

Mistrust endangers salmon

It's hard to tell what is in shorter supply with regard to the tense debate over management of Yukon chum salmon: the chums themselves, a sufficient amount of quality data with which to make sound decisions, or a sufficient level of trust between participants to even have a useful discussion.

It may be that trust is actually the hardest to come by, and the lack of it as detrimental to the resource as the incidental take of chums during the False Pass commercial fishery.

The Alaska Dept. of Fish and Game insists that its data is reliable and plentiful enough to warrant the measures they've taken to restrict Kuskokwim and Yukon River subsistence fisheries. Yet Natives, in addition to noting specific deficiencies in the department's research methodology, say that their traditional hunting and fishing practices are under political fire on many fronts. All too often, department employees are directly or indirectly involved in these attacks.

Natives should be willing to separate politics from biology, but only if the department is able and willing to do the same. And if the department is truly confident of its research, it is long past time for a concerted confidence-building program with village residents that recognizes their legitimate fears, aspirations and resource knowledge