

# ALASKA DEPARTMENT OF FISH AND GAME DIVISION OF COMMERCIAL FISHERIES NEWS RELEASE



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## **2015 Kuskokwim River Salmon Fishery News Release 1** **Alaska Board of Fisheries Decisions on Kuskokwim River Proposals**

The Alaska Board of Fisheries (board) met in Anchorage from March 17–20, 2015. The Board heard and adopted three proposals for Kuskokwim Area subsistence salmon fishing which were submitted by the Alaska Department of Fish and Game (department) or the board. These new regulatory management tools provided for the operation of subsistence fishing gear. The board's Kuskokwim Subsistence Salmon Panel held a special meeting in Bethel in January and received considerable input regarding Kuskokwim River regulatory options. Additionally, the department sought and received feedback from Kuskokwim River stakeholders and the Kuskokwim River Salmon Management Working Group regarding these new management tools during public meetings held on March 26 and 27 in Bethel. To supplement the 2015 Kuskokwim River Chinook salmon outlook news release published February 24, 2015 and in further preparation for the 2015 season, the department has incorporated implementation of these new tools into 2015 preseason management strategies as follows:

### 4-Inch Gillnets

The first adopted proposal addressed the use of 4-inch mesh gillnets during times of Chinook salmon conservation. The department may now specify that 4-inch mesh gillnets be operated as set gillnets only that must be within 100 feet of the ordinary high water mark. The intent is to keep these gillnets close to the bank and out of the channel.

- Use and operation of this gear type during salmon fishing closures is only intended to provide subsistence harvest opportunity on species other than salmon such as whitefish.
- A salmon fishing closure and 4-inch or less gear restriction is effective for conserving Chinook salmon in early to mid-June before chum and sockeye salmon become abundant.
- This gear type may incidentally harvest some salmon, including Chinook salmon. Salmon incidentally harvested may be retained, but this gear may NOT be used to target salmon during closed periods.

### Salmon Harvest Opportunity

The board adopted a proposal that gives the department the authority to specify the length of gillnets used during subsistence salmon fishing periods. The intent of this proposal was to give the department the ability to have very limited periods of directed Chinook salmon subsistence harvest opportunity when a small surplus is available while still ensuring Chinook salmon conservation.

- In concert with the existing Kuskokwim River Salmon Management Plan, this additional regulatory direction is intended to provide subsistence users with a small “taste” of fish earlier in the season that many fishermen have expressed a desire for during recent years of poor Chinook salmon runs and heavy subsistence restrictions. The preseason forecast indicates surplus Chinook salmon may be available for subsistence harvest in 2015. The department intends to provide for limited directed Chinook salmon harvest opportunity after the first quarter of the Chinook salmon run has passed for escapement and upriver subsistence use and based upon inseason run assessment.
- To maintain the need for Chinook salmon conservation when early season run assessment is highly uncertain, gillnets would be restricted to 6-inch or less mesh size during these limited salmon fishing periods and allowable length of gillnets will be reduced.
- The specific dates of these periods, their duration, and specifications of allowable gear will be determined inseason based on run strength and run timing indicators.

### Fish Wheel Operations

Lastly, the board adopted a proposal allowing fish wheels to be operated with chutes during times of Chinook salmon conservation. Prior regulations only allowed the use of live boxes on fish wheels requiring live release of all Chinook salmon taken, and this option will still be available to subsistence fish wheel users.

- The department will require subsistence fish wheels to be equipped with a livebox or chute and all Chinook salmon must be returned to the water alive. This provision for live boxes and chutes is planned to be in place until such time as the need for Chinook salmon conservation is no longer warranted.
- A livebox must contain no less than 45 cubic feet of water volume while in operation. The live box must be checked at least once every six hours while in operation.
- Fish wheels equipped with chutes must be closely attended, while in operation, and all Chinook salmon must be returned to the water alive. The intent of these requirements is to allow fishermen to harvest chum and sockeye salmon while conserving Chinook salmon.

The department will continue to refine and finalize the 2015 management strategy as the fishing season approaches. Any questions regarding these regulatory changes and status of the preliminary 2015 management strategy in the Kuskokwim Area can be directed to Aaron Poetter in Anchorage at 907-267-2303 or Aaron Tiernan at 907-267-2379.

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