

United States Senate

August 14, 2023

The Honorable Gina Raimondo
Secretary
United States Department of Commerce
1401 Constitution Avenue NW
Washington D.C. 20230

Dear Secretary Raimondo,

Alaska has experienced unprecedented declines of salmon returns in some regions, alongside historically high returns in other regions. Salmon abundance is an acute issue across Alaska, and I have heard a unified request for increased investment into the development of research priorities to better understand this increased variability of salmon species. In response, I authored the Alaska Salmon Research Task Force Act, which was signed into law in December 2022. In accordance with this law, on June 9, 2023, you made appointments to the Alaska Salmon Research Task Force.

The impacts of catastrophically low returns of salmon are substantial, particularly in rural regions of Alaska where no salmon fishing has occurred, such as the Yukon River region. Salmon serve as a critical food source, represent a subsistence culture that has existed for millennia, and provide a sense of identity for many individuals across my state. It is very important to me that Alaskans have a seat at the table as we work to develop research strategies to help understand these unprecedented and dramatic changes and chart a path forward in response to them.

I welcomed the news that members of this Task Force had been selected, and appreciate the wide variety of Alaska stakeholders selected; however, I was disappointed that no Alaska Native subsistence users from the Interior Yukon River region were selected. The Interior Alaska and Yukon River perspective is unique – it's a 1,982-mile-long river with many different cultures and subsistence lifestyles present. Residents along the Yukon River have experienced significant declines in salmon returns that are, without a doubt, exacerbating mental health challenges and contributing to food insecurity.

The Interior Alaska and Yukon River region's perspective is irreplaceable. I recognize that you have appointed 19 Task Force members, the maximum allowed under the law, and appointing additional members is currently not possible. Despite this, given the lack of Interior Yukon River region stakeholders on the Task Force, I want to highlight the dire situation faced in this region.

In closing, I would like to reiterate the need for salmon research to guide our efforts in restoring salmon populations that are relied on by some of our most vulnerable communities along the Yukon River who are deeply affected by these declines.

Sincerely,



Dan Sullivan
United States Senator