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Governor Sean Parnell  
STATE OF ALASKA

August 16, 2012

The Honorable Rebecca Blank  
Acting Secretary  
United States Department of Commerce  
1401 Constitution Avenue, NW  
Washington, DC 20230

Re: Federal Fishery Disaster

Dear Madam Secretary,

I trust you received my letter of July 14 advising you of the very serious situation in Alaska due to significant declines in Chinook salmon abundance and requesting a federal disaster declaration for the 2011 and 2012 Chinook salmon seasons on the Yukon and Kuskokwim Rivers. In that letter, I also alerted you that Cook Inlet Chinook salmon were experiencing diminished returns and fisheries managers had imposed severe restrictions.

Now that the Chinook runs in the Cook Inlet area have largely concluded, in accordance with Section 312(a) of the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Management and Conservation Act (MSA), I am writing to request that you declare a fishery disaster for Upper Cook Inlet salmon fisheries for 2012. A number of the region's fisheries have been severely disrupted by the abrupt decline of Chinook salmon in the Kenai River and Northern District streams as fisheries managers restricted harvests in an effort to meet conservation objectives. The MSA authorizes the Secretary of Commerce to determine if a commercial fishery failure has occurred. I ask your prompt review of this matter due to the importance of these fisheries to the local, regional, state, and national economies.

Our analysis indicates that the decline of these fisheries meets the standards for a disaster determination under the MSA. The region has seen significant unanticipated decline of important fishery resources and while the cause of the decline is undetermined it may include reduced ocean survival rates or other unknown factors. As a consequence, the salmon fisheries of the region that harvest these resources have been severely restricted with revenues far below levels seen in prior years.

The Kenai River Chinook salmon run saw steep decline in returns for 2012. The stock is managed to provide a range of escapement into the river to ensure future sustainability. In 2012, the total run was well below expectations and fisheries that harvest the stock were tightly constrained to help provide for escapement. In order to pass Chinook salmon to the river and provide for spawning

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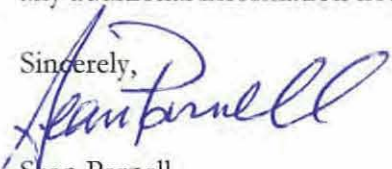
escapement, the east side setnet fishery was closed for most of June and July, the period in which most of the harvest generally occurs. As a result, a fishery which provides an average annual return to fishermen of \$10,900,000 yielded only about \$1,100,000 in 2012, a decline of nearly 90 percent.

The Kenai River Chinook salmon sport fishery was severely restricted and even closed for much of the season in order to conserve Chinook salmon for escapement. The Chinook sport fishery is one of the principle economic drivers for the local and regional economy, bringing in tens of thousands of visitors and supporting guided fishing ventures and lodges. These members of the fishing community suffered substantial losses as a direct result of the decline of the Kenai Chinook salmon run.

Fisheries in the Northern District were restricted as well. The Northern District setnet fishery was closed or restricted for many of the regularly scheduled periods in June and July; resulting in Chinook harvests of less than half the annual average. The sport fisheries in Northern District streams also experienced restrictions, with preseason restrictions tightening in-season and eventually going to complete closure on some systems. These restrictions affected the guides and many other support businesses who count on a robust sport fishery to generate traffic and economic activity in the region.

I cannot overstate the importance of fisheries to the economy of the Upper Cook Inlet region. Throughout this area, impacts are being felt by commercial fishermen, sport guides, fish processors, and those who sell fuel, tackle, supplies, groceries, and lodging. Local governments will feel the impact of lost revenue to their economic base. The Cook Inlet salmon runs are also an important food source to both Kenai Peninsula and Matanuska-Susitna Valley residents. The Upper Cook Inlet salmon fisheries affected by the decline of the Chinook salmon runs are crucial to the economic vitality of the region and the well being of the residents. I appreciate your prompt attention to this matter. I have directed the Alaska Departments of Commerce, Community and Economic Development and Fish and Game to provide National Marine Fisheries Service and your office with any additional information needed to make a determination.

Sincerely,



Sean Parnell  
Governor

cc: The Honorable Lisa Murkowski, United States Senate  
The Honorable Mark Begich, United States Senate  
The Honorable Don Young, United States House of Representatives  
The Honorable Gary Stevens, Alaska State Senate  
The Honorable Mike Chenault, Alaska State House of Representatives  
The Honorable Bill Stoltze, Alaska State House of Representatives  
The Honorable Bill Thomas, Alaska State House of Representatives  
The Honorable Bert Stedman, Alaska State Senate  
The Honorable Lyman Hoffman, Alaska State Senate

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The Honorable Tom Wagoner, Alaska State Senate  
The Honorable Charlie Huggins, Alaska State Senate  
The Honorable Linda Menard, Alaska State Senate  
The Honorable Kurt Olson, Alaska State House of Representatives  
The Honorable Mark Neuman, Alaska House of Representatives  
The Honorable Wes Keller, Alaska House of Representatives  
The Honorable Shelley Hughes, Alaska House of Representatives  
The Honorable Susan Bell, Commissioner, Alaska Department of Commerce, Community,  
and Economic Development  
The Honorable Cora Campbell, Commissioner, Alaska Department of Fish and Game  
Kip Knudson, Director of State and Federal Relations, Office of the Governor