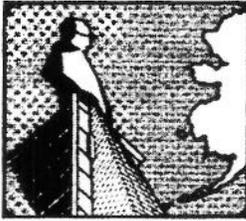


BSFA



Bering Sea Fishermen's Association

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Serving western Alaska since 1980

21 January 2008

Carl J. Artman, Assistant Secretary, Indian Affairs
U.S. Department of Interior
1849 C Street NW MS-4141-MIB
Washington D.C., 20240

Re: Reinstatement of Base Budget Funding of Bering Sea Fishermen's Association

The Bering Sea Fishermen's Association (BSFA) requests the Department of Interior reinstate within their base budget, \$1,200,000.00 to BSFA for salmon research and restoration projects in Western Alaska and Interior river systems and ongoing implementation of marine productivity research.

This funding originated in 1994, because of Congress' concern with the Western Alaska salmon declines, and was disbursed through the Bureau of Indian Affairs under the Wildlife & Parks, Tribal Management and Development Program. Since 1997 there have been 15 state and federal fishery and/or economic disaster declarations for the Arctic-Yukon-Kuskokwim regions. Declines in salmon populations continue to restrict opportunities for subsistence and commercial fishermen.

Appropriations for BSFA have varied over time as shown below:

FFY94 appropriation \$805,000.00	FFY01 appropriation \$805,000.00
FFY95 appropriation \$336,809.00	FFY02 appropriation \$1,200,000.00
FFY96 appropriation \$804,500.00	FFY03 appropriation \$792,000.00
FFY97 appropriation \$805,000.00	FFY04 appropriation \$795,000.00
FFY98 appropriation \$805,000.00	FFY05 appropriation \$778,000.00
FFY99 appropriation \$805,000.00	FFY06 appropriation \$443,000.00
FFY00 appropriation \$905,000.00	FFY07 & FY08 no appropriation

In FFY00, D.O.I. eliminated "special" Alaska programs. Our D.O.I. contact informed us that the Alaska Delegation was in a powerful position and we were advised to seek earmarks through Senator Stevens. Due to the changes on Capitol Hill over the past few years this necessary program, previously mandated by Congress, has gone unfunded.

The D.O.I. understands the importance of Alaska's Indian fisheries and must re-establish funds within Wildlife & Parks to support this program.

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The BSFA program focuses on guiding management actions and in turn seeks to prevent salmon disasters, meet our treaty obligations with Canada, and rebuild the fishing industry. BSFA would continue to design and implement cooperative projects with Alaska Native communities in Kotzebue Sound, Norton Sound and the Yukon and Kuskokwim River drainages. Since the beginning of this program, nearly 90% of the program funds awarded to BSFA was directed to Native organizations, where Native employment, local involvement, and capacity development are top priorities. Additionally, these funds provided seasonal employment of up to 130 full-time positions with training and mentoring programs for high-school students creating opportunities for Indian youth to engage in the scientific research in their own regions, on stocks of critical concern to their people.

The projects implemented with these funds are all coordinated with the Alaska Department of Fish and Game or the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service in order to ensure collaborative processes and to direct these dollars at the highest priority projects.

BSFA would continue to contract with local and regional Alaska Native organizations and other appropriate entities as well as with individual fishermen in addition to coordinating with state and federal agency staff to design and implement projects.

Research on AYK stocks within the freshwater and marine ecosystems must continue. Subsistence and commercial fisheries are being managed conservatively, with subsistence fishers operating under fishing time restrictions and commercial harvests below the 10-year average despite increasing markets. Declines of salmon abundance plus low market demand for salmon have combined to cause severe hardship and anxiety for the fishery-dependent communities in this region. Since 2002, some runs have increased, while others remain at critically low levels. Between 1997 and 2002, the unexpected and dramatic declines of AYK salmon runs prompted a total of 15 disaster declarations in different watersheds within the region by the Governor of Alaska and federal agencies, as indicated in Table 1.1.

		Declaration source	Declaration type
Kuskokwim River Watershed	1997-1998-2000-2001-2002	State	Economic Fish Disaster
Norton Sound Watershed	2000-2001-2002	State	Economic Fish Disaster
Yukon River Watershed	1997-1998-2000-2001-2002	State	Economic Fish Disaster
Kuskokwim Region	1997	Federal	Commercial Fish Failure
Yukon, Kuskokwim & Norton Sound	2000	Federal	Fisheries Disaster

Table 1.1. State and federal disaster declarations by watershed by year for the AYK Region. Sources: State Disaster Declarations (Alaska Oceans Program 2005); Federal Fisheries Disaster (Stevens 2000); Commercial Fisheries Failure (NMFS 1997).

Salmon bycatch in the Bering Sea and Aleutian Islands has been steadily rising. In 1999 and 2000 the National Marine Fisheries Service issued an "incidental take statement" to address endangered species issues. The statement authorized a total of 55,000 Chinook to be taken as bycatch, based on assumptions of what percentage of those would come from endangered stocks. That number was surpassed in 2003, 2004, 2005, and 2006 as the amount of bycatch steadily rose to 55,594, 63,138, 74,975, and 87,771 Chinook salmon, respectively. In response the permit allowance was raised to 87,500 Chinook for 2007, but the actual number of more than 130,000 salmon caught last year exceeded this new limit by more than 40,000. To put this 130,000 salmon in another perspective, the number of salmon intentionally caught in the entire Chinook commercial salmon fishery in Alaska for 2007 was around 560,000.

Due in part to salmon bycatch in the BSAI fishery, however, only an estimated 24,585 Chinook made it to the Canadian border in 2007. This is far below the border passage escapement goals of the Pacific Salmon Treaty and resulted in no commercial fishery, no sport fishery, and limited subsistence harvest from the Canadian side of the Yukon River.

The forecasts indicate another below-average Chinook run on the Yukon River this summer. The residents are in a position of urgency for more information, for the ability to engage in gathering that information, and a message from those in power that their needs are being attended to in every possible fashion.

We passionately request consideration of funding for this program in the FFY09 base budget. Additionally, because of the significance we request that you assign funds to this program from the D.O.I. discretionary budget awarded for FFY08.

We request the reinstatement of \$1,200,000.00 into D.O.I.'s base budget for the BSFA for FFY09 to preserve the continuation of salmon research and restoration projects in the affected Arctic-Yukon-Kuskokwim regions of Western Alaska and carry on development and implementation of investigations in marine productivity.

Sincerely,

Executive Director

cc: Alaska Senator Ted Stevens
Alaska Senator Lisa Murkowski
Alaska Congressman Don Young
ADF&G Commissioner Denby Lloyd
USF&WS Regional Director Tom Melius