OUTDOOR ALASKA

Magazine of the Alaska Outdoor Council

VOLUME 32 | ISSUE 1 | SEPTEMBER 2024

Protecting your hunting, fishing, trapping and access to Alaska public lands since 1955

AlaskaOutdoorCouncil.org

Hunt of a lifetime

Erik Burney with his mountain grizzly from the Talkeetna Mountains

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- Protecting Alaska Heritage
- Key Outdoor Legislation
- Alaska Salmon Disaster 2024
- A Bear With Papa

ALASKA OUTDOOR COUNCIL PRESENTS

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ABOUT THE ALASKA OUTDOOR COUNCIL

Mission: "Dedicated to the preservation of outdoor pursuits in Alaska – hunting, fishing, trapping, and public access – and conservation of the habitats upon which they depend."

Vision: "To unite the voices of our membership and member clubs to effectively represent their outdoor interests in all facets of public policy."

We remain committed to protecting our Alaskan way of life

I would like to thank every one of our members and member clubs for the outstanding support you provide to the Alaska Outdoor Council. Through your donations we can continue the fight against shrinking opportunities to access Alaska's natural resources. For this we Thank You!!!

If you are unfamiliar with the Alaska Outdoor Council, we are a federation of 50 member clubs with the common interest of access Alaska's natural resources through hunting, fishing, trapping, public access or just enjoying a day out in the wilderness.

Some of the key objectives of the Alaska Outdoor Council include:

- Dedicated to the preservation of outdoor pursuits in Alaska — hunting, fishing, trapping, and public access and conservation of the habitats upon which they depend.
- Collaborating with government agencies, lawmakers, and other organizations to develop and implement effective wildlife management and conservation strategies developed and in control of the State Government.
- Supporting programs and initiatives aimed at preserving Alaska's rich outdoor heritage for future generations.

We are actively involved in legislative and regulatory processes at the State and Federal levels, working to influence policies that affect outdoor recreation and conservation in Alaska. Please visit our website at alaskaoutdoorcouncil.org to see what we are currently working on along with past newsletters, calendar of events or even purchasing some new AOC swag.

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Please follow along on these vital pieces of outdoor legislation

Bills of interest to AOC membership that are awaiting action by the Governor or have failed passage:

■ **HB83/SB34 Citizens Advisory Commission on Federal Areas (CACFA).** AOC actively Supported. HCSCS SB34(FIN) passed the House with 2 last minute amendments, Sec. 4. AS 41.37.220(i) -(j). After 4 months of committee hearings Rep. Foster from Nome threw in 2 amendments with no opportunity to discuss the amendments. Amendment (i) is nothing that the Commission didn't already do in the past, the Commissioners would determine which matters needed their attention. Amendment (j) was completely unnecessary, not allowing the commissioners to address access across or to ANCSA lands on RS2477 right-of-ways to public lands beyond isn't helpful to Alaskans. Whether or not you are an ANCSA Corporation or individual Alaskan Native trying to access the 20 million acres of ANCSA lands within federal Conservation System Units or an Alaskan wishing to access state or federal public lands beyond CACFA may have been able to help. CACFA did get an appropriation of $176,500 to find an Executive Director, an office, and hold public meetings. It's now up to the Governor to sign the bill and appoint its membership.

■ **SB92 State Ownership of Submerged Lands.** AOC actively Supported. CSSB 92(2D RES) did not pass the House. The Governor, DNR, and a major lobbying effort by the Alaska Chapter of SCI were not persuasive enough to gather 21 House representatives to support state management of 1,873 navigable waters. Alaska Native Right advocates preferring Federal management of waters and subsistence fisheries harvest to state management prevailed. 20 House members willingly ignored their Oath of Office (Alaska State Constitution Article 12, Sec. 5) of defending the Constitution of the State of Alaska. The Submerged Lands Act of 1953, 43 U.S.C. §1311 gives title to each state to ownership of lands beneath navigable waters upon Congresses action for States entrance to the Union, Equal Footing Doctrine of U.S. Constitution. Be sure and ask your candidates for state legislature this fall where they stand on AS 39.05.045, Oath of Office, before giving them your vote.

■ **HJR22 amendment to the Constitution of the State of Alaska giving a federal subsistence priority to Fish/Game on state and private lands.** AOC Monitored with no opportunity to give public testimony in legislative committees. The bill died in (H)RES. HJR22 was amended, 33-LS1321/D in H(RES) to include a portion of Title VIII Sec. 801of ANILCA leaving no doubt that the purpose of the resolution was to implement the federal subsistence law on all of Alaska. Having the state implement

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the federal subsistence law in Title VIII of ANILCA on State, private, and Federal lands/waters to end Dual Management and allocation of fish and game is inconsistent with AOC Bylaws and Policy.

■ **SB253/HB396 Big Game Guide concession area permits on state land.** AOC actively Supported. Thanks to the Herculean efforts by APHA lobbyist the long time sought after beginning of limiting big game guides on state lands by permit could began. During the final days of the session SB189 was amended to include HB 396. The bill if signed into law would require the Alaska Board of Game to establish an initial big game guide concession area.

■ **HB272 Big Game Hunting by Persons with Disability.** AOC took no position. The bill if signed into law would allow the Alaska Board of Game to create another special class of hunters, those with disabilities. The bill passed and awaits action by the Governor.

■ **SB171 Residency Requirements for Hunting, Fishing, Trapping.** AOC Monitored. The bill had numerous hearings in (S) RES and (S)FIN and passed the Senate with 15 yea votes. (H)RES heard and held the bill, where it died.

■ **HJR3 National Concealed Handgun Reciprocity.** AOC Supported. Introduced by Representative George Rauscher this resolution asks Congress to pass H.R.38 or similar legislation allowing for reciprocity concealed handgun permits among other states. The resolution was passed and sent to the Governor.

■ **HB297 surcharge on sport fishing license for access.** H(FSH) heard and held the bill in May. The bill was offered by the Governor without any input from AOC.

■ **SB255/HB386 establish crime of obstructions of free passage to public places.** Sponsored by the Governor the bill was heard in (S) JUD referred to (S) Transportation where it died.

■ **SB168 game seized by the state and unlawfully taken game.** AOC Monitored. The bill would have ensured that hunters who have had their game wrongfully seized by enforcement would receive monetary compensation from the state. The bill never made it out of (S)FIN.

■ **SB125/HB293 trapping cabins on state land.** AOC actively Supported. The Senate CS for CS for HB125(RES) am S finally passed the Legislature on May 15,2024. Should the Governor support the bill and it become law it would put an end to a long struggle in the legislature to provide safe living conditions for trappers who remain in the field near their traplines.

■ **HB195 Cook Inlet: Buyback set net Permits.** AOC Monitor. The bill got to H(RLS) where it was referred back to H(FIN) to die.

■ **SB198 remote recreational cabin site.** AOC Opposed. AOC pointed out that the bill was inconsistent with state statute AS 38.04.015. Public Interest in Retaining State Land for Public Ownership. DNR dropped their efforts to advocate for the bill, it died in S(RES) early in the session.

■ **SB199 State Land: Disposal/Sale/Lease/Restrict.** AOC Monitored. The bill was heard and held in (S) Resources. As access for the majority of Alaskans who are Non-Federally Qualified Subsistence Users is being diminished on federal lands (60% of Alaska) the importance of state lands (24% of Alaska) for public access to public resources becomes that much more critical.

■ **HB295 salmon hatchery permits.** AOC Monitored. The bill passed to allow the sale of hatchery salmon eggs to stock lakes.

■ **SB78 Hunting and**

fishing license for Nonresident students. AOC supported.The bill would allow nonresident students to purchase state hunting, trapping, and fishing licenses at resident cost. The bill passed out of (S) Resources with full support and was referred to (S) Finance. It didn't make it out of (S)FIN committee.

■ **SSCR1(SENATE SPECIAL CONCURRENT RESOLUTION NO. 1).** AOC Supported not approving the Governor's Executive Order #124. E.O. #124 if approved by the legislature would have transferred the authority to determine which animal species were on the "clean list" from the Alaska Board of Game to the Commissioner of Fish & Game. SSCR1 passed, the Governor's E.O. #124 failed.

Thank you for supporting and growing our mission

Greetings Friends and Fellow Alaskans!

Summer as always seems to be flying by and everyone is in the freezer filling mode. I'm sure just like many Alaskans, I feel blessed once again to return to our rivers to gather fresh Alaskan sockeye and share ties with our families.

It's these Alaskan traditions that highlight the importance of our mission and what drives us to keep moving forward. The last few years have been monumental growth for our organization. It seems 2024 will continue that trend as we move toward the later part of the year.

I want to thank the many members who have stepped forward to help and those that have supported our growth. Without each other, we simply cannot succeed. This is the unique mindset is what Alaska Outdoor Council and this unified voice will be what carries us into the future.

Looking forward to the fall, we are excited to announce our largest banquet in the history of the organization. The Alaska Outdoorsman Banquet will be Oct. 5, 2024, at Sullivan Arena in Anchorage. We will once again partner with member club Alaska Gun Collectors Association to support local youth shootings sports and outdoor education.

This Banquet has grown tremendously and with the help of many sponsors and local businesses, this banquet will feature many new raffles and prizes.

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Alaska Outdoor Council Executive Director Caleb Martin with a Mountain Goat he harvested in fall 2023.

We have said goodbye to check-in and check-out lines this year with streamlined processes that allow everyone to scan their tickets on entry and auto check out once they are done for the evening! We are featuring two live country bands plus an after party for you to enjoy the rest of the evening!

These improvements mean our ability to fund local programs, projects and advocacy just continues to grow grow grow! We hope to see you this fall and as always get out and enjoy YOUR Alaska Outdoors!

Alaska again proves to be a land of great hunting opportunity

"There's that bear."

I looked up at Erik Burney from the caribou I had just finished gutting.

"What bear?"

"That grizzly," Erik said, never looking up from his binoculars, focused on the ridge far above us in the Talkeetnas.

Half a mile uphill, a chocolate brown spec moved below the ridgeline.

Through binoculars it transformed into a half ton of mountain grizzly, swaggering from blueberry bush to bush, gorging on the purple fruit.

I pondered. My caribou tag was filled. My winter freezer filler was now ready to pack out. But Erik and I both had brown bear tags in our pockets, and here was an opportunity.

"Let's go get him!"

***

This hunt began a decade ago when I drew an either-sex caribou tag for the Denali herd in the Talkeetna Mountains. In those days, the Denali caribou herd was 50,000 animals. Sadly, that herd has plummeted and has not been an option recently.

Erik and I had hunted together for everything from deer to ducks. He agreed to tag along with harvest tags for a bear and maybe a moose as an option once we were done with my caribou.

We arranged for legendary pilot Mike Meekins to fly us into the mountains with plans of intercepting the migration.

Mike has been flying these mountains since 1981 and is a joy to fly with, as well as knowing these mountains like the back of his hand.

As often happens, bad weather delayed several of the groups ahead of us, so our fly-in was delayed from early morning to late afternoon. We had picked a few camp options, which unfortunately were all already holding hunters when we flew over, and with the day getting late, we settled for the best available spot.

It was on a migration route that unfortunately was empty of caribou. So, after three days, we called Mike by satellite phone to relocate. Our new campsite, near the head of a beautiful valley ringed by peaks and above a rushing creek, held more promise.

***

As a recovering Texan who's spent the last 20 years living, hunting, and fishing in Alaska, I've been blessed with plenty of Alaska mentors, made plenty of mistakes — and loved every minute.

I also try with limited success to educate Texan friends and family about Alaska's challenges.

During my early years as an Alaskan in Juneau, I'd fallen in love with bear hunting and been blessed with a beautiful 8-foot brown bear and a couple of respectable black bears.

Then I drew a coveted Kodiak Island brown bear fall tag in 2013, in a unit where I'd hunted deer and seen huge bears. But I didn't make that hunt because my son's wedding fell right in the middle of the 30-day hunt window. Risking getting marooned in bear camp and missing that wedding wasn't an option!

Still, bears were not on our minds.

But Mike, before he'd flown off, pointed to a far ridgeline and said the previous group of hunters he'd flown into this valley had seen a big grizzly feeding on blueberries there a couple of times.

So, we beat darkness to pitch a tent, gather water from the stream and Jetboil a quick dinner. Things were looking up.

That said, our time was getting short and we'd yet to see a caribou. And real weather was forecast in two days.

So, the next morning, when a pair of big caribou cows strolled through the valley, I chose steaks over horns and put the larger cow on the ground.

I had just gutted that cow and was preparing to start skinning it for the pack back to camp when Erik spotted that big grizzly, about a half mile above us.

***

Back on that mountain ridge in the Talkeetnas.

There really wasn't any debate. We dropped everything but rifles and started a sprinting sneak up the glacial creek.

Knowing the odds were long, we dropped everything but rifles, and started jogging through head-high willows, paralleling the bear, working uphill as it slowly worked down. We waded a roaring glacial creek, climbed through jumbles of rock but kept the bear mostly in sight.

For a half hour it seemed we'd never catch up.

We could tell the bear was moving, but slowly, feeding on berry

bushes near the top of the ridge. If he kept his course, and we sprinted down the creek while staying under cover of the willows and alders, we might intercept him.

And despite all the odds and a couple of slips in the icy water, that's what happened.

The bear was slowly moving lower as we worked uphill, and we ran out of cover behind a set of boulders the perfect height for a shooting rest.

I'd taken a good Southeast Alaska brown bear years ago, so the shot was Erik's.

At 400 yards, it looked possible. At 200 yards the old bear was looking huge and still oblivious.

Now at 100 yards, he was just big.

We had just time to catch our breath and Erik had a rock-solid rest when that hairy mountain of grizzly swaggered into view at 100 yards.

"He's plenty close —shoot that bear!"

My long-time hunting companion just grinned, laid his .30/06 across a boulder and flipped off the safety.

At the crack of his '06, the old bruin rolled, and then as they often do, bounced up, bounding downhill. Quick follow-up shots rolled the old warrior again, and he lay still.

After the obligatory handshakes and photo session, we set to work.

We spent the rest of the morning and early afternoon quartering and packing my caribou back to camp. With it safely hung some distance from the tent, we hiked back up the mountain and spent late into the evening in icy rain turning to snow, skinning the ancient bear. He was scarred and almost toothless and we'd later learn more than 15 years old.

The next day we spent packing out hide and skull in the eight inches of snow that had fallen overnight. After a day of savoring the high country, glassing Dall sheep on the next mountain top, and feasting on oatmeal laced with mountain blackberries. With a blizzard forming in the far mountains, we hailed Mike on the Sat phone for a ride home, loaded into a pair of Super Cubs and flew out just ahead of the gathering snow.

LEE LESCHPER is CEO of Fireweed Strategies LLC, publisher of a number of Alaska magazines including Outdoor Alaska

ADF&G management threatens Mat-Su salmon escapements

On Saturday July 20, attainment of 2024 Mat-Su salmon spawning escapement goals was put in jeopardy, and the likelihood of later season-disrupting harvest restrictions or salmon fishing closures for conservative inriver salmon user groups became much more likely with issuance of Alaska Department of Fish and Game Advisory Announcement #37. Announcement 37 "restricted" the entire Northern District commercial harvest opportunity on Monday July 22 to one of the most liberal levels ever allowed since 2011, during the July 20 - July 30 period. — Up to 3 set nets with up to 105 fathoms of aggregate gear length.

The 2024 Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ADF&G) preseason outlook projected a Susitna River drainage sockeye salmon return of 303,400 fish — 35% below the historical 2002 - 2023 average and 21 percent below the recent 10-year (2014 - 2023) average run.

5 AAC 21. 358 Northern District Salmon Management Plan directs that ADF&G shall manage Northern District commercial fisheries based on the abundance of sockeye salmon counted through the weirs on Larson, Chelatna, and Judd Lakes, and based on the abundance of king and coho salmon counted through the Little Susitna River weir or other salmon abundance indices as the department deems appropriate. * bold language adopted at 2024 Upper Cook Inlet Board of Fisheries meeting.

Section C of the plan, addresses the salmon migration period between July 20 - August 6, and allows ADF&G to restrict the Northern District commercial fishery to (1) three set gill nets not more than 105 fathoms in aggregate length; (2) two set gill nets not more than 70 fathoms in aggregate length: or (3) one set gillnet not more than 35 fathoms in length, if ADF&G's assessment of abundance indicates restrictions are necessary to achieve the escapement goal.

Over the past 5 years each time the Northern District (General Subdistrict / west side) commercial fishery has been allowed to fish more than one set gillnet at the start of the July 20 - August 6 period, coho and /or sockeye salmon escapement shortage has resulted — causing emergency restriction(s) or harvest closure(s) later each season. In 2023 coho salmon escapement shortages were so severe to cause inseason closure of three of the most significant Mat-Su sport salmon fisheries: Deshka River and Little Susitna River closed to all sport coho salmon fishing, and closure of Jim Creek to all salmon fishing. In addition the entire Susitna River drainage was restricted to artificial lure fishing with a daily coho salmon limit reduced to one fish (0 at Deshka River). Furthermore, both the Central District drift gillnet fishery and Northern District set gillnet fishery were closed early, because of coho salmon escapement shortages exacerbated by earlier-season unsustainable commercial harvest opportunities, during a year of low coho salmon abundance.

Given ADF&G's 2024 outlook for a less than average Susitna River drainage sockeye return, Northern District Salmon Management Plan direction to provide shared commercial and inriver sockeye , chum, and pink salmon harvests, along with no ADF&G collection of Judd and Chelatna Lake sockeye salmon abundance data last year and

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Guide Lori Price nets a Kenai sockeye for Steve Roden. Sockeye were the one bright spot for Alaska anglers in 2024.

Visitors like Texan Laura Hampton with a nice silver salmon from a previous year. In 2024, visitors as well as Alaskans, found very few silver salmon statewide.

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again in 2024, and the department's history of inseason restrictions / closures disrupting reasonable salmon harvest opportunities during previous seasons, a rational person could likely conclude the best management scenario for achieving Northern Cook Inlet salmon spawning escapement goals and providing all Northern Cook Inlet user groups a reasonable salmon harvest opportunity throughout more of the season would be Option 3 — one set gillnet not more than 35 fathoms in length (and specifically within the General Subdistrict).

A rational person might further conclude that a more liberal (General Subdistrict) Northern District commercial harvest opportunity may only be justified after adequate salmon escapement enumerations (or even adequate weir-based escapement projections) were obtained from at least two or more of the four specific salmon abundance indicators identified within the plan. Contrary to what you might think, the Department provided no indication of Northern Cook Inlet / Susitna River / Little Susitna River salmon abundance when issuing Announcement #37, and, furthermore, salmon weir counts posted on the ADF&G website, at that time, showed 0 salmon through Larson Lake, no abundance estimates from Judd and Chelatna Lake, and 15 coho salmon through Little Susitna River.

Last winter a retired ADF&G fishery biologist commented to me that it appeared Northern Cook Inlet ADF&G commercial fisheries management was taking a "Parochial Position" — of providing harvest for the commercial user group, even if it was at the expense of ADF&G established salmon escapement goals and / or the reasonable harvest opportunities of inriver users. Such management diverges from purposes provided in the Northern District Salmon Management Plan, is irresponsible, unacceptable, and frankly, since it may be unsustainable — has the appearance of also being unconstitutional. It is long past time that Northern Cook Inlet commercial fisheries management be based on a solid biological information — and when or if critical information is lacking (or indicates an unsustainable trend)— ADF&G commercial management of Northern Cook Inlet salmon stocks must be conducted on a significantly more conservative basis.

Tidbits

A short-lived opportunity to catch and or harvest better-quality pink salmon from the Susitna River tributary streams along the Parks Highway, north of Willow, may likely peak during the last week of July. Small spinners, spoons, or flies are sometimes effective in drawing strikes from newly arriving pink salmon.

I went on a personal use dip netting trip to the lower Susitna River with three other individuals on Saturday July 20, and we had relatively good success. I would hope other Alaska residents might enjoy reasonable success in the remaining one Saturday and one Wednesday open dates in July for 2024 — after this column is published.

A few additional open fishing days remain for the Fish Creek Personal Use Dip Net fishery compared to the Lower Susitna River Personal Use Fishery, however, the last day for both fisheries is July 31 — so if you want to participate in either, better not dally too long.

Two friends of mine fished the Deshka River / Susitna River confluence area on Tuesday July 23, and caught one coho salmon and one pink salmon, but did not observe any large abundance of salmon milling in that area, as can sometimes occur.

AD&G harvest data from the Northern District commercial period mentioned in the above column show 11 delivers from the Eastern Subdistrict harvested 1,176 sockeye, 65 coho, salmon, 169 pink, and 72 Chum salmon or ~1,500 total salmon — about 135 salmon per delivery, while 24 deliveries from the General Subdistrict harvested 1,449 sockeye, 468 coho, 44 pink, and 514 chum salmon or ~2,525 total salmon — about 105 salmon per delivery. These are subpar daily harvest totals for this time of the season — but only one data point. However, like Northern Cook Inlet weir counts, they in No Way indicate any large surplus of harvestable salmon available in the Northern District of Upper Cook Inlet, at this time.

Good Luck and Fish On!

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Rockfish anglers will find target-rich environment in Alaska

When anglers think of pursuing saltwater fishing in Alaska, they're usually inundated with dreams of wrestling a barn-door halibut — which sometimes get so big that anglers might use a .410 to dispatch the large behemoths. But that's not the only species the cold waters of Northern California all the way to the Gulf of Alaska can provide.

Often thought of as the "younger brother" to targeting halibut, the rockfish offers an engaging, high-success-rate option for anglers looking to round out a trip. Also, consider the distressed halibut populations and increased limits anglers have seen in Alaska. If other fish species aren't available to target, that could really hamper the legendary lodge trips Alaska is so famous for.

From deep-water holes along underwater ridges to the rocky reefs along the coast, rockfish offer a diverse and exciting fishing experience for anglers who target them. We spoke with experts in the field to learn more about the top five species of rockfish you'll likely encounter in these waters — along with habitat, tackle and techniques for catching them.

Black Rockfish

Agreed upon by all our experts as easily the most-targeted and cooperative rockfish species, these fish school big time around rocky

structure (as the name suggests). They are incredibly eager to bite once you find a school. We caught up with Capt. Brent Foster of Brookings Fishing Charters in Oregon. Foster specializes in lingcod and rockfish charters off the Oregon coast, and boasts that 80% of trips are black rockfish, with some really big ones.

"It's not uncommon to have a 4- or 5-pound black on every trip." That's a trophy size fish, and great fun on the light tackle spinning gear. Brent fishes some of the smaller reefs off the lighthouse area of Oregon, often in less than 100 feet of water.

"We do a lot of light tackle here, not running big sticks like other guys do since we're fishing in 100 feet of water or less with spinning rods and braided line," Foster said. "Flutter Jigs and smaller paddle tail swimbaits up to 4 ounces excel; sometimes we have to go a bit heavier due to drift."

Quillback Rockfish

Known for their distinctive spiky dorsal fins, quillbacks are another common pelagic rockfish that grow to good size, making them a favorite among anglers. While available farther north in Alaska, the quillback are a subject of controversy as they've been added to the list of banned harvest fish in Oregon. (Other species on the no-take list include copper and China rockfish.) As always, anglers should check limits and regulations of species when fishing in state or federal waters.

What are Non-Pelagic Rockfish?

These rockfish are found most often on or near the bottom and tend to prefer rocky bottoms (hence the name "rockfish"). More often than not, they're hooked as bycatch when jigging or bait fishing for halibut.

Yelloweye Rockfish

Florida angler Pammy Pease traveled a long way to catch this lovely yelloweye rockfish on light tackle off Canada's British Columbia coast. Doug Olander / Sport Fishing

Yelloweye rockfish are the quintessential Alaskan fish. Among the largest of the rockfish species, a big yelloweye jigged up from depth makes a fine photo fit for a postcard. (It's one of my biggest bucketlist rockfish since moving to the last frontier several years ago.) They're common and fairly easy to find in and around Kodiak waters all the way down to Prince William Sound.

Tiger Rockfish and China Rockfish

Okay, technically two species, but these are favorites of Capt. Brian McKay of Alaska Outdoors Addiction. While on the smaller side of the rockfish spectrum, they're beautiful fish, often caught at depths of 100 to 300 feet (and sometimes as deep as 800 to 1,000 feet). They readily hit jigs on light tackle. Tigers are also a favorite of biologist Adam St. Saviour, a researcher with the state of Alaska, as they're a rare species to catch compared to others. We'll talk later with St. Saviour about conservation.

Shortraker Rockfish

Gaining notoriety after the 48-pound state record was caught last July in Alaska, shortraker rockfish are known for hanging out deep. Captain Ray Nix, of Crazy Ray's Adventures, deep-drops herring or octopus on circle hooks with halibut sticks at least 800 feet down to target these fish. By all accounts, it's quite a chore to crank them up, but worth the experience for a once-in-a-lifetime catch. Electric reels are the preferred tackle method in this scenario.

Fly Fishing for Rockfish

Captain Brian McKay developed a method for clients who want to take rockfish on the fly off the coast of Kodiak Island, Alaska. He suggests switching things up by having one angler "man the jig" with a hookless lure to entice the fish higher in the water column and whip them into a feeding frenzy. Once the fish are jigged up higher, they will cooperate with any big streamers in your fly box, including a super-sized Russian river or popsicle style.

Rockfish Conservation

Catching up with Adam St. Saviour, a research biologist for the Southcentral Region with the Alaska Department of Fish and Game, we'd be remiss if we didn't cover one major conservation aspect of fishing for rockfish. Rockfish are susceptible to overfishing and bad management practice. They're also prone to barotrauma during their release, which can kill the fish.

In Alaska, it is imperative for anglers to carry a deep-water release mechanism for rockfish in the boat. These devices are designed to return a rockfish back near the bottom where it was hooked, or to a specified depth, to assist the fish in recompression and up chances of post-release survival. Anglers can find more information about deep-water releases from the organization Return 'Em Right.

CODY MCLAUGHLIN is an outdoor writer, conservationist and hunting advocate based in Alaska. He recently launched Trout Stream Studios as an executive producer for podcasts and livestreams in the hunting and veterans' affairs spaces – including for the Congressional Sportsmen's Foundation's The Sportsmen's Voice Podcast, the popular Blood Origins Podcast, and the Veterans' Affairs Administration's National Center for PTSD. He serves currently on the board of the Alaska Outdoor Council and is a former board member and lead spokesman of the New Jersey Outdoor Alliance.

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A hunt with Papa: Memories from the field last a lifetime

We had been walking uphill for an hour when we arrived at the spot where we last saw the bear.

It was midday getting into the evening and there was no sign of the bear. We had last spotted him at the base of the hill where we had stopped on our last ride back to the lodge, it was our last day and the plane would be coming for us in the morning. It was windy and cold on the side of the mountain; the clouds had lifted for a few hours, and we could finally see the tundra in its fog-less entirety for the first time in three days.

I looked back down at the base of the hill where Papa stood, attentively watching our group inch our way up.

Papa is my grandfather. We were hunting at Rainy Pass Lodge for a week in August to try and fill a tag for bears or caribou. Most of the trip was spent glassing different spots from a hill called Lookout Point, a popular glassing spot just a short distance from the main lodge.

After several failed stalks we decided to take a six-hour horseback ride to Sheep Lake, a small cabin that abutted a clear lake deep in the heart of the tundra.

I was 15 at the time. The next day, when I arrived back in Anchorage, I would be starting high school. A milestone and one of few times to be able to do a hunt like this with Papa. Papa had hunted at Rainy Pass for years,

being close friends with the Perrins family who owned the lodge.

The stories Papa has at the lodge are about as old as the lodge itself, but it made for a jovial occasion to reconnect with them again.

Together, Papa and I had shared a lot of time in the field and in the water. We would fish the Kenai heavily in the summer and when the leaves turned brown and the air turned to a stabbing cold in the fall we would be out in the marsh, waiting for a flutter of ducks to come close enough for a shot. We shared these experiences with joy, and it seemed appropriate to pass the torch along with a trip of incredible magnitude.

To get to Sheep Lake you had to cross the Happy River Valley. A labyrinth of undulating tundra followed by icy rivers that roared like a highway under the belly of the horse. Clothes, guns, and gear would get soaked crossing the muddy bogs of the valley. But when you approached the cabin, the earth flattened, and it was downhill to a small outcrop where a beautiful, green-roofed sanctuary waited to house you.

Sheep Lake proved difficult due to the weather. The rain and fog had come, bedding down mostly every animal in the valley. After a few days of no success, we began our somber ride back to camp.

Travel took us through the Ptarmigan Valley, a long stretch of Tundra that would take you to the front doors of Rainy Pass Lodge if you followed it closely. It was lunchtime and we glassed as we ate. It was during this lunch break when Steve Perrins, who was our guide for our trip, spotted a bear grazing about a mile up a large hill right in front of us.

Action followed quickly.

It was decided that Colton, our second guide and Steve's son, would take me and Henry, our packer, up the hill near the bear to try and get a good shot. Papa and Steve would stay behind with the

horses and watch the stalk unfold.

The problem was that the trail to get up to the path was uncut and a trail of alders snaked its way around the base of the hill like a locked-up fortress. We would have to power our way through the alders to get up to the bear. Once we cleared the alders, we would be right at the spot where we had seen the bear.

Navigating the alders was difficult and my hands were striped with cuts by the time we got to our spot.

There we were and no bear. My body went into a mode of PTSD, remembering the several failed stalks that had played out just like this. I could feel my heart sink low into my feet thinking about coming down from this mountain, cut up, exasperated, and worse, empty-handed.

A thick black spot rose from behind a ridge about 50 yards from where we stood. I tapped Henry's shoulder. He nodded and we positioned to shoot.

The bear edged closer, but went behind a bunch of alders. I waited for him to emerge and when he did, he stood still, like a gargoyle. That is when the ringing boom exploded on the hillside and I felt my shoulder recoil back and the bear dropped.

The bear lay where he was shot.

We began the field dressing process and the adrenaline leaked out of my body as a cacophony of cheers and hallelujahs filled the quiet on the hill. I looked through my binoculars and Steve and Papa had already taken their horses and made their way to camp. It was getting into the evening and the sun was starting to set in the valley. We packed the bear and made it to the horses just as the last sliver of visible light disappeared over the hills.

Back at the lodge, we were met with cheers and congratulations. Papa walked out with the group, and I moved toward him. It was impossible not to notice the tearful glimmer, like torchlight, which sparkled in his eyes.

HARRY WHITED is a lifelong Alaskan studying Journalism at the University of Kansas. Harry is regularly published in the University Daily Kansan. He enjoys returning to his home state of Alaska to enjoy the abundant outdoor opportunities with his family and friends, especially his grandfather Dr. John Erkmann.

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