

Kotzebue hatchery plans continue despite protests

The Alaska Department of Fish and Game is going ahead with plans for a 40-million-egg chum salmon hatchery on the Noatak River near Kotzebue despite biologists' warnings it could harm a healthy wild salmon population.

Theodore Merrell Jr., a salmon biologist with 25 years experience in Alaska and past president of the Alaska Chap-

ter of the American Fisheries Society, said wild salmon could be weakened if bred with hatchery fish.

"Hatchery fish are treated with tender loving care, and they may not survive under wild conditions," he said. "If they interbreed, the less strong hatchery fish could dilute the toughness of the wild stock."

Department officials say the

hatchery is intended to stabilize the catch in the Sound at a level high enough to permit the successful operation of a fish processing plant in Kotzebue.

Kotzebue Sound yielded a record 600,000 fish in 1981 without the artificial enhancement, although the average annual catch is much lower, the department said.