



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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Tribes and Tribal Organizations Call on Secretary of Commerce to Reduce Salmon Bycatch in 2022 Bering Sea Pollock Fishery

This past summer, fish racks, smokehouses, and fish camps across the Yukon and Kuskokwim Rivers and Norton Sound region stood empty. After a multi-species, multi-river salmon collapse, our people are facing a winter without the Chinook and chum salmon which are critical to the lifeblood of our over 110 regional Tribal communities and are central to our cultures.

Tribes throughout our region face historic salmon shortages after a summer in which subsistence fishing was either shut down or severely restricted. Meanwhile, the industrial Bering Sea pollock trawl fleet is allowed to inadvertently catch and waste these same Chinook salmon. While our Tribes were forced to sacrifice our critical subsistence harvest, in 2021 the Bering Sea pollock fishery caught 15,000 Chinook salmon and over 500,000 chum salmon. Under current rules, in 2022 the pollock fleet is legally allowed to catch up to 45,000 Chinook salmon and an unlimited number of chum salmon.

Today, Kawerak, Inc., the Association of Village Council Presidents, the Aleut Community of St. Paul Island, the Bering Sea Elders Group, the Kuskokwim River Inter-Tribal Fish Commission, and the Yukon River Inter-Tribal Fish Commission petitioned the Secretary of Commerce to take emergency action to eliminate Chinook salmon bycatch and set a cap on chum salmon bycatch in the Bering Sea pollock trawl fishery in the 2022 season.

“The Secretary of Commerce has the authority to issue emergency regulations to ensure that salmon bycatch in the pollock fishery is not the final straw for our salmon runs. The Secretary has a trust responsibility to the Tribes, and protecting the salmon that form the foundation of our community’s food security and culture is of the utmost importance. Now is the time to take action.”

- Julie Raymond-Yakoubian, Kawerak, Inc.

“Our salmon runs and our communities are at the breaking point. We can’t risk the chance of high bycatch in these dire times. We need to do everything possible to save our Chinook and chum salmon runs, and we all need to do our part to restore our salmon runs, and eliminating bycatch is critical.”

- Brooke Woods, Yukon River Inter-Tribal Fish Commission