

# SALMON HARVESTERS' ROUNDTABLE DIALOGUE FOR THE COPPER RIVER WATERSHED

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Changes in our regional climate patterns and in our oceans affect Copper River salmon, and these changes, in turn, affect fishermen harvesting salmon for food, livelihood and recreation. The Copper River Watershed Project (CRWP) believes that a stakeholder group guided by public participation principles<sup>1</sup> will be useful in opening up conversations about ideas for sharing up management of State of Alaska fisheries in the face of drastic budget cuts, for advocating an coordinated action for more research on how ocean conditions may affect salmon fisheries, for research needs across the Copper River watershed,<sup>2</sup> and for sharing accurate information on management decisions that affect all users. We invite partners to gather and discuss on-the-water conditions, fish, and fishery observations that includes representation from all Copper River salmon user groups. We propose an initial roundtable meeting during the State Board of Fish meeting in December 2017 to bring fishermen from each user group together to reflect on their local knowledge gained from fishing over multiple seasons.

## INTRODUCTION

Changes in our regional climate patterns and in our oceans are affecting Copper River salmon. Recent years have seen several environmental shifts such as changes in the Pacific Decadal Oscillation, extreme surface temperatures in the Gulf of Alaska, record size returns of sockeye and pink salmon, smaller than average salmon, statewide declines of king salmon returns, and changes in the dominant prey species of adult salmon and other fishes. Alaska's wildland resources generate billions annually in wildland sales and labor value. "Alaska is home to the nation's largest commercial fisheries . . . and drives an estimated \$1.8 billion in economic activity. Alaska's oceans support vital subsistence and personal use fisheries, and through sport fishing they contribute substantially to a more than \$1 billion recreation and tourism industry."<sup>3</sup>

Alaska Native Alaskans fished the Copper River and its tributaries for centuries, and followed salmon management practices that they developed over time.<sup>4</sup> Roads were constructed through the Copper River basin to facilitate development in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, and by 1925, "about 75% of the state's population was

<sup>1</sup> See International Association for Public Participation, *Core Values* ([www.iap2.org/page.do](http://www.iap2.org/page.do))

<sup>2</sup> Potential topics for research needs to prepare for climate change could include both water lake conditions, impacts on food web structure in general to non-food items, or research on temperature impacts to spawning success and egg bycatch/losses.

<sup>3</sup> Tracy Johnson, "Climate Change and Alaska Fisheries," University of Alaska Sea Grant, 2016.

<sup>4</sup> William Scamman and James Kay, "Traditional Knowledge and Policy Practices of the Athabascans of the Copper River, Alaska," in the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, July 2012.