

FISHERIES UPDATE FOR THE WEEK OF MAY 25-JUNE 1, 2020. Report #1
Compiled by George Pappas - (907) 786-3822, George_Pappas@fws.gov Office of
Subsistence Management, USFWS.

The purpose of the weekly fisheries update is to provide the reader with an overall summary of the status of subsistence related fisheries throughout the state of Alaska. The target audience is the Federal Subsistence Board and its Staff Committee. The report was compiled with the assistance of the Federal in-season managers and OSM staff that provided weekly updated information by the close of business on Friday of the reporting week. My goal is to have the report sent by the close of business the following Monday. Web links have been included to provide additional information. You may obtain additional information on a fishery of particular interest by contacting the in-season manager, provided contacts, follow the provided web links, or contact me.

SOUTHEAST ALASKA

Sitka and Hoonah Area – Justin Koller, Forest Service, Tongass National Forest
Justin Koller, (907)747-4297 jpkoller@fs.fed.us

No report submitted for this week. Justin's first report will be submitted for next week's report.

Petersburg and Wrangell Area – Robert Cross, Forest Service, Tongass National Forest
Robert Cross, (907)772-5944 robert.cross@usda.gov

The pre-season terminal run forecast for large Chinook Salmon in the Stikine River is 13,350 fish. This forecast is below the bottom range of the 14,000 to 28,000 fish goal. Directed commercial, sport, and subsistence fisheries in the area have been closed to protect this return. Currently, all drift gillnet, purse seine and non-terminal harvest area troll fisheries are closed in the area.

The 2020 Federal Stikine River Sockeye Salmon subsistence fishery will begin June 21. The 2020 pre-season Sockeye Salmon forecast is 103,400 fish, with 64,500 Tahltan and 38,900 Mainstem fish. The 2019 Sockeye Salmon forecast was 90,000 fish, which included 66,000 Tahltan Lake and 24,000 Mainstem Sockeye. The escapement objective for Tahltan bound Sockeye Salmon is 18,000 and 30,000 for Mainstem fish. The low Mainstem return resulted in an in-season closure of the 2019 Federal subsistence Sockeye Salmon fishery on July 22, 2019. The 2020 forecast is above the escapement objectives and a season closure is not anticipated.

In response to COVID-19, the Petersburg and Wrangell District offices have reached out to the 2019 Federal subsistence fish permit holders, by phone and email, to arrange for the delivery of 2020 permits by mail. Subsistence harvesters have also been informed of the temporary method of issuing permits, and their Federal subsistence points of contact for the Tongass National Forest through a Forest Service news release. A total of 63 Stikine River Federal subsistence salmon permits (FFSE07) and 17 General Fish permits (FFSE04) have already been issued for residents in the Wrangell and Petersburg Districts.

Yakutat, Juneau, and Admiralty areas of Northern Southeast Alaska - Jake Musslewhite (907-789-6256; jgmusslewhite@fs.fed.us), Forest Service, Tongass National Forest

No report submitted for this week. Jake will submit first summary next week.

Prince of Wales and Ketchikan District Area – Jeff Reeves, Forest Service, Tongass National Forest. (907) 826-1649 jreeves@fs.fed.us

The 2019 subsistence salmon fishery for Southeast Alaska and Yakutat areas had 226 permits issued for the fishery. To date, 90% of the permits have been returned reporting a harvest of 7 Chinook, 9 Chum, 352 Coho, 150 Pink, and 386 Sockeye Salmon. Also reported were 4 Steelhead Trout, 3 Rainbow Trout, 34 Cutthroat Trout and 18 Dolly Varden. 71 permits have currently been issued for the 2020 season

The 2019 Prince of Wales/Kosciusko winter subsistence steelhead fishery ended on February 29th. Access was limited during this fishery due to snow levels. A total of 18 permits were issued during the fishery. All permits were received back and a total of 2 Steelhead were reported harvested.

The 2020 Prince of Wales/Kosciusko spring subsistence steelhead fishery ended on May 31st. A total of 38 permits were issued to Prince of Wales Island residents during this fishery. Permits from this fishery being are starting to be returned and are not due back until June 15. The total reported harvest to date is 3 Steelhead Trout.

Although Chinook Salmon abundance has been determined to be low this year, hatchery production Chinook Salmon are present in the local Craig and Klawock area are being harvested by subsistence users fishing under sport fishing regulations at this time.

Although a couple of Prince of Wales Island streams have June returns of Sockeye Salmon, most subsistence users are in preparation for subsistence harvest in July.

There are currently some commercial Chinook troll fisheries occurring within terminal harvest areas in the Craig and Ketchikan areas. While the Craig area opened on May 1, the Ketchikan area harvest areas just recently opened on June 1. Harvest to date is 1076 Chinook from the Craig terminal harvest area. The Kendrick Bay terminal seine fishery for Chum Salmon will begin soon.

The District 1/Unuk River Eulachon subsistence fishery was closed pre-season in February 2020. A USFS monitoring crew, accompanied by a Ketchikan Indian Community personnel, attempted to access the Unuk River by boat on March 13 but were unable to access the site due to poor weather. Follow up aerial surveys were initiated.

Low water conditions provided for excellent visibility however, limited Eulachon presence was noted during the surveys. Continued poor marine weather, along with additional COVID-19 directives, resulted in cancellation of further efforts to access the site by boat. Local State and Federal managers, as well as those in Canada and Washington continue to manage Eulachon extra-conservatively as they believe the populations have not recovered enough to provide fishing opportunity. Managers do not know how long this trend will continue. Based on the documented declines in ocean

conditions affecting salmon and other species, it is assumed recovery may take some time.



School of Eulachon in Upper Landing Slough side of Unuk River during March 16, 2020 aerial survey (Jeff Reeves photo).

Southeast Alaska Web Links

Tongass National Forest News Room <http://www.fs.usda.gov/news/tongass/news-events>

Federal Subsistence Fisheries Regulations for Southeastern Alaska Area
http://www.doi.gov/subsistence/regulation/fish_shell/upload/Southeast.pdf

ADF&G Sport and Personal Use Fishing News Release and Emergency Order Link
<http://www.adfg.alaska.gov/sf/EONR/index.cfm?ADFG=region.R1>

ADF&G Commercial Fisheries News Release and Emergency Order Link
<http://www.adfg.alaska.gov/index.cfm?adfg=cfnews.main>

Weekly ADF&G Sport Fishing Reports for Southeast Alaska
<http://www.adfg.alaska.gov/sf/FishingReports/index.cfm?ADFG=R1.home>

Statewide ADF&G Fish counts
<http://www.adfg.alaska.gov/sf/FishCounts/>

SOUTHCENTRAL ALASKA

PRINCE WILLIAM SOUND – COPPER RIVER

Copper River, 6/1/2020 Update – Dave Sarafin, Wrangell-St. Elias National Park and Preserve, (907) 822-7281, dave_sarafin@nps.gov

In January of 2020, the Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ADFG) provided preseason forecasts of 60,000 Copper River Chinook salmon and 1,422,000 wild stock Copper River sockeye salmon. Relative to recent 10-year averages, these forecasts are 20% above average for Chinook salmon and 33% below average for sockeye salmon. In early May, Federal and State fisheries managers met to discuss this forecast, anticipated early season management strategies, and plans for maintaining communications with local stakeholders regarding the run strength assessments and management actions throughout the season.

The commercial fishery in the Copper River District has been limited in response to low numbers of sockeye salmon observed in run strength indices. Three 12-hour open commercial fishing periods occurred during the month of May. Total commercial harvest reported for the season was 39,848 sockeye salmon and 4,919 Chinook salmon. The total projected sockeye salmon harvest for the three periods was 101,040 fish. A 12-hour commercial fishing period was announced for Monday, June 1.

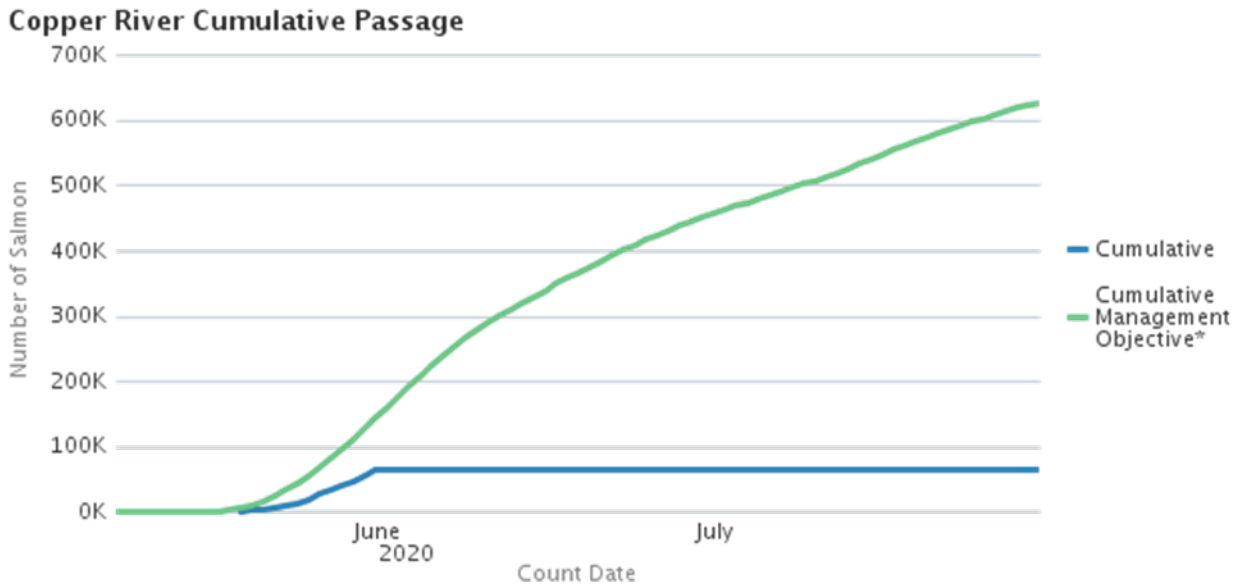
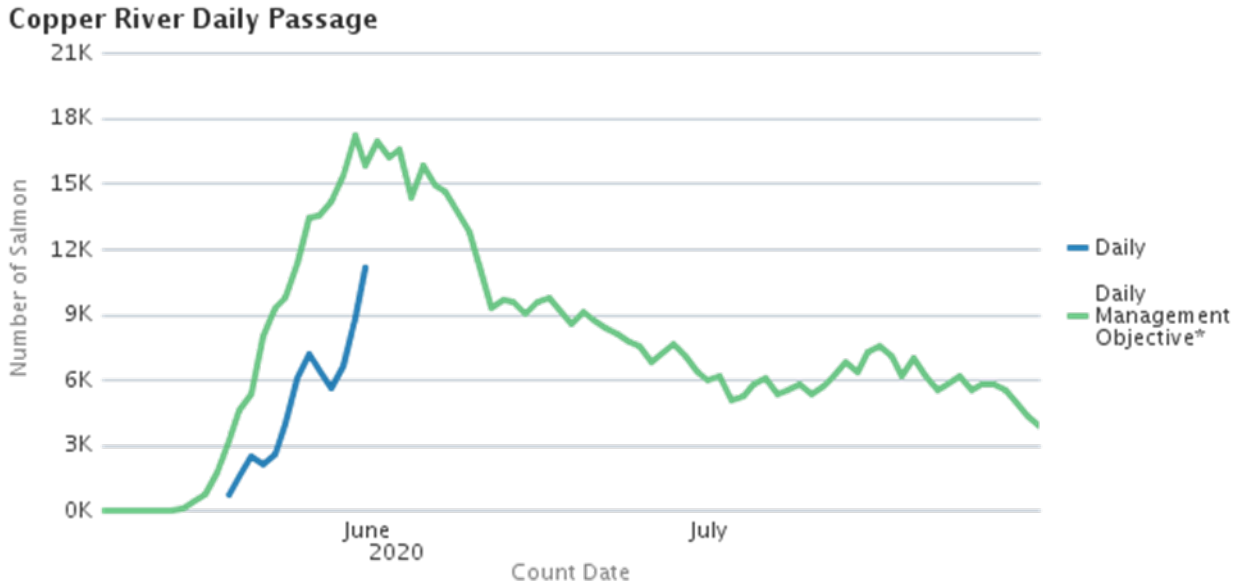
The ADFG sonar at Miles Lake (located just downstream of the Million Dollar Bridge in the Copper River) began recording salmon passage on May 19. As of May 31, 65,729 salmon have been estimated migrating upstream for the season. This estimate is 45% of the cumulative management objective of 144,797 for this date. A daily estimate of 11,144 salmon migrated by the sonar on May 31.

The Native Village of Eyak Baird Canyon fish wheels captured and tagged 941 Chinook salmon through May 31. The upriver fish wheels at Canyon Creek have captured and examined 139 Chinook salmon through May 31, of which, 10 were recaptured fish that had been tagged at the downstream wheels.

Performance in the commercial fishery and in river sonar salmon passage estimates are the primary early season assessments of the sockeye salmon return to the Copper River. Based on long-term average run timing and harvests, both indicators are well below the expected levels for this date of the season. The overall return could be very weak or simply delayed in run timing. Federal managers will continue to monitor run strength indices to evaluate the need for appropriate fisheries management actions in the Copper River Drainage. No Federal Special Actions have been issued by the in-season manager this season.

The State subsistence fishery in the Glennallen Subdistrict will open on June 1. The State personal use fishery in the Chitina Subdistrict is scheduled to open for a 24-hour fishing period on June 7.

2020 Upper Copper River Salmon Passage at Miles Lake Sonar through May 31



Source:

http://www.adfg.alaska.gov/index.cfm?adfg=commercialbyareacopperriver.salmon_escapement

The Federal subsistence fisheries in the Chitina Subdistrict, the Glennallen Subdistrict, and the Batzulnetas area opened on May 15 and are expected to remain open through September 30. Through the Office of Subsistence Management (OSM) Federal subsistence permit website, one hundred and ten (110) Chitina Subdistrict permits, two hundred and twelve (212) Glennallen Subdistrict permits, and zero (0) Batzulnetas area permits have been issued to date. With the park offices and visitor contact stations closed to the public due to public health advisories and staffing delays related to Covid-19, the

permitting process has been adapted to ensure the safety of permit applicants and park staff.

By regulation, the Federal subsistence fisheries of the Upper Copper River District and the Batzulnetas area are scheduled to be open from May 15 through September 30. Prior to 2018, regulatory Federal Special Actions had been taken in the Chitina Subdistrict to initially delay the starting date and then periodically open and close the fishery following the schedule for the State personal use fishery. In 2018, after an initial delay of the season from May 15 until June 1, continuous fishing was allowed. In 2019, the season was open from May 15 through September 30, with a continuous fishing schedule maintained throughout the season. The 2019 season was the first season that Federal subsistence fishing in this subdistrict was not delayed or restricted by Special Action. Use and harvest in the Chitina Subdistrict by Federally qualified fishers did increase during the 2018 and 2019 seasons, however, the level of harvest was still very low compared to other upriver fisheries and this harvest likely displaced harvest that would have occurred by the same users in the adjacent Glennallen Subdistrict. Federal managers have received only positive feedback regarding the additional opportunity.

With funding through the Fisheries Resource Monitoring Program (FRMP), Wrangell-St. Elias National Park and Preserve is again planning to operate the Tanada Creek salmon weir located at Batzulnetas. Installation of the weir is scheduled to begin in mid-June.

Links:

ADF&G Miles Lake daily sonar estimates

http://www.adfg.alaska.gov/index.cfm?adfg=commercialbyareacopperriver.salmon_escapement

NVE's Chinook Escapement Monitoring project in the Copper River

<http://eyak.fishscan.com/Summary/DailySummary.aspx>

ADF&G Copper River Inseason Commercial Harvest Estimates

<http://www.adfg.alaska.gov/index.cfm?adfg=commercialbyareacopperriver.harvestsummary>

ADF&G Emergency Orders and News Releases

<http://www.adfg.alaska.gov/sf/EONR/index.cfm?ADFG=area.list&Year=2018&AreaID=33>

**PWS and Copper River Delta – Milo Burcham, Chugach National Forest, Cordova.
6 June 2017.**

(907) 424-4759 mburcham@fs.fed.us

No report submitted, expect first report next week.

**COOK INLET AREA – Jeff Anderson, Field Supervisor, Kenai Fish and Wildlife
Field Office (907) 260-0132 Jeffry_Anderson@fws.gov**

No report submitted, expect first report next week.

Kodiak Island Area – Michael Brady, Refuge Manager, - Kodiak NWR

(907) 487-0226 or michael_brady@fws.gov or Kevin Van Hatten (907) 487-0230
Kevin_VanHatten@fws.gov

No report submitted, expect first report next week.

Federal Subsistence Fisheries Regulations for Kodiak Area
<http://alaska.fws.gov/asm/pdf/fishregs13/kodiak.pdf>

**BRISTOL BAY, CHIGNIK, ALASKA PENINSULA, and ALEUTIAN ISLANDS –
Jonathon Gerken Fisheries Branch Chief Anchorage Fish and Wildlife Field Office**
(907) 271-2776 Jonathon_Gerken@fws.gov

FISHERIES UPDATE FOR THE WEEK OF June 1, 2020.

**BRISTOL BAY, CHIGNIK, ALASKA PENINSULA, and ALEUTIAN ISLANDS –
Jonathon Gerken Fisheries Branch Chief Anchorage Fish and Wildlife Field Office**

These areas support abundant returns of salmon, particularly Sockeye Salmon; as well as some of the largest commercial fisheries for salmon in Alaska. All of the assessments of salmon returns are conducted by the Alaska Department of Fish and Game, and provide the basis for any inseason assessment and management. None of the adjustments in commercial fishing management throughout any of these areas are anticipated to affect subsistence fishing in Federally-managed waters.

The Alaska Department of Fish and Game issues information for COVID-19: Under Alaska's Health Mandates 10, 17, and 18, Subsistence fishing is Essential and is part of Alaska's Essential Services and Critical Infrastructure. Subsistence fishermen should ensure that all travel and other activities follow protocols in Alaska COVID-19 Health Mandates. COVID-19 Health Mandates may be found here:
<https://gov.alaska.gov/home/covid19-healthmandates/>

Bristol Bay:

The 2020 Bristol Bay Sockeye Salmon run is forecast to be approximately 48 million fish for the nine river systems: Kvichak, Alagnak, Naknek, Egegik, Ugashik, Wood, Igushik, Nushagak, and Togiak. Based on the forecast 36 million fish are available for commercial inshore harvest. The Alaska Department of Fish and Game has strategies in place for all mixed stock districts to address differential run strength should that occur. Gillnets are the primary gear used for most subsistence fishing for salmon. A permit is required for subsistence harvest of salmon.

The commercial salmon season in Bristol Bay opens June 1 by regulation and commercial fishing openings have been announced. Fishing in eastside districts and Togiak will be allowed using a weekly schedule that will vary by district. The schedules

are in place to balance fishing opportunity with escapement in the early part of the season, particularly for Chinook Salmon. As each run develops and Sockeye Salmon run characteristics become defined within individual districts, fishing time will be adjusted accordingly. In the Nushagak District, management of the Chinook Salmon fishery will govern fishing time in the early part of the season, followed by directed Sockeye Salmon management as abundance dictates.

The Sockeye Salmon sustainable escapement goals (SEG) for Bristol Bay systems are:

Escapement Goals:

Kvichak	SEG = 2,000,000 – 10,000,000
Alagnak	SEG = 320,000 minimum
Naknek	SEG = 800,000 – 2,000,000
Egegik	SEG = 800,000 – 2,000,000
Ugashik	SEG = 500,000 – 1,400,000
Wood River	SEG = 700,000 – 1,800,000
Igushik	SEG = 150,000 – 400,000
Nushagak	SEG = 370,000 – 900,000
Nushagak	SEG = 55,000 – 270,000 Chinook Salmon
Togiak	SEG = 150,000 – 270,000

Chignik:

The 2020 Sockeye Salmon forecasted run size for the Chignik River Management Area (CMA) is 1,296,000 fish with a harvest estimate of 586,000 Sockeye Salmon. The CMA is composed of five fishing districts: Eastern, Central, Chignik Bay, Western, and Perryville. In June, the first commercial fishing period in the Chignik Bay, Central, and Eastern districts and the Inner Castle Cape Subsection of the Western District may occur after approximately 20,000 Sockeye Salmon have escaped or are expected to escape into the Chignik River. The Chignik River Chinook Salmon harvest is dependent upon the amount of commercial fishing time for Sockeye Salmon in July. The commercial harvest 10 year average is approximately 7,000 fish. The ADF&G will host a commercial fishing stakeholder meeting on June 3. The Federal inseason manager and OSM will not host in person stakeholder meetings due to the restrictions in place for COVID-19.

Escapement Goals:

Early Run Sockeye Salmon/ Black Lake	BEG = 350,000 – 450,000
Late Run Sockeye Salmon/ Chignik Lake	SEG = 200,000 – 400,000
-In-river Goal	-10,000 in August and 10,000 in September in addition to minimum escapement objectives
Chinook Salmon	BEG = 1,300 – 2,700
Pink Salmon – Even year	SEG = 170,000 – 280,000
Chum Salmon	SEG = 45,000 – 110,000

Alaska Peninsula:

There are numerous salmon stocks and fisheries throughout the Alaska Peninsula, as well as the Aleutian Islands. The largest fisheries are managed under management plans. Management objectives vary by district and time. Several Sockeye Salmon escapements (mostly on the north peninsula) are monitored with weirs including Nelson, Bear, Sandy, Ilnik, McLees, and Orzinski systems. Preseason forecasts are made only for the Nelson River and late-run (post July 31) Bear Lake stocks. The 2020 Sockeye Salmon run size projections are 362,000 fish for the Nelson River and 408,000 fish for late-run Bear Lake. A permit is required for subsistence harvest of salmon.

Escapement Goals:

Nelson River	BEG = 97,000 – 219,000
Late-run Bear Lake	BEG = 117,000 – 195,000

Aleutian Islands.

All fisheries are forecast to meet escapement goals and provide harvest opportunity.

Federal Subsistence Fisheries Regulations for Bristol Bay Area
http://www.doi.gov/subsistence/regulation/fish_shell/upload/Bristol.pdf

Federal Subsistence Fisheries Regulations for Chignik Area
http://www.doi.gov/subsistence/regulation/fish_shell/upload/chignik.pdf

Southcentral Alaska Web Links

Federal Subsistence Management Fisheries News Releases
<http://www.doi.gov/subsistence/news/fishing/index.cfm>

ADF&G Sport and Personal Use Fishing News Release and Emergency Order link
<http://www.adfg.alaska.gov/index.cfm?adfg=fishingSportFishingInfo.R2>

ADF&G Commercial Fisheries News Release and Emergency Order Link
<http://www.adfg.alaska.gov/index.cfm?adfg=cfnews.main>

Weekly ADF&G Sport Fishing Reports for Southcentral Alaska
<http://www.adfg.alaska.gov/sf/FishingReports/index.cfm?ADFG=R2.Home>

Statewide ADF&G Fish counts:
<http://www.adfg.alaska.gov/sf/FishCounts/>

Yukon River – Gerald Maschmann, Fish Biologist USFWS Fairbanks Office.
(907) 456-0406, Gerald_Maschmann@fws.gov

The Emmonak Field Office will be **closed** for summer management activities due to COVID-19 concerns. Essential services will be provided to fishermen online and over the phone.

Summer Season Outlook and Management Strategies

The 2020 drainage-wide Chinook salmon outlook is for a run size of 144,000 to 220,000 fish. This would be a slightly smaller run size than 2019. A cautionary approach will be taken early in the season, and management strategies will be adjusted based on run assessment information as fish enter the river. Assessment project and management updates will be given on the **YR DFA weekly teleconferences** each **Tuesday at 1:00 pm at the following number: 1-800-315-6338, Passcode: 98566#.**

- The sport fishery for Chinook salmon will begin the season closed (effective May 11) throughout the U.S. portion of the Yukon River drainage, excluding the Tanana River drainage. Chinook salmon may not be retained or possessed. Management actions for the Tanana River drainage will be announced in early June.
- As Chinook salmon enter each district, subsistence salmon fishing will be on a **reduced regulatory schedule and restricted to 6-inch or smaller mesh gillnets.**
- If inseason assessment indicates a poorer than anticipated run, subsistence fishing periods may be cancelled (similar to last year). If confidence is high that the Chinook salmon run is near the upper end of the outlook and escapement goals are likely to be met, the use of 7.5-inch gillnets will be considered.
- **Fishermen in District 5 should expect to have gillnets restricted to 6-inch or smaller mesh throughout the summer season.** This is an effort to provide harvest opportunity while protecting Chinook salmon bound for Canada.
- As a reminder, subsistence fishermen may use dipnets during open subsistence periods in all districts. This gear allows fishermen to harvest Chinook and chum salmon and may be an effective means for targeting higher quality chum and releasing unwanted fish.
- Dependent on the ability of the processor to operate safely, commercial fishing for summer chum salmon may begin with selective gear (dip nets and beach seine with required live-release of all Chinook). Openings in District 1 and 2 will be dependent on processor capacity.

Assessment Information

According to Alaska-Pacific River Forecast Center, ice-out on the lower Yukon River at the village of Emmonak occurred on May 14, earlier than the historical median of May 20. Additionally, Bering Sea ice retreated off the coast early, leaving the Yukon River mouth ice free with only minor spring flooding. Climate modeling provided by NOAA, ADF&G, and AOOS are anticipating an early to normal entry timing for Chinook Salmon based on a warm Bering Sea spring. A few subsistence fishermen in the lower Yukon River area have been fishing since ice out and are reporting high water and high debris loads. The first report of a subsistence caught Chinook Salmon within the Yukon River

was on May 27. The first Summer Chum Salmon was caught on May 28. The Lower Yukon test fishing (LYTF) project began on May 29 with drift fishing for Chinook and Summer Chum Salmon. Set netting will begin when driftwood and debris clears out of the river. With the ADF&G Emmonak management office closed this season, the LYTF will be operated by local fishermen employed by the Yukon Drainage Fisheries Development Association (YDFDA) with coordination by ADF&G through their Anchorage and Fairbanks offices. The Middle Mouth site of the LYTF will be canceled this year due to safety concerns with the COVID-19, however the Big Eddy site will continue. The Pilot Station sonar is expected to begin full operations on June 5. At this time, it is too early to assess the overall strength of either the Chinook or Chum Salmon runs. The average first quarter point in the LYTF for Chinook Salmon is June 16 for the years 1989-2019. The average first quarter point in the LYTF for Summer Chum Salmon is June 19 for the years 2001-2019.

Management Actions

Until more assessment data become available, management decisions will be consistent with the preseason projections. At this time, subsistence salmon fishing in the Yukon River drainage is open 24 hours per day, seven days per week, with 7.5-inch or smaller mesh gillnets. Subsistence salmon fishing in the southern Coastal District and District 1 should expect subsistence salmon fishing restrictions the first week of June. The personal use fishery in Subdistrict 6-C is open on its regulatory schedule of two, 42-hour periods per week restricted to 7.5-inch or less mesh gillnet gear and fish wheels. During subsistence salmon fishing closures, gillnets that have mesh size 4-inches or smaller not exceeding 60 feet in length may be used to target non-Salmon species. The sequential activation of subsistence fishing restrictions will continue in all districts as the Chinook Salmon migrate upstream.

Consultation

Extensive public outreach and consultation was performed during the fall of 2019 and spring of 2020 to inform and seek input from Yukon River fishermen and stakeholders. Run outlook and possible management strategies were discussed at Federal RAC meetings and State AC meetings, the Yukon River Panel meeting, and at the annual Yukon River Drainage Fishermen's Association (YRDFA) Board meeting. Due to uncertainties surrounding the COVID-19 pandemic, managers began holding weekly management meetings in April. The Executive Director of the Yukon River Inter-Tribal Fish Commission participated in some of these meetings and provided vital feedback from local fishermen to the managers. On May 12, a pre-season planning teleconference lead by YRDFA was held that brought together representatives from most Alaskan Yukon River communities to discuss the run outlook and management options.

KUSKOKWIM RIVER

In Season Manager – Vernon “Ray” Born, Refuge Manager, Yukon Delta National Wildlife Refuge Contact Vernon_Born@fws.gov (907) 543-3151 or Aaron Mosses Aaron_Moses@fws.gov (907) 545-3252

No weekly summary submitted. Aaron will submit first report next week.

Yukon-Kuskokwim-Interior Alaska Web Links

Federal Subsistence Management Fisheries News Releases:

<http://www.doi.gov/subsistence/news/fishing/index.cfm>

Federal Subsistence Fisheries Regulations for Yukon–Northern Area

http://www.doi.gov/subsistence/regulation/fish_shell/upload/Yukon.pdf

Federal Subsistence Fisheries Regulations for Kuskokwim Area

http://www.doi.gov/subsistence/regulation/fish_shell/upload/Kusko.pdf

ADF&G Sport and Personal Use Fishing News Release and Emergency Order link:

<http://www.adfg.alaska.gov/sf/EONR/index.cfm?ADFG=region.R3>

ADF&G Commercial Fisheries News Release and Emergency Order Link:

<http://www.adfg.alaska.gov/index.cfm?adfg=cfnews.main>

Weekly ADF&G Sport Fishing Reports for Interior Alaska:

<http://www.adfg.alaska.gov/sf/FishingReports/index.cfm?ADFG=R3.home>

Statewide ADF&G Fish counts:

<http://www.adfg.alaska.gov/sf/FishCounts/>

Northwest Alaska – Ken Adkisson, National Park Service, Nome.

(907) 443-6104 Ken_Adkisson@nps.gov

There is still considerable pack ice north of the Seward Peninsula and Bering Strait, and many of the more northern communities are still engaged in marine mammal hunting (see photos below). However much of the waters south of Bering Strait are rapidly becoming ice free although there are still some areas of pack ice. Many residents are beginning to look forward to a good summer of fishing.



Near shore ice conditions at Shishmaref, AK 05/26/2020
Photo by Curtis Nayokpuk



Walrus near Gambell, AK 05/25/2020
Photo by Clarence Irrigoo, Jr.

The area covered in these weekly Fisheries Updates for Northwest Alaska include two federal subsistence management regions (the Seward Peninsula and the Northwest Arctic)

and three State of Alaska districts (Norton Sound, Port Clarence and Kotzebue. The Seward Peninsula Region (Federal) contains two of the State districts: Norton Sound and Port Clarence. In turn, the Norton Sound District includes six numbered subdistricts: Unalakleet (6), Shaktoolik (5), Norton Bay (4), Elim (3), Golovin (2) and Nome (1). The Port Clarence District also includes the Pilgrim River and Salmon Lake. The Northwest Arctic Region contains one district (Kotzebue). The districts and subdistricts are based on the Alaska Department of Fish and Game organizational structure for the management of commercial and subsistence fisheries. Two other references a reader might encounter are Northern Norton Sound and Southern Norton Sound. Northern Norton Sound includes all marine and fresh waters of Subdistricts 1 through 3 (Nome, Golovin and Elim) as well as the Cape Wooley area of the Norton Sound District, and the Port Clarence District. Southern Norton Sound waters include the Norton Bay Subdistrict beginning at Bald Head, between Elim and Koyuk, to the southern Norton Sound District boundary at Point Romanof. This area includes Subdistricts 4 (Norton Bay), 5 (Shaktoolik) and 6 (Unalakleet). Report updates will generally begin with the southernmost areas, then move progressively northwards.

Since we are so far north, our commercial fishing seasons tend to trail behind those in the more southerly areas so that we currently are seeing very little activity. Therefore we will begin this year's reports with snapshot summaries of the 2019 season followed by the 2020 season forecasts for a comparative starting point. As the season progresses and activity increases we will add in new events.

Norton Sound District

2019 Season Summary:

Commercial Salmon Fisheries

Well above average runs of chum, pink, sockeye and coho salmon highlighted the 2019 fishery. The coho salmon commercial harvest was the fourth highest in history and was a top 5 harvest for the third year in a row. The chum salmon commercial harvest was the third highest in the last 35 years. The sockeye salmon commercial harvest, although a small portion of the overall harvest, was the highest in history at nearly 7,000 fish. The pink salmon run was one of the greatest runs for an odd-numbered year and pink salmon escapements were records at several salmon counting projects. However, there was little interest from the buyer in purchasing pink salmon. No commercial fishing targeting king salmon was allowed but the run was much better than expected and the harvest of nearly 1,400 fish was the highest in 20 years. This summary should be considered preliminary and will be updated in subsequent reports.

Subsistence Salmon Fisheries

Subsistence salmon fishers in the Port Clarence District and Subdistricts 1–3 (Nome, Golovin, and Elim) were required to possess a subsistence permit for each household that fished in these locations. The permits identify the type of gear used, and the bag limit, that is specific to each body of water. In addition, the permit contains a catch calendar where the

permit holder records the catch of each species of fish for each day fished. If the subsistence fishers have filled their harvest limit in one river they can fish in another river.

The only places where there are limits on subsistence salmon harvest are in the Nome Subdistrict, and Pilgrim River and Salmon Lake in the Port Clarence District. Salmon limits have been in place in Nome Subdistrict since 1985 but have been removed for most rivers with the improving chum salmon runs in recent years. Subsistence permits are important to management because they identify users and harvests, but the actual catch information cannot be compiled in most circumstances until well after the season when the permits are returned. In southern Norton Sound, villages are surveyed to estimate the subsistence harvest and likewise this information is not available until well after the season

2020 Salmon Outlook

Salmon outlooks and harvest projections for the 2020 salmon season are based on qualitative assessments of parent-year escapements, sibling relationships, subjective determinations of freshwater overwintering and ocean survival, and in the case of the commercial fishery, the projections of local market conditions. Continuing the trends seen over the past three years there were high coho and chum salmon harvests with last year's commercial coho salmon harvest, the fourth highest on record, and the chum salmon harvest, the third highest harvest since 1983. The department expects better coho and chum salmon runs in 2020, and a Chinook salmon run like last year. The regular subsistence fishing schedule from mid-June until mid-July in Shaktoolik and Unalakleet Subdistricts is expected to be in effect for Chinook salmon with no additional subsistence restrictions. No commercial fishing for Chinook salmon is expected but incidentally caught Chinook salmon in commercial fisheries will be allowed to be sold. Chum salmon runs are expected to be well above average and the harvest is expected to be 180,000 to 230,000 fish. The department expects the pink salmon run to be well above average for an even-numbered year, but harvest will depend on buyer interest and could range from 25,000 to 75,000 fish. No pink salmon directed fishing periods would be expected because of buyer interest in more valuable salmon species and the pink salmon harvest would likely be an incidental harvest only. However, the department does have the authority to increase fishing net aggregate length from 100 fathoms to 200 fathoms if there were a pink salmon directed fishery. The coho salmon run is expected to be well above average based on ocean survival conditions in recent years and the commercial harvest is expected to be 200,000 to 250,000 fish. In the Port Clarence District, the department expects the commercial fishery to remain closed because of a lack of buyer interest despite the in-river goal of 30,000 sockeye salmon at Pilgrim River expected to be reached. Subsistence fishing closures in the Pilgrim River are not expected, but the department will limit sockeye salmon subsistence harvest to 25 fish initially and will increase or waive the limit if the run is like the last several years.

2020 commercial Herring Season Opened

Herring have been reported off the beach south of Shaktoolik. Norton Sound Seafoods Products expressed an interest in buying 75 tons of herring bait. Since the quota is over 5,000 tons, ADF&G announced a commercial opening effective noon Tuesday, May 19 through June 30.

Kotzebue District

The Kotzebue District includes all the waters from Cape prince of Wales to point hope. The district is divided into three subdistricts. Subdistrict 2, located near the mouth of the Noatak River is closed to commercial fishing by regulation. Most commercial fishing occurs in Subdistrict 1 which is subdivided into six statistical areas to help managers determine catch locations. Chum salmon is the most abundant anadromous fish species although king salmon, pink salmon, silver salmon and sockeye salmon occur in lesser numbers as do Dolly Varden and sheefish.

2019 Season Summary:

The commercial salmon season opened on July 10 and closed by regulation after August 31. The last day the buyers bought fish was August 30. Commercial fishing was allowed six days a week with no fishing on Saturday due to the lack of plane availability to ship the catch out on the following day, and to allow a one-day window for fish passage to provide for more opportunity to subsistence users. From July 10 through July 12, fishing was open for 10 hours daily; from July 14 through August 2, fishing was open for 12 hours daily; from August 4 through August 14, fishing was open for 14 hours daily; from August 16 through August 30, fishing was open 12 hours daily. During the season, the earliest fishing opened was at 8 a.m. and the latest fishing closed was at 10 p.m. Commercial fishing periods increased to 14 hours daily once a floating processor vessel arrived and restrictions to fishing time due to air cargo capacity were unnecessary.

In the commercial salmon fishery, gear is limited to set nets with an aggregate of no more than 150 fathoms per permit holder. Permit holders generally operate with one end on or near shore and they also set in deeper channels from the mud flats farther out from shore. Most gear used in the district is 5-3/4 inch to 6-inch stretch mesh gillnet.

There were three buyers during the season, Copper River Seafoods (CRS), Maniilaq dba Arctic Circle Wild Salmon and Pacific Star. CRS and Pacific Star were the buyers throughout the season. Maniilaq bought gilled and gutted chum salmon from July 22 until August 9. The commercial harvest of 493,295 chum salmon was the seventh highest harvest on record. In addition, 16 king salmon and 29 sockeye salmon were sold. No chum salmon were reported kept for personal use, but 151 Chinook salmon, 475 sockeye salmon, 2,767 pink salmon, 111 coho salmon, 936 Dolly Varden, 191 sheefish, 16 whitefish and 1 pike were reported in the catch and kept for personal use.

The 2019 harvest was the fourth time in the last five years the harvest exceeded 400,000 chum salmon but was only the tenth time in history for a harvest that high. There were 93 permit holders that sold fish in 2019, slightly less than last year when 95 permit holders sold fish (Figure 1 and Table 1) and was the fifth highest permit holder participation in 25 years. The highest daily fishing effort occurred on July 29 when 61 permit holders fished.

A total of 4,004,727 pounds of chum salmon (average weight 8.1 lbs.) was sold at an average of \$0.38 per pound. This year's average price was 5% lower than the 2018 average price of \$0.40 per pound. The total exvessel value was \$1,538,976 and was down nearly one-third from last year but was only the fifth time since 1988 that the value was over one million

dollars. The historical average exvessel value of fishery was \$713,912 without adjusting for inflation.

Primary fishery management objectives are to provide adequate chum salmon escapement throughout the duration of the commercial fishery to ensure sustainability of the fishery and to provide for the subsistence priority. A test fishery conducted on the Kobuk River provides the only inseason escapement index of the Kotzebue Sound District. This year's chum salmon cumulative daily CPUE index at the department test fish project on Kobuk River near Kiana was 1,508 and was the 11th highest in the 27-year project history. No aerial surveys were conducted in 2019.

No subsistence salmon surveys are scheduled. Subsistence harvesters reported difficulty in fishing this season because of high water conditions but that there were enough chum salmon in both the Kobuk River and Noatak River for subsistence needs.

2020 Salmon Season Outlook

The outlook for the 2020 season is based on the parent-year escapements and returning age classes observed in the commercial fishery and in the test fish samples from the Kobuk River last year. The 5-year-old component of the run is expected to be above average based on the 4-year-old return in 2019. The 4-year-old component of the run is expected to be average based on the 3-year-old return last year. The 3-year-old and 6-year-old age classes are much smaller components of the run and are expected to be average. The commercial harvest is expected to fall within the range of 450,000 to 650,000 chum salmon. Two major buyers are expected in July and a low volume value added buyer has expressed interest in buying fish in August.

No subsistence fishing restrictions are expected in 2020.

Federal Subsistence Fisheries Regulations for the Kotzebue Area
<http://alaska.fws.gov/asm/pdf/fishregs11/norton.pdf>