

FISHERIES UPDATE FOR THE WEEK OF May 23-29, 2016. Report #1
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 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

Klag Bay - The Sitka Tribe of Alaska operates the Sockeye Salmon monitoring weir at Klag Bay which is scheduled to be operational the last week in June. In 2015, approximately 3,304 Sockeye Salmon migrated past the weir while an estimated 1,344 Sockeye Salmon were harvested in the marine terminal area subsistence and sport fisheries. Subsistence harvest accounted for over 99% of terminal area harvest.

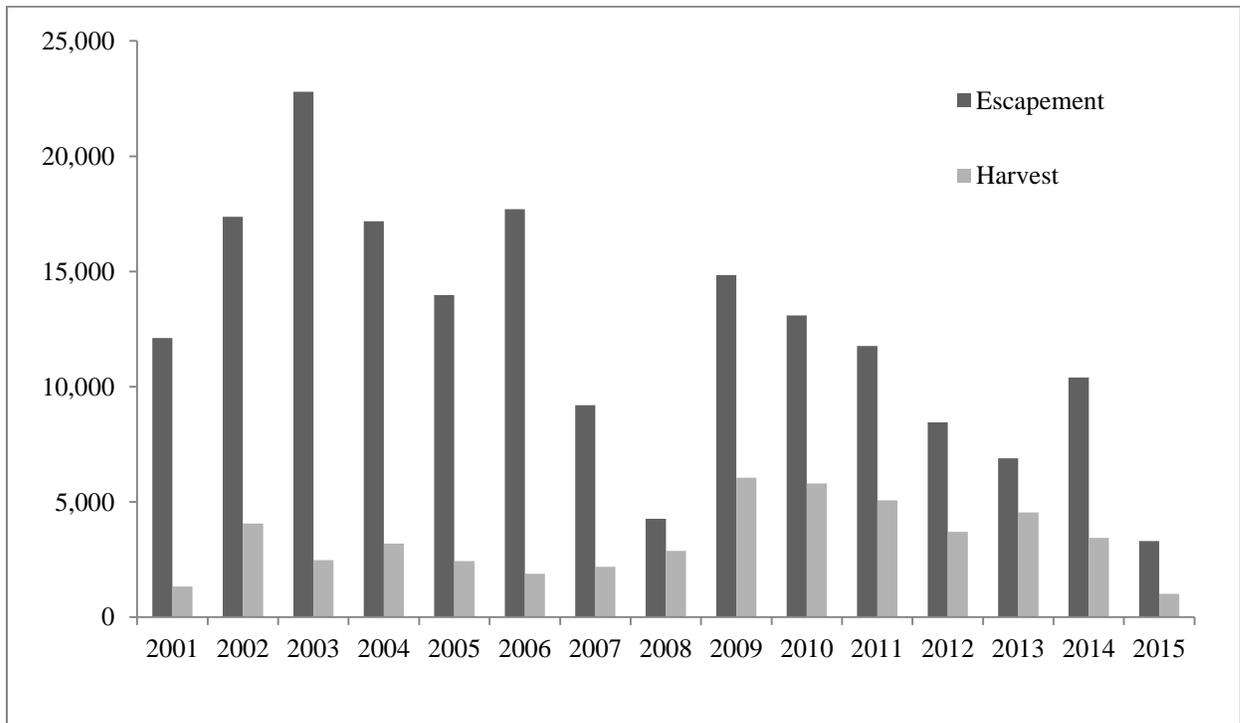


Figure 1. Escapement and harvest of Sockeye Salmon at Klag Bay, 2001-2015 (Sitka Tribe of Alaska).

Redoubt Lake - The Forest Service operates the Redoubt Lake weir and video-equipped net weir which are scheduled to be operational in mid-June. In 2015, an estimated total of 13,379 Sockeye Salmon passed through the weir into Redoubt Lake. In accordance with the Redoubt Lake Management Plan, the individual/household subsistence Sockeye Salmon possession limit remained 10 and the individual/household subsistence Sockeye Salmon annual limit remained 50 throughout the season. These limits were based on an in-season model prediction of about 11,500 Sockeye Salmon returning. The preliminary subsistence Sockeye Salmon harvest was 402.

Wrangell/Petersburg Area

Stat Week 22, ending May 28, 2016

The 2016 pre-season terminal run size forecast for large (>30") Stikine River Chinook Salmon is 33,900 fish. The resulting U.S. directed fishery allowable catch is 1,100 large Chinook Salmon. An allowable catch of this magnitude allowed limited directed commercial fisheries with gillnet and troll gear in District 8 as well as the Chinook Salmon subsistence fishery. ADF&G closed the directed commercial gillnet fishery in District 8 after the third week of fishing due to lower than anticipated harvest. The drift gillnet fishery may reopen if indications of Stikine River Chinook Salmon abundance improve. Directed Sockeye Salmon fishing in District 8 will begin June 13. The Chinook Salmon subsistence fishery started on May 15 and will end June 20. The U.S. Forest Service has issued 23 subsistence fishing permits to residents of Wrangell and Petersburg. Water levels are at moderate levels and although fishing conditions are good, there has not been any subsistence fishing and the estimated harvest is zero.

Yakutat, Juneau, and Admiralty areas of Northern Southeast Alaska

No report submitted for this week.

Prince of Wales and Ketchikan District Area

The 2015 subsistence salmon fishery for Southeast Alaska and Yakutat areas had 264 permits issued for the fishery. To date, 90% of the permits have been returned reporting a harvest of 7 Chinook, 18 Chum, 289 Coho, 223 Pink, and 978 Sockeye Salmon. Also reported were 5 Steelhead Trout, 3 Rainbow Trout, 44 Cutthroat Trout and 45 Dolly Varden

The 2015 Prince of Wales/Kosciusko winter subsistence Steelhead Trout fishery ended on February 29th. Mild winter conditions allowed for better access during this fishery. A total of 19 permits were issued during the fishery. All permits were received back and a total of 8 Steelhead Trout were reported harvested.

The 2016 Prince of Wales/Kosciusko spring subsistence steelhead fishery ends on May 31st. A total of 63 permits have been 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.

With a very high abundance of Chinook Salmon in local marine waters, as well as liberal sport limit, most subsistence users are actively 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.

The District 1/Unuk River Eulachon fisheries were closed pre-season during in February 2016. During two March 2016 aerial surveys, Eulachon were observed in both the Unuk and Eulachon Rivers. Although the stronger than prior years, the population is not at an acceptable level of abundance to provide for subsistence fishing opportunity.

No Fisheries Resource Monitoring Projects are active yet on Prince of Wales Island. The Hatchery Creek project is no longer funded, however, a new project at Eek Lake run by the Hydaburg Cooperative Association will begin next week.



Aerial photo of schools of Eulachon in the Unuk River, March 17, 2016 (Jon Hyde photo).

Sitka and Hoonah Area – Justin Koller, Forest Service, Tongass National Forest

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Wrangell/Petersburg Area – Bob Larson, Forest Service, Tongass National Forest

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Yakutat, Juneau, and Admiralty areas of Northern Southeast Alaska - Ben Van Alen, Forest Service, Tongass National Forest

(907)-789-6257 bvanalen@fs.fed.us or Jake Musslewhite (907) 789-6256

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

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 – Molly McCormick, Wrangell-St. Elias National Park/Preserve
 (907) 822-7280 Molly_McCormick@nps.gov – [Final Report as Molly Retired 6/1/16](#).
New Author – Dave Sarafin (907) 822-7280 Dave_Sarafin@NPS.gov

As of May 25, 2016 the ADF&G sonar at Miles Lake (located just downstream of the Million Dollar Bridge in the Copper River) estimated that 111,852 salmon had migrated upstream. This estimate is 191% of the projected escapement objective of 58,573 for this date, or 53,279 more salmon. An estimate of 22,800 salmon migrated by the sonar counter on May 25th.

MILES LAKE SONAR ESTIMATES (TOTAL SALMON)

Year	Estimate	Year	Estimate	Year	Estimate	Year	Estimate
1978	107,011	1988	488,398	1998	866,957	2008	614,999
1979	237,173	1989	607,797	1999	848,921	2009	709,330
1980	276,538	1990	581,895	2000	587,592	2010	924,010
1981	535,263	1991	579,435	2001	833,569	2011	914,285
1982	467,306	1992	601,952	2002	819,000	2012	1,271,354
1983	545,724	1993	797,902	2003	695,233	2013	1,267,060
1984	536,806	1994	715,181	2004	669,646	2014	1,177,005
1985	436,313	1995	599,265	2005	854,268	2015	1,341,545

1986	509,275	1996	906,867	2006	959,731		
1987	483,478	1997	1,148,079	2007	926,438		

Commercial harvests to-date in the Copper River District of Prince William Sound are:

- 5,716 Chinook
- 138,722 sockeye
- no coho
- 1 pink
- 2,399 chum

The Chitina Subdistrict is scheduled to open on June 7 and remain open for 144 hours. It is then scheduled to reopen immediately on June 13 and remain open the entire week. The state and federal fisheries usually follow identical fishing schedules which are set by the state. Thirty-seven Federal Chitina Subdistrict permits have been issued on FWS’s online data base. Additional permits for this subdistrict have been issued in Chitina and Kennecott, NPS ranger stations that do not have internet connectivity.

The Glennallen Subdistrict opened for Federal subsistence users on May 15th and is expected to remain open until September 30th. Ninety-eight Federal Glennallen permits have been issued on FWS’s online data base. Additional permits for this subdistrict have been issued in Chitina and Kennecott, NPS ranger stations that do not have internet connectivity. The state subsistence fishery in the Glennallen Subdistrict is scheduled to open on June 1st.

The Batzulnetas fishery is open, No permits have been issued so far.

The Tanada Creek weir has not yet been installed.

As of May 25th 745 Chinook had been tagged at the two project fishwheels in Baird Canyon operated by the Native Village of Eyak and 7 had been recaptured at the Canyon Creek wheels.

ADF&G’s counting tower in the Gulkana River has not been installed yet.

One Special Actions have been issued by the park this season:

- delaying the starting date of the Chitina River federal subsistence salmon fishery and setting the tentative pre-season schedule for this fishery.

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>

ADF&G Copper River Inseason Commercial Harvest Estimates

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

Gulkana River counting tower – ADF&G

<http://www.adfg.alaska.gov/sf/FishCounts/index.cfm?ADFG=main.LocSelectYearSpecies>

PWS and Copper River Delta – Milo Burcham, Chugach National Forest, Cordova.
(907) 424-4759 mburcham@fs.fed.us

31 May 2016

A total of 17 Federal Subsistence fishing permits have been issued for freshwaters within the Prince William Sound of Chugach National Forest to date. One-hundred and two permits were issued in 2015. Harvest by this year's permit holders will not be known until reports are returned this winter. In 2015, 878 Coho and 172 Sockeye Salmon were reported harvested on Copper River Delta fresh waters in this fishery.

Cook Inlet Area – Jeff Anderson, Field Supervisor, Kenai Fish and Wildlife Field Office (907) 260-0132 Jeffry_Anderson@fws.gov

No report submitted for this week.

Kodiak Island Area – Anne Marie LaRosa, Refuge Manager, - Kodiak NWR
(907) 487-2600/0230 AnneMarie_LaRosa@fws.gov or
Kevin Van Hatten (907) 487-0230 Kevin_VanHatten@fws.gov

Subsistence Sockeye Salmon fishing is off to a medium start with few Kodiak gillnetters fishing at Buskin River. Catch per unit effort is fairly low with reports of 3-4 fish per 8 hours fishing. The low CPUE is anticipated as there have only been 144 sockeye salmon passing the weir into Buskin Lake. There have not been any reports of subsistence fishermen utilizing Litnik (Afogank) Lake Sockeye Salmon, even though 2,832 fish have passed through the weir.

A Commercial fishing period will occur sometime during the first week of June in the west and north portions of the island due to some strong early runs. The Karluk and Ayakulik rivers are experiencing some normal Sockeye Salmon returns right now and the Buskin and Afognak drainages appear to be strong as well.

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

Bristol Bay and Chignik – Johnathon Gerken Fisheries Branch Chief Anchorage Fish and Wildlife Field Office

(907) 271-2776 Jonathon_Gerken@fws.gov

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

Bristol Bay:

There are a number of regulation changes that were adopted or modified at the December 2015 and March 2016 BOF meetings that can be found here:

<http://www.adfg.alaska.gov/static/applications/dcfnewsrelease/650190311.pdf>

Preseason forecasts for sockeye salmon run returns to Bristol Bay, Chignik, and the Alaska Peninsula predict that there will be harvestable surpluses in all districts, and that escapement goals will be achieved in all systems.

For Bristol Bay, the forecast is for 46.6 million Sockeye Salmon, which is lower than the preseason forecast of 54 million for 2015. Most of the sustainable escapement goals (SEG) for Bristol Bay systems were recently revised to increase the upper ranges:

System	SEG
Ugashik	500,000 – 1,400,000
Egegik	800,000 – 2,000,000
Naknek	800,000 – 2,000,000
Wood River	800,000 – 1,800,000
Nushagak	370,000 – 900,000
Igushik	150,000 – 400,000

Harvestable surpluses are projected for all systems. ADFG Commercial Fisheries Division has strategies in place for all mixed stock districts to address differential run strength should that occur. The salmon commercial fishing season opens by regulation June 1 and weekly fishing schedules are in place until mid-June.

Chinook Salmon returns have been poor to moderate in recent years throughout most of Alaska, including Bristol Bay. Commercial fishing for Nushagak Chinook Salmon is managed for an inriver return of 95,000. Some conservation measures are in place to conserve Chinook Salmon, including maximum mesh size restriction to 5 ½ inches through mid to late July in Naknek/Kvichak, Ugashik, and Togiak districts. The Chinook

Salmon return to Togiak is anticipated to be poor and reduced fishing time from scheduled periods is anticipated.

Gillnets are the primary gear used for most subsistence fishing for salmon. A permit is required for subsistence harvest of salmon.

Chignik:

The 2016 total Sockeye Salmon *Oncorhynchus nerka* forecasted run for the Chignik River watershed is approximately 2,910,000 fish. Approximately 2,190,000 Sockeye Salmon are expected to be harvested in Chignik Management Area. 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. Two fishing periods of up to 48 hours in length, separated by at least 48 hours, may occur in the Western District concurrent with the Chignik Bay and Central districts during June and early July. All subsequent Western District fishing periods and the first commercial fishing period in the Perryville District may occur on July 6. Fishing periods in the outer portions of these districts will depend on the Chignik River Sockeye Salmon interim escapement objectives being met as well as the strength of the local pink and chum salmon runs. Beginning July 6 through August, inner bay fisheries may occur in the Western and Perryville districts to target Pink and Chum Salmon. From the end of the transition period (approximately late-June through mid-July) until the end of the fishing season, ADF&G shall manage CMA based on its evaluation of the local pink *O. gorbuscha*, chum *O. keta*, and coho *O. kisutch* salmon runs, as well as the Chignik watershed late-run Sockeye Salmon escapement. Current counts through the Chignik weir are 8,552 sockeye salmon as of 5-30-16.

Alaska Peninsula:

There are numerous salmon stocks and fisheries throughout the Alaska Peninsula, as well as the Aleutian Islands. Several Sockeye Salmon escapements (mostly on the north peninsula) are monitored with weirs including Nelson, Bear, Sandy, Ilnik, McLees, and Orzinski rivers. Preseason forecasts are made for only the Nelson (692 thousand) and late-run Bear (424 thousand) River Sockeye Salmon stocks. The largest fisheries are managed under management plans. Management objectives vary by district and time; and include: local Sockeye Salmon escapements; more distant Sockeye Salmon returns to Bristol Bay or Chignik; and local Pink, Chum, or Coho Salmon returns.

A permit is required for subsistence harvest of salmon.

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.

Gerald_Maschmann@fws.gov or

Fred Bue Fredrick_Bue@fws.gov

Emmonak Summer Office (907) 949-1798

Federal staff will arrive in Emmonak on May 31 to open the Emmonak Field Office for summer management activities. The office can be contacted by calling (907) 949-1798.

Summer Season Outlook and Management Strategies

The summer chum run is projected to be average to above average and to provide for escapement and subsistence uses. A surplus of 450,000 to 950,000 summer chum is anticipated to be available for commercial harvest, however the commercial harvest opportunity will depend upon available markets and the strength of the overlapping Chinook salmon run. The Chinook salmon outlook is projecting a below average run. The run size is projected to be between 130,000 to 175,000 Chinook salmon with managers anticipating the run near the low end based upon recent productivity; however the 2015 run came in unexpectedly near the upper end this projection, possibly indicating an improvement in productivity. Subsistence conservation measures will be required to spread out the available subsistence harvest and meet escapement goals. No directed Chinook salmon commercial fishery is anticipated. Public meetings were held throughout the winter and spring to inform fishers of the outlook. The following management strategies were formulated after extensive public input:

- Before Chinook salmon enter the river, subsistence fishing opportunity for non-salmon species will be provided with 6-inch or smaller mesh size gillnets.
- As the Chinook salmon run begins to build, subsistence salmon fishing will close chronologically in each district based on the migration timing of Chinook salmon

- to protect the first pulse of Chinook salmon as mandated by regulation. Additional closures may be necessary if run assessment indicates a weaker than expected run.
- Similar to 2015, Subdistrict 5-D will be open to fish on the early trickle of Chinook salmon with 6-inch or smaller mesh size gillnets prior to the first pulse closure.
 - During subsistence salmon fishing closures, non-salmon species may be harvested using 4-inch or smaller mesh size gillnets not exceeding 60-feet in length.
 - When summer chum salmon become abundant, subsistence and commercial fishing opportunities will initially be provided with selective gear such as dip nets, beach seines, and manned fish wheels that require the immediate and careful release of all Chinook salmon alive.
 - When confidence is high that the Chinook salmon run is adequate and escapement goals are likely to be met, the use of 6-inch gillnets, and possibly 7.5-inch gillnets, on a reduced regulatory schedule may be considered.
 - Fishermen are reminded that whenever gillnets are allowed, they may choose to use *smaller* mesh gillnets than specified.
 - The sport fishery for Chinook salmon is closed throughout the U.S. portion of the Yukon River drainage, excluding the Tanana River drainage. Chinook salmon may not be retained or possessed. Restrictions for the Tanana River drainage will be announced in early June.
 - The fall chum salmon run is anticipated to be of sufficient size to provide for full subsistence harvest opportunity with a potential surplus for commercial harvest.

Assessment Information

Ice out on the lower Yukon River occurred on May 3, approximately twenty days earlier than the historical average, and the earliest on record. Additionally, Bering Sea ice retreated off the coast early, leaving the Yukon River mouth ice free. With ice out earlier than average and climate modeling provided by NOAA, ADF&G, and AOOS, managers are anticipating earlier entry timing for Chinook and summer chum salmon. Subsistence fishermen in the lower Yukon have been reporting catches since ice out. The first subsistence caught Chinook salmon was reported on May 23. Preliminary lower Yukon test fishing began on May 17 at the Big Eddy. The first Chinook caught in the test fishery was May 23. Chinook and summer chum salmon catches for both subsistence fishermen and the test fishery have been sporadic. Efforts are being made to release Chinook salmon alive that are caught in the test fishery in order to conserve Chinook salmon. At this time it is too early to assess the strength of either the Chinook or the chum salmon runs. The Pilot Station sonar crew is preparing the camp and deploying the sonar system. ADF&G anticipates the sonar to be up and running on June 1. Subsistence fishing for sheefish and other whitefish has been quiet, possibly due to poor weather conditions.

Management Actions

Until assessment data become available, management decisions will be consistent with the preseason projections. At this time, subsistence salmon fishing drainage wide is open 24 hours per day, 7 days per week with 7.5" or smaller mesh gillnets. Subsistence fishermen are reporting good smelt catches. Traditional knowledge indicates that the

salmon run follows soon after the smelt. A joint State and Federal agency News Release was issued on May 26 announcing the closure of subsistence salmon fishing in the northern portion of the Yukon Area Coastal District and District 1 effective 6:00 p.m. May 29 followed by reopening to the use of dipnets and beach seines effective 24 hours later beginning 6:00 p.m. June 30. Similarly, District 2 will close to salmon fishing, effective 6:00 p.m. May 30, and reopen at 6:00 p.m. June 1 to the use of dipnets and beach seines. All Chinook caught in dipnets and beach seines must be immediately released alive back into the water. Additionally, the southern portion of the Coastal District will continue on their standard fishing schedule, however their allowable gillnet mesh size will be restricted to no larger than 6-inches effective 6:00 p.m. May 29 in order to conserve Chinook Salmon. 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 moving upstream.

Consultation

Extensive public outreach and consultation was performed during the fall of 2015 and spring of 2016 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 Board meeting. In April, a pre-season planning meeting was held in Anchorage that brought together representatives from most Alaskan Yukon River communities to discuss the run outlook and management options.

Kuskokwim River – Vernon Born, Acting Refuge Manager, Yukon Delta National Wildlife Refuge, [Lew Coggins \(907\)543-1002](tel:9075431002), Lewis_Coggins@fws.gov

Summary:

The subsistence salmon fishery is currently limited under State of Alaska Emergency Order to restrict harvest of Chinook salmon consistent with the recent State of Alaska Board of Fisheries actions taken in January 2016

(<http://www.adfg.alaska.gov/static/applications/dcfnewsrelease/658240954.pdf>).

Under the current management plan, Chinook salmon fishing will not be authorized prior to June 12, 2016. Additional information on fishing opportunities will be posted on the Yukon Delta National Wildlife Refuge Facebook page

(<https://www.facebook.com/Yukon-Delta-National-Wildlife-Refuge-1039425076133926/>)

The ADF&G Bethel test fishery began operations on May 23, 2016 a full 9 days earlier than the historical project onset. This early timing is to provide additional information in the event of a particularly early Chinook salmon run. Since beginning operations, the test fishery has been observing small catches of Chinook salmon and sheefish.

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

NEW = Kuskokwim River Updates Hosted on OSM Website

<http://www.doi.gov/subsistence/kuskokwim.cfm>

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.

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Being this far north, our fisheries cycles including run timing and fishing activity tend to be days to several weeks behind those further south, so there currently is not a lot of fishing action. However, summer is rushing in and conditions can quickly change. The waters south of Nome are largely open. However, there are considerable areas of ice northward of Bering Strait especially north of the northern coast of the Seward Peninsula and back into Kotzebue Sound. South of the Seward Peninsula folks are looking toward fishing. North of the Seward Peninsula, the focus is largely on hunting sea mammals, especially the bearded seal.

Norton Sound Area

2015 Season Summary:

The 2015 salmon fishery closed with several highlights. These included the highest exvessel value on record, record harvests of coho and sockeye salmon, the highest chum

salmon harvest in over 30 years, and for odd-numbered years, pink salmon run strength throughout Norton Sound was the strongest since the record odd-year run of 2005. And, while restrictions were taken in the subsistence fishery in southern Norton Sound in order to protect Chinook salmon, escapements showed much improvement. Chinook salmon escapement goals were met throughout Norton Sound. Based on available escapement monitoring information, chum, coho and pink salmon escapement goals were likely achieved throughout Norton Sound. The Pilgrim River sockeye salmon run was the greatest since the record runs in the middle of the last decade.

2016 Outlook:

ADF&G bases its salmon outlooks on qualitative assessments of parent-year escapements, sibling relationships, and subjective determinations of freshwater overwintering and ocean survival. Southeastern Norton Sound Chinook salmon stocks and northern Norton Sound chum salmon stocks are classified as *stocks of yield concern* under 5 AAC 39.222 *Policy for the management of sustainable salmon fisheries*.

The Chinook salmon run is expected to be both early this year and weak compared to historical levels. The ADF&G began meetings last week in the communities of Koyuk, Shaktoolik and Unalakleet to discuss the upcoming season and options for possible restrictions for allowing limited Chinook salmon subsistence harvest opportunities while still ensuring Chinook salmon escapement needs will be achieved. It has been eleven years since the last directed Chinook commercial salmon fishing periods have occurred in southern Norton Sound. However, runs of Chinook salmon showed considerable improvement in 2014 and 2015 over the exceptionally weak runs of from 2010 to 2013. Additionally, juvenile Chinook salmon abundance and size condition indices from 2013-2014 Northern Bering Sea surveys suggest good ocean survival for at least the 2011-2012 brood years, and the possibility of improved adult Chinook returns beginning this season.

The run of herring into Norton Sound has come a week earlier this year than last season's very early run. Significant spawning activity was observed at Klikitarik Point during a May 11 aerial survey. Also ripe and spawned out herring were harvested in subsistence nets earlier in the week near Unalakleet. Consequently ADF&G opened a commercial herring bait fishery to set gillnets on May 13 until further notice. This opening was followed by another opening May 17 to allow a small number of Norton Sound herring permit holders to undertake a commercial spawn on wild kelp fishery only if they had not participated in the sac roe, bait or pound kelp herring fisheries.

Kotzebue Sound Area

2015 Season Summary:

The chum salmon harvest was the 12th highest in the 54-year history of the fishery. However, the harvest fell short of a top -10 finish due to buyer capacity issues that resulted in some fishing periods being cancelled. There was only 1 major buyer compared to the 3 buyers in the previous year. The Kobuk River test fish index was the 4th highest

for the 23-year history of the project. A total of 2,589,104 pounds of chum salmon were sold at an average price of \$0.33 per pound, almost a drop of 40% from the previous year's price of \$0.54 per pound.

2016 Outlook:

The outlook for the Kotzebue District chum salmon run is based on parent year escapement and returning age classes observed in the commercial fishery and in the test fish samples from the Kobuk River in 2015. The 2016 outlook for commercial salmon harvest is 300,000-500,000 chum salmon; and no commercial harvest for Chinook, sockeye, pink, or coho salmon.

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