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**Alaska fishermen and conservation groups urge Washington organization to address real issues facing Northwest Chinook and orcas**

**Juneau, AK** - SalmonState, Alaska Trollers Association and Alaska Longline Fishermen's Association are joined by sport and charter fishermen to condemn the Wild Fish Conservancy's recent misguided decision to attack Alaskan fishing families, rather than the underlying cause of the Southern Resident orca population's decline: the decades of destruction of the Pacific Northwest's freshwater habitat vital to Chinook salmon, an important food source for Southern Resident orcas.

On April 17, Washington-based Wild Fish Conservancy filed an injunction in federal court to prevent Chinook salmon trolling in Southeast Alaska effective July 1, 2020. The injunction comes just a month after the Wild Fish Conservancy's lawsuit against the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) for authorizing the Southeast Alaska Chinook troll fishery. In response, Alaska fishermen and conservationists spoke out in opposition to the Wild Fish Conservancy's injunction, expressing their disappointment that the organization chose to divide stakeholders rather than bring them together.

"It is both disheartening and surprising that this Washington group has overlooked the dams, habitat degradation, and toxic pollution in their own backyard and instead has focused their attack on a sustainable hook and line salmon fishery over a thousand miles away. This frivolous lawsuit not only endangers our region's economy and small-boat fisheries, but also the future survival of Northwest Chinook and orca populations. As a commercial fisherman I have been proud to work with conservation groups in Alaska to protect salmon habitat. If fishermen are driven out of business, who will be left to effectively advocate for protection of wild salmon and the habitat they depend on? Now is a time when we should be coming together and combining efforts to tackle these complex issues while we still have a chance."

**Thatcher Brouwer, Commercial fisherman and Alaska Trollers Association Board Member**

"Alaska's small scale fishermen are committed to sustainable fisheries and healthy ecosystems. Our members are fishing families who are passing along a tradition of stewardship to kids and

grandkids. In fact, our organization has been honored for its conservation work both in Alaska and nationally by the Obama Administration. This lawsuit facilitates the demise of wild salmon and orcas by ignoring the devastating impacts of dams, pollution, and habitat loss. And the timing could not be worse; right now family fishermen are struggling to provide healthy seafood to a country confronted with a pandemic. This lawsuit is misguided at best.”

**Linda Behnken, Commercial fisherman and Executive Director of Alaska Longline Fishermen’s Association**

“Alaska is famous throughout the world for its successful, science-based fisheries management - that is why we have healthy fisheries. I currently hold the Resident Sportfishing seat on the Sitka Fish and Game Advisory Committee and have lived and fished in Sitka for 23 years. I can say with certainty that each member of our Advisory Committee, whether representing sport, commercial, subsistence or conservation interests always puts preservation of the resource first prior to engaging in any allocation battles. I feel this lawsuit is a misguided diversion from the real issues: pollution, dams, and habitat loss in Washington state.”

**Steve Ramp, Sitka resident and sport fisherman**

“We see orcas regularly here in Southeast Alaska - our guests love spotting them, and I do too. We still have healthy whale populations in Alaska because we have healthy, intact salmon habitat from the headwaters out to the marine waters. That’s not the case in the Pacific Northwest where the freshwater environment has been largely spoiled by urban impacts and dams, which have limited access to historically productive salmon river systems. Over a million people visit Southeast Alaska every summer for a reason: they want to see and experience what an intact ecosystem looks like. Sadly, this is a rarity in the world today.”

**Mike Reif, Owner and Operator of Sea Roamer Charters**

“I have been working on Alaska conservation issues for over 25 years and this lawsuit is possibly the most misguided effort I’ve seen in my career. This suit is a cynical attempt to target commercial and sport salmon fishermen in Southeast Alaska while ignoring the root cause behind the massive decline of salmon in the Pacific Northwest and the plight of Southern Resident orcas: catastrophic habitat destruction in Washington and Southern British Columbia. If we put every boat on the beach we would do little to help these incredible mammals. The answer to saving them lies a lot closer to Puget Sound than Southeast Alaska.”

**Tim Bristol, Executive Director of SalmonState**

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