

# BIA Allows Annette Island Fish Trap Operation

JUNEAU — The Bureau of Indian Affairs has decided to allow fish traps to operate on the Annette Island reserve on a restricted basis this season.

Clarence Antioquia, area director for the BIA, announced recently following a meeting in Juneau that the Metlakatla community will be permitted to operate two fish traps for a maximum of 12 days during August.

His decision followed the announcement by the Department of Fish and Game that all of Southeastern Alaska will be closed to commercial salmon net fishing at least through July 27 because of extremely weak salmon runs in the area.

The total closure may extend through the remainder of the summer, in at least some districts, if the salmon runs continue weak.

James Brookes, commissioner of the Alaska Department of Fish and Game, told the Metlakatla council delegation that the predicted total pink salmon run to Southeastern Alaska will be only about one third of the amount needed for spawning escapement.

"We need to allow every possible pink salmon to spawn this year if we are going to rebuild the salmon runs of Southeastern Alaska," Brooks said.

He said the Department strongly opposes the Annette Island fish traps because they will further jeopardize the already weakened salmon runs.

Brooks noted that only about 80,000 pink salmon have been caught in Southeastern Alaska this season, most of them incidental to other fisheries, and that the total pink harvest for the year probably will not much exceed 100,000 fish.

The Metlakatla delegates at the meeting said that they will need to harvest about 200,000 pinks in the traps in order to make a profit on their operation.

"No fishing is not an acceptable alternative in this case," Antioquia said. "The people of Metlakatla must be allowed to share in the fish."

He made the ruling under a new federal regulation which authorizes the Metlakatla community unlimited fishing rights in an area 3,000 feet from the reserve without regard to state laws.

Brooks said that many of the pink salmon passing Annette Island in August are destined for streams on that island.

"If you want to sacrifice these fish and jeopardize future runs, you apparently have the legal right to do so. The state's primary responsibility is the preservation

of the resource, and with the low pink salmon runs this year, we would prefer to have no fishery there," Brooks said.

"If the federal government is convinced that there are overriding considerations, then I would recommend no fishing on the reserve in July and two days per week of fishing in August.

"While this federal plan is not what we would like, I believe it does give some measure of protection and is perhaps the best we can hope for under the circumstances," Brooks said.

Also attending the meeting were Solomon Guthrie, mayor of Metlakatla; council members John Smith and Wally Leask; Harry Rietze, Alaska director for the National Marine Fisheries Service; Gordon Watson, Alaska director for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and other state

and federal officials.

In another meeting in Juneau, Department of Fish and Game spokesmen told a delegation of Ketchikan seine boat operators that weak salmon runs will result in the closure of net fishing in Southeastern Alaska, perhaps for most of the summer.

"We face a very grim, dismal picture as far as the Southeastern salmon runs are concerned this year," Brooks said. "We are closing the seasons now and if fish later appear that can be harvested, we will harvest them.

"We are not going to harvest first and then hope that more fish will appear to provide for spawning escapement."

The Ketchikan delegation, headed by Joe Demmert, asked the department to permit them to continue the red salmon fishery in District 4. It will remain closed, however, to protect the weak run of reds and to prevent the incidental catch of pinks in that fishery.

"Every indicator we have points to the fact that we are faced with a disaster in the salmon runs of Southeastern Alaska this year," said Carl Rosier, director of the department's division of commercial fisheries. "We must take every possible step to provide for spawning escapement to rebuild these salmon runs."