

Senate passes bill to implement Yukon fish treaty

The Senate has passed a bill (S. 267) authored by Senator Ted Stevens, chairman of the Senate Subcommittee on Oceans and Fisheries, that included eight separate provisions strengthening international fisheries conservation. Senator Frank Murkowski was a cosponsor of the bill.

The bill, which must now be considered by the House, would implement an agreement reached between the United States and Canada in February to conserve and manage Yukon River salmon. Under the agreement, Alaskans have all five of the U.S. votes on a joint

Yukon River Panel, Stevens said.

The panel would be charged with, among other things, selecting restoration and enhancement projects that would benefit fishermen on both sides of the U.S. - Canada border. Funding for the projects would come from a new Yukon River Restoration and Enhancement Fund.

Under the agreement, which was signed on February 3, 1995, the United States must contribute \$400,000 annually to the fund. Stevens' bill authorizes this spending by the Secretary of Commerce.

The bill designates the Alaska

Department of Fish and Game as the management entity for the United States for the purposes of the agreement.

"This legislation marks the beginning of a regime under which we can work with Canada to ensure that our vital Yukon River salmon resources will be carefully managed, restored and enhanced," said Stevens.

The bill would reimburse U.S. fishermen who paid a transit fee to Canada last year, and would protect U.S. fishermen from action by Canada this year. Stevens noted that 56 of the 258 U.S. fishermen

who paid the fee last year were from Alaska.

The bill also directs the Secretary of State to seek reimbursement from Canada for the fees paid last year.

A separate title of the bill would implement for the United States an international agreement requiring countries to keep track of their fishing vessels operating on the high seas. The bill would also prohibit the United States from entering into new international fishery agreements unless those agreements are consistent with the United Nations ban on high seas driftnet fishing,

and would require the Secretary of the State to seek to strengthen the ban.

The bill would also assist Russia with efforts to conserve fisheries by preventing U.S. fishermen from fishing in the Central Sea of Okhotsk (commonly referred to as the "Peanut") unless it is conducted under an international fishery agreement to which both Russia and the United States are parties.

The bill, which Stevens introduced early in the 104th Congress, now goes to the House of Representatives for consideration.