

**Mary Sims**

*Public access to tidelands for personal use dipnetting in Alaska.*

**Biography**

Mary Sims has worked for the State of Alaska Department of Natural Resources for the past 26 years. In her current position as Leasing Manager for the Southcentral Region of the Alaska Division of Mining, Land and Water, Mary and a staff of six have real estate responsibilities for approximately 60 million acres of state lands within the Southcentral Region of the state, including tide and submerged lands. Of this approximate 60 million acres, 45 million are upland acres and 15 million are tide and submerged lands that include the Aleutian Chain, Prince William Sound and the Bering Sea.

The Leasing Unit is charged with duties to ensure that State Lands are used in a manner that is in compliance with the State's constitution, along with all applicable federal requirements. Issues addressed under the leasing program are wide, varied, and often unique. Mary and staff have been involved with many high profile issues throughout the Southcentral Region, including the Prince William Sound Exxon Valdez oil spill, the Amchitka Island nuclear test monitoring project, and most recently this past Decembers Selandang Ayu ship wreck near Dutch Harbor in the Aleutians.

**Abstract**

Alaskan residents enjoy a unique fishery that allows them to fill their freezers with fresh salmon. The fishery is conducted with wide mouthed, long handled nets from ocean beaches and river banks at two primary locations in South central Alaska. A total of 30,000 permits are issued for these two locations with a harvest of approximately 370,000 fish. Participants line the shore and extend their nets into the water and await the telltale "bump" indicating a migrating salmon has become tangled in their net. The nets are quickly removed from the water and the salmon is dispatched. The process is then repeated.

These popular fisheries allow residents to obtain large quantities of fish far exceeding numbers available to more common rod and reel fishermen. The popularity of the program has caused some access issues and restrictions along the privately owned uplands adjacent to these fisheries.

On the Kenai Peninsula the Kenai River is the most commonly fished location. The fishery occurs where the river empties into Cook Inlet. To manage public access the city government has adopted fees for parking, restrooms and litter patrols. Despite these management actions nearby landowners are seeking to vacate a public easement to eliminate access they say disrupts their peace and quiet.

Alaska residents living in the interior of the state head south to Chitina as the preferred fishing destination, Chitina is located approximately 260 miles NE of Anchorage and 315 miles south of Fairbanks. Fishing occurs on shorelands beneath the bed of the Copper River, A 2004 land survey determined the most popular boat launch is located largely on the private lands of the local native corporation. The corporation subsequently asserted their property rights by placing barriers along their property boundaries restricting the ability of many long time users to launch boats in the area.

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These two locations are experiencing similar problems prompting public land managers to respond with different solutions. In Chitina public land managers have in the short term marked a narrow strip of public land providing foot access around the private lands.

In the case of the Kenai beaches crowds are much larger. Public easements do exist, though vacation actions are ongoing. Government agencies are proposing more active management to address the concerns of property owners and preserving public access.

The presentation will provide an overview of this unique fishery, the desires of the private landowners and the specific measures public agencies are using to meet the challenges of providing public access while being sensitive to the concerns of private property owners.