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MEETING UPDATE

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**Additional Information on the Alaska Board of Fisheries Rescheduled
Southeast and Yakutat Shellfish and Finfish Meeting,
March 10-22, 2022 in Anchorage**
New agenda and roadmap under consideration

With the recent surge of COVID-19 in the country and Alaska, and in response to requests from regional stakeholders, host community health providers, and input from the Department of Health & Social Services, the Alaska Board of Fisheries (board) postponed its Southeast and Yakutat Finfish and Shellfish meeting, previously scheduled for January 4-15, 2022, in Ketchikan. The meeting is now rescheduled to the Anchorage Egan Civic and Convention Center, 555 W. 5th Avenue, from March 10-22, 2022.

The public has voiced concern regarding rescheduled meeting timing and location. In determining the location for the rescheduled Board meeting, the board took into consideration several factors, most critical of which were public safety and well-being related to COVID-19. While it is not possible to predict with any certainty when the current COVID-19 surge will subside, it was felt important to push the meeting past February to allow for as much dissipation of the virus as possible.

With another Anchorage-based meeting to occur in March, the Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ADF&G) is better able to set-up and maintain a secure meeting space with as many mitigation protections as possible. Additionally, Anchorage provides the best hospital resources in the event of a large outbreak should medical care be required for a large number of attendees. ADF&G was advised that an outbreak in smaller, landlocked Southeast communities could overwhelm local hospital capacities.

Meeting timing and location is not ideal for a variety of reasons, but the board felt it important to manage proposals that have sat idle for over a year after postponing all actions in 2021. The decision to shift the Southeast meeting did not come lightly. Due to facility availability, scheduling the two-week meeting back to Ketchikan would not be possible until April which is problematic for stakeholder and staff participation. Notwithstanding the concern regarding hospital capacities, there was uncertainty meeting in Juneau would afford adequate hotel space given increased visitation for the legislative session and the potential for reduced lodging options as witnessed last winter.

In addition, with limited time to conduct 22 days of meetings, moving the large amount of board equipment between locations is cost prohibitive with such a short turnaround. Moreover, given the mitigation measures made necessary because of COVID-19, the functional set-up required to conduct these meetings as safely as possible has significantly increased the technical requirements, i.e. web conferencing, video capacity. Setting up to in a single location improves the ability to minimize technical failures that impede the public process.

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There are several fisheries about to occur or occurring that the board will set its schedule to avoid. To allow herring stakeholders the ability to meaningfully engage, the board will take all herring proposals first, currently projected to occur March 10-12. Most herring proposals are regarding the Sitka Sound herring resource. If herring spawn timing in Sitka Sound in 2022 is similar to recent years, conducting a review of proposals between March 10-12 is not likely to result in overlap with the subsistence spawn-on-branch or commercial sac roe herring fisheries and will afford the greatest opportunity for strong public participation in the board meeting.

To accommodate the tail end of the commercial salmon winter troll fishery, which ends March 15, the board will take up salmon-related proposals starting March 18. At that time, it will take up all salmon subsistence, sport, personal use and commercial proposals, including stock of concern action plans. Placing salmon-related issues at the end of the meeting also better aligns participants with the board's Hatchery Committee which was and remains scheduled in Anchorage on a new date of March 23.

At this time, the revised tentative order for proposals is:

- Session 1: March 10-13 – herring
- Session 2: March 14-17 – groundfish and shellfish
- Session 3: March 18-22 – salmon and non-groundfish finfish

A more precise agenda and roadmap will be forthcoming.

The board will take public testimony at the beginning of each session and will complete committee of the whole work and deliberations before moving to the next session. In recognition of the difficulties for some Southeast residents to travel to Anchorage, the board is taking remote public testimony at select ADF&G Southeast offices. Final locations will be announced prior to the meeting, however individuals wishing to testify remotely must sign-up by March 3. An online registration platform will be posted on the meeting page as soon as possible. The meeting page is:

<http://www.adfg.alaska.gov/index.cfm?adfg=fisheriesboard.meetinginfo&date=03-10-2022&meeting=anchorage>. Remote participation extends only to public testimony and not committee work.

In addition to the first-time ever remote public testimony, the board is extending the written public comment deadline to February 23, 2022.

The board and ADF&G sincerely regret this abrupt change in scheduling. These are challenging times that require balancing of health considerations and meeting scheduling protocols. We are trying our best to find the right balance and ask for your patience. We have endeavored to take into account the public's input and appreciate everyone's understanding and cooperation as we work through these difficult times.