COMMITTEE ON ARMED SERVICES
COMMITTEE ON THE BUDGET
COMMITTEE ON
HOMELAND SECURITY AND
GOVERNMENTAL AFFAIRS

MARK BEGICH
ALASKA

United States Senate
WASHINGTON, DC 20510

COMMITTEE ON
COMMERCE, SCIENCE, AND TRANSPORTATION
CHAIRMAN, SUBCOMMITTEE ON OCEANS,
ATMOSPHERE, FISHERIES AND COAST GUARD
COMMITTEE ON VETERANS' AFFAIRS

June 26, 2012

The Honorable Ken Salazar
Secretary
Department of the Interior
1849 C Street, N.W.
Washington, DC 20240-0002

Dear Secretary Salazar: Ken

This is the time of year Alaska Native people along the Yukon and Kuskokwim rivers are usually harvesting and preserving Chinook (king) salmon for the winter. As I write, however, the majority of these fisheries are closed by federal and state managers, and biologists are predicting 2012 will be one of the worst Chinook runs on record. As you prepare the Fiscal Year 2014 budget proposal, I strongly encourage you to increase funding for the Alaska Subsistence Management Program to increase research on and management of this important fishery.

Subsistence hunting and fishing allows Alaska Natives to get relief from the high costs of fuel, food and transportation in these areas, and the burden is on the federal government to manage the subsistence resources to ensure the food security of the villages along the Kuskokwim and Yukon rivers. People along the rivers are resorting to extreme measures and harvesting fish, despite closures by the state and federal authorities; because they are afraid they will not have enough food to last through the winter.

Alaskans understand federal dollars are tight in these tough economic times, but I do not believe you can meet the goals of the *Alaska National Interests Lands Conservation Act*, or implement the recommendations of your own review of the Subsistence Program without increased funding. Better management of this fishery requires new investment in key management tools including: research, data collection, fish weir maintenance, biologists, aerial surveys, genetic sampling for stock compositions and bolstering the Bethel test fishery. I understand the Department's budget is stretched very thin this year, but due to the dire circumstances subsistence users face right now, I urge you to look for ways to transfer additional dollars to do research on the suitability of an additional sonar in order to more accurately track the numbers of salmon in the Kuskokwim and Yukon rivers.

SUITE 750
510 L STREET
ANCHORAGE, AK 99501
(907) 271-5915

SUITE 328
101 12TH AVENUE
FAIRBANKS, AK 99701
(907) 456-0261

SUITE 308
ONE SEALASKA PLAZA
JUNEAU, AK 99801
(907) 586-7700

SUITE 101
805 FRONTAGE ROAD
KENAI, AK 99611
(907) 283-4000

SUITE 230
1900 FIRST AVENUE
KETCHIKAN, AK 99901
(907) 225-3000

SUITE 309
851 EAST WESTPOINT DRIVE
WASILLA, AK 99654
(907) 357-9956

SUITE SR-111
RUSSELL BUILDING
WASHINGTON, DC 20510
(202) 224-3004

Additionally, if studies show changes in the ocean are leading to the decline of king salmon, the federal agencies need to coordinate efforts to tackle this problem to find overall long-term solutions. I am simultaneously urging the Senate Appropriations Committee to increase funding for the Subsistence Program in the Fiscal Year 2013 budget and proposing an increase to the Fiscal Year 2013 and 2014 National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration for Chinook salmon research.

Alaska Native people have been harvesting fish along these rivers for thousands of years. The Chinook salmon are one of their primary nutritional and cultural mainstays. I look forward to working with the Department to find a path towards responsible and responsive federal subsistence management.

If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact my staff. I look forward to your timely response to this very urgent matter for Alaskans.

Sincerely,

Mark Begich
United States Senator