Sockeye, Coho, Chum, and Pink. These salmon fisheries produce over \$3 billion in first wholesale value and are the major employer in the broader Alaska seafood industry that altogether provides 78,000 jobs and 60% of U.S. wild seafood production. There are salmon permit holders from 48 different states, and over 2300 permitted salmon skippers from the states of Washington, Oregon, and California. Thousands more crew and processor workers from throughout the U.S. states depend on the sustainability of Alaska's salmon fisheries. And the summer salmon season provides the only opportunity in many communities of coastal Alaska for any sort of cash income. In addition the sheer volume of activity creates an economy of scale that provides for freight rates that allow for much needed supplies and fuel to be brought into many of the remote places in Alaska. Indeed salmon and the other large fisheries in Alaska are largely responsible for keeping the cost of foodstuffs, consumer goods, and energy, affordable throughout Alaska.

Alaska produces over 44% of the total world production of wild salmon. There are thousands of pristine watersheds in Alaska that together produce this incredible volume of salmon with such tremendous biodiversity. Salmon returns support most of Alaska's wildlife. When bears, otters, wolves, and other animals bring fish ashore, the parts they leave behind are a primary source of

nutrients for Alaska's forests. Without salmon, a major part of Alaska would have little value to Alaskan's or to the rest of the nation.

Our pristine watersheds are the key to our long history of sustainability in our fisheries, but things may be on the brink of changing quickly. Right now we are seeing a rapid expansion in our population in Alaska coupled with a greatly expanded demand on resources. Alaska's river systems are used increasing by personal use, subsistence, and guided and unguided recreational fishermen.

Requests for expanded fishing access in riparian and upland areas along previously remote watersheds is very worrisome to members of UFA. We hold that the long term ability for our river systems and watersheds to sustain healthy returns of salmon relies in part on their ability to be protected from peoples' insatiable desire to access waterfront areas and harvest fish and use the waters for recreational, industrial, and municipal purposes.

Climate change may have significant and potentially irreversible negative impacts. These impacts are not caused by fishermen or by the fishing industry and, no amount of mitigation by the Alaska fishing industry can reverse the potential impacts of climate change on salmon.

We are experiencing an increase in mining interest in Alaska. Mines are commonly located in salmon stronghold watersheds. The impact of developing mining infrastructure causes great concern for us by itself, but potentially more worrisome is the likelihood that mine development will provide expanded opportunity for our growing population to access more of the currently pristine waterways in Alaska. One such project is located at the very headwaters of the single largest sustainable salmon watershed in the world. Mine development may proceed because of the lure of hundreds or thousands of mostly short term construction jobs, and the associated increase in taxes to local governments, but the risk of expanding access for many thousands of people to the headwaters of Bristol Bay forever, is truly frightening to many. The Bristol Bay watershed for example, has sustained an active commercial salmon fishery economy for over 100 years. The salmon returns there in 2009 were at all-time high levels of abundance.

We must learn from other areas – it will be far more economical to protect salmon strongholds before we wreck them, than it will be to try to fix and recover them.

We support the concept within S. 817 of identifying salmon strongholds and the threats to them, and we support creating a structure with funding to ensure that we are doing everything we can to sustain or restore salmon where necessary, for the benefit of future generations.

UFA maintains firmly, that the makeup of the Salmon Stronghold Partnership Board must include not less than four representatives of commercial fishing organizations –at least one from each of the Pacific states.

UFA also recommends that funding for potential future programs be appropriated in addition to, and, not at the expense of, other ongoing management efforts for sustainable fisheries.

We applaud you madam Chairman for uniting the eight west coast senators in co-sponsorship of S. 817.

We regret that only Alaska can be recognized as a regional salmon stronghold in this legislation. We hope this bill will help to ensure that the regional stronghold status will not change in Alaska, and we also hope that remaining salmon strongholds in Washington, Oregon, California, and Idaho, can be conserved. We hope that this bill will help ensure that we learn from the past, and that together we share in the bounty of Pacific salmon.

Thank you for this opportunity to testify, and I am available to answer any questions.

Respectfully submitted by,



Joe Childers
President

UNITED FISHERMEN OF ALASKA MEMBER ORGANIZATIONS

Alaska Crab Coalition • Alaska Independent Fishermen's Marketing Association • Alaska Independent Tendermen's Association
Alaska Longline Fishermen's Association • Alaska Scallop Association • Alaska Trollers Association • Alaska Whitefish Trawlers Association
Aleutian Pribilof Islands Community Development Association • Armstrong Keta • At-sea Processors Association • Bristol Bay Reserve
Bristol Bay Regional Seafood Development Association • Cape Barnabas Inc. • Concerned Area "M" Fishermen • Cook Inlet Aquaculture Association
Cordova District Fishermen United • Crab Group of Independent Harvesters • Douglas Island Pink and Chum • Fishing Vessel Owners Association
Groundfish Forum • Kenai Peninsula Fishermen's Association • Kodiak Regional Aquaculture Association • North Pacific Fisheries Association
Northern Southeast Regional Aquaculture Association • Petersburg Vessel Owners Association • Prince William Sound Aquaculture Corporation
Purse Seine Vessel Owner Association • Seafood Producers Cooperative • Sitka Herring Association • Southeast Alaska Fisherman's Alliance
Southeast Alaska Regional Dive Fisheries Association • Southeast Alaska Seiners • Southern Southeast Regional Aquaculture Association
United Catcher Boats • United Cook Inlet Drift Association • United Southeast Alaska Gillnetters • Valdez Fisheries Development Association