

Full Lineup Scheduled for ComFish 2012

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Jennifer Canfield/KMXT

Alaska's largest fisheries trade show starts next week here in Kodiak. This is the 32nd year for ComFish. It's grown from being part of Crab Fest and eventually outgrew its space at the armory and the Coast Guard base. This year the trade show will be at the Kodiak Harbor Convention Center. Kodiak Chamber of Commerce Executive Director Trevor Brown says at its peak ComFish has hosted 200 vendor booths. While there will be 40 booths this year, Brown says the forums are another important element of ComFish.

"The trade show is very important but the forums is a great community service that we can offer to the fishing community and the community in general. A lot of these issues affect everyone in the community, not just the fishermen."

Laine

Welch produces the daily syndicated Fish Radio and writes the column Fish Factor. She's put together the lineup for this year's forums at ComFish. One workshop will be especially useful for those interested in participating in the North Pacific Fishery Management Council's June meeting here in Kodiak. Welch says the workshop will be a primer for people who need help understanding the complicated hearings.

"Many

people don't realize, I know this caught me by surprise a year or so ago, that 80 percent of all of Alaska's seafood landings come from federal waters meaning three to 200 miles. Eighty percent of that and the North Pacific Council oversees all of those fisheries. So it's real important that you pay attention and now Kodiak and the community will have the opportunity to engage in the council process when they're here for seven to nine days. These two groups are going to give a workshop on how to do that effectively."

Welch

is also excited about a series of forums which she calls unprecedented. The State of Alaska's large mine permitting team will present again this year. Also on the agenda is Pebble Partnership's environmental studies manager, Jane Whitsett, and vice president of public affairs, Mike Heatwole. They will give an overview of the environmental baseline data related to the proposed Pebble Mine. Following that will be the project manager for the Chuitna Coal Project, Dan Graham. He will give a summary of the status of the project which Welch says would displace 11 miles of salmon stream.

"Dan

Graham, the Chuitna Coal Project Manager will be coming to talk about what their plans are. They say they can rehabilitate and revitalize these 11 miles of stream after 25 years of strip mining and everything will be just fine, so he will explain that. And then the state large mine permitting team will be here. They came a few years ago. It was extremely successful and interesting. So after the Pebble discussion, an hour of Chuitna Coal Project in upper Cook Inlet, then the state large mine permitting team will talk about the permitting process for hard rock mines like Pebble and coal mines like Chuitna and just take all questions. I think that's going to be a real eye opener."

Welch

says some other important forum topics will be safety regulations that go into effect this year and initiatives that fishing communities in the Lower 48 are advancing to keep the smaller boats fishing.

ComFish

kicks off next Wednesday at 4 p.m. You can find the complete schedule here.