

FISHERIES UPDATE FOR THE WEEK OF MAY 29-JUNE 6, 2017. Report #1
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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

Falls Lake - The Forest Service and the Organized Village of Kake operate the Falls Lake trap and video net weir which will be operational the first week of July. The final escapement estimate in 2016 was 5,098 Sockeye Salmon while the final subsistence and sport harvest in the marine terminal area was 1,000. Subsistence harvest accounted for 99% of terminal area harvest.

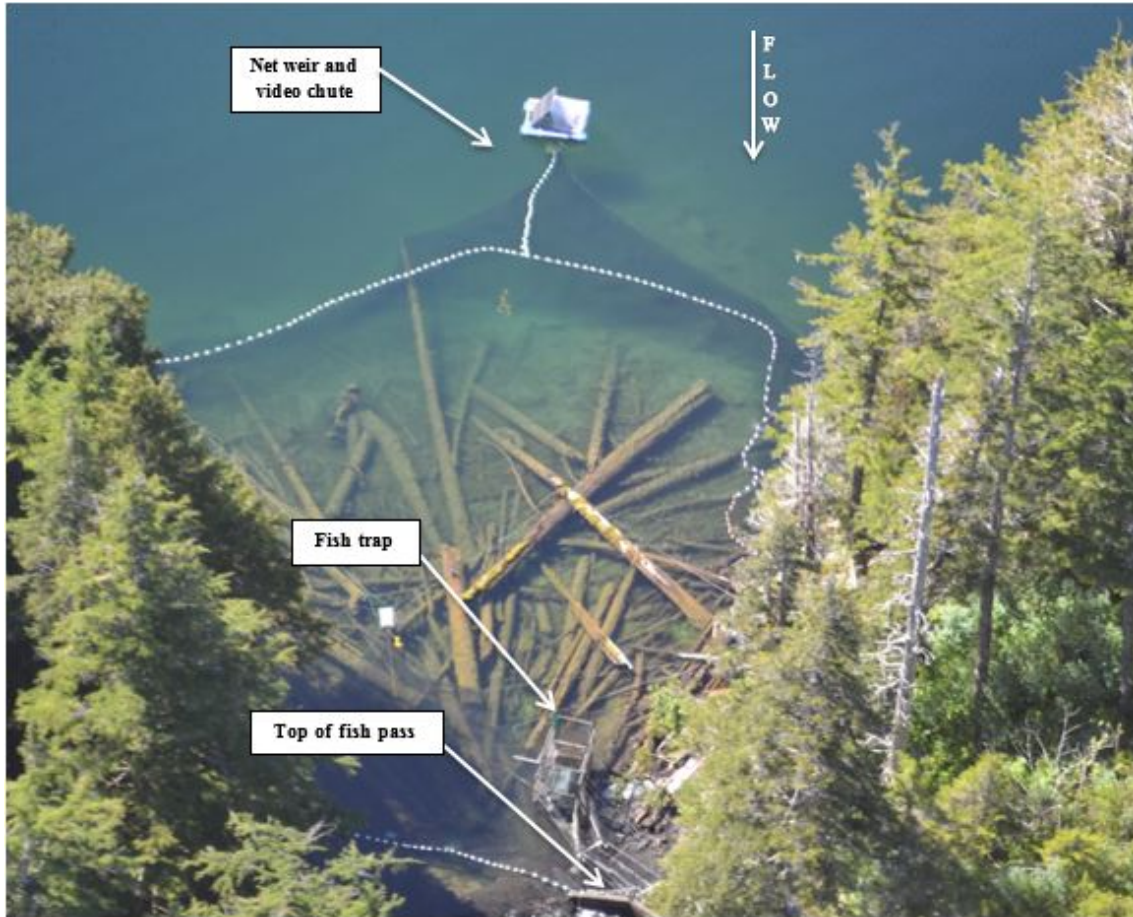


Figure 1. Aerial photo (2013) of the Falls Lake outlet illustrating the typical location of weir equipment.

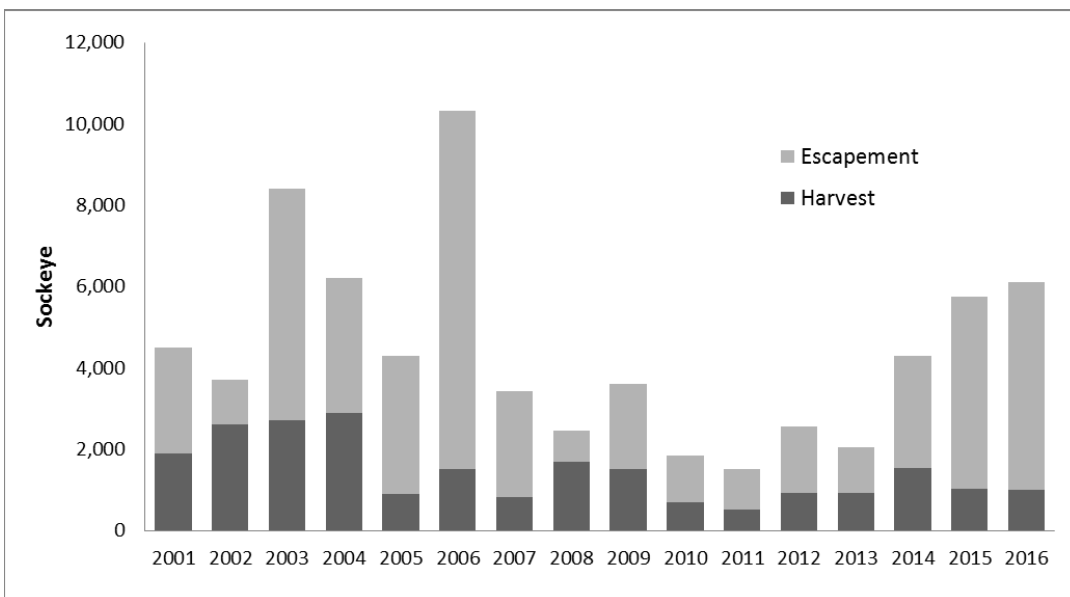


Figure 2. Escapement plus harvest equals total terminal run of Sockeye Salmon at Falls Lake, 2001-2016.

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 2016, approximately 5,234 Sockeye Salmon migrated past the weir while an estimated 2,605 Sockeye Salmon were harvested in the marine terminal area subsistence and sport fishery. Subsistence harvest accounted for over 99% of terminal area harvest.

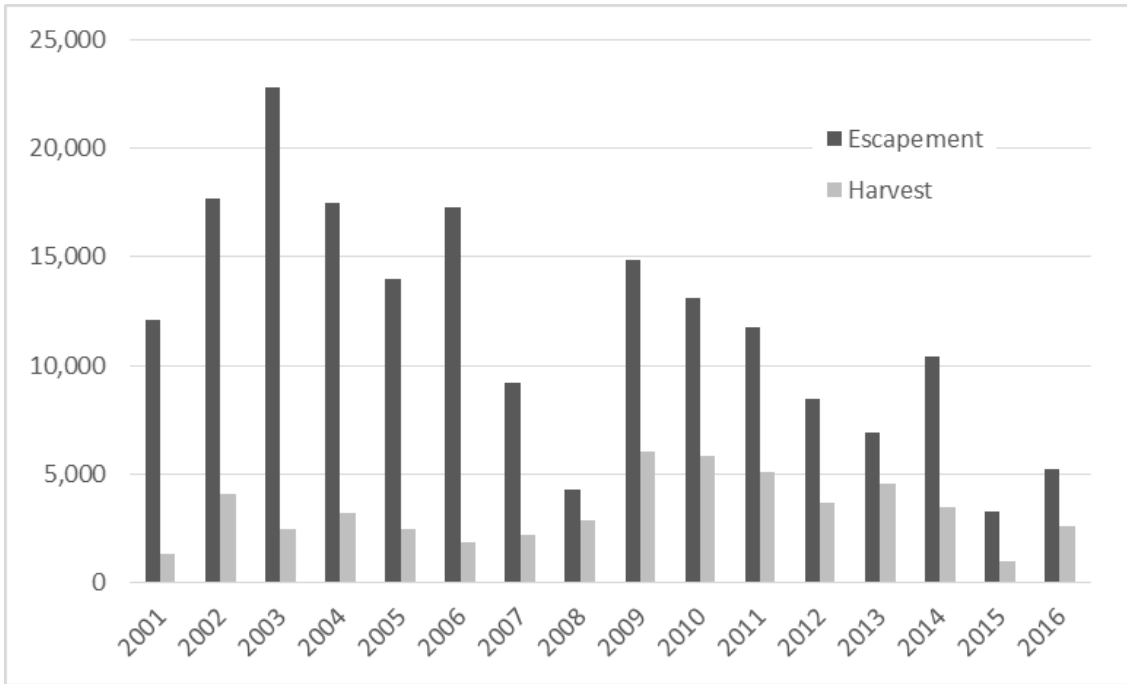


Figure 3. Escapement and harvest of sockeye at Klag Bay, 2001-2016.

Redoubt Lake - The Forest Service operates the Redoubt Lake weir which is scheduled to be operational in mid-June. In 2016, an estimated 22,937 Sockeye Salmon passed through the weir into Redoubt Lake. On July 14th, in accordance with the Redoubt Lake Management Plan, the individual/household subsistence sockeye possession limit was set at 25 and the individual/household subsistence sockeye annual limit was set at 100. These limits were based on an in-season model prediction of about 33,000 sockeye returning. Subsistence sockeye harvest reported to ADF&G was 2,304.

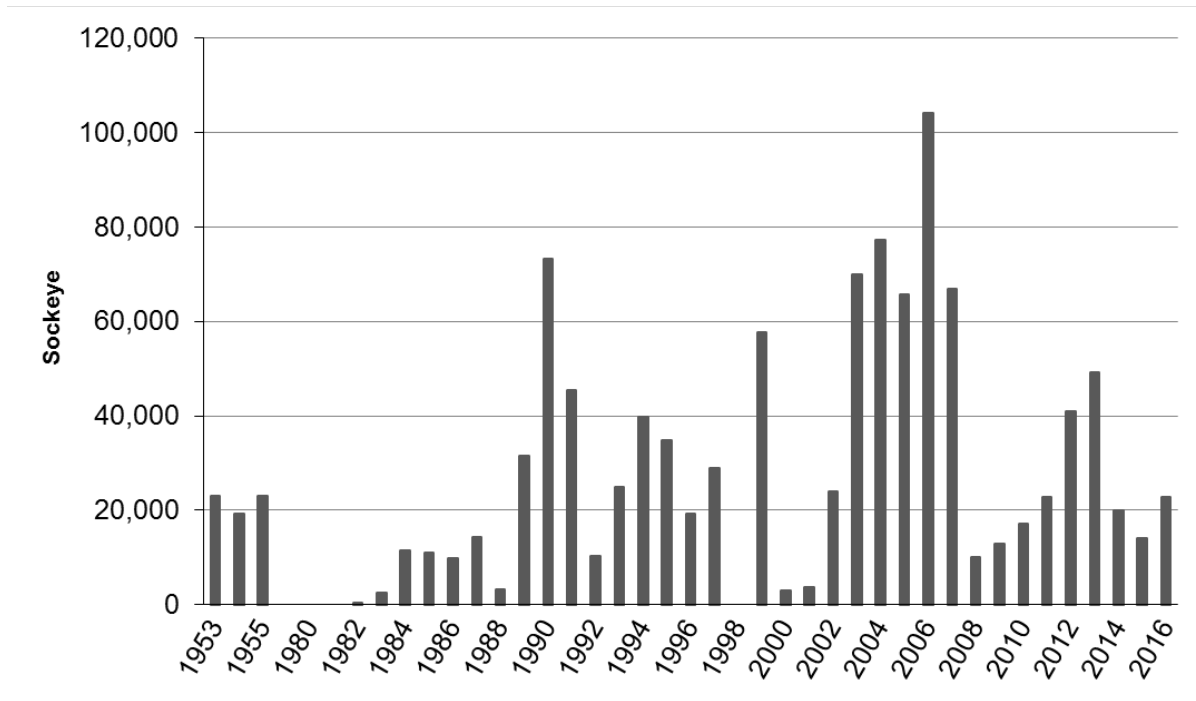


Figure 4. Annual Sockeye Salmon expanded escapement into Redoubt Lake for years with data: 1953 to 1955, 1982 to 1997, and 1999 to 2016. The weir was not operated in 1998.

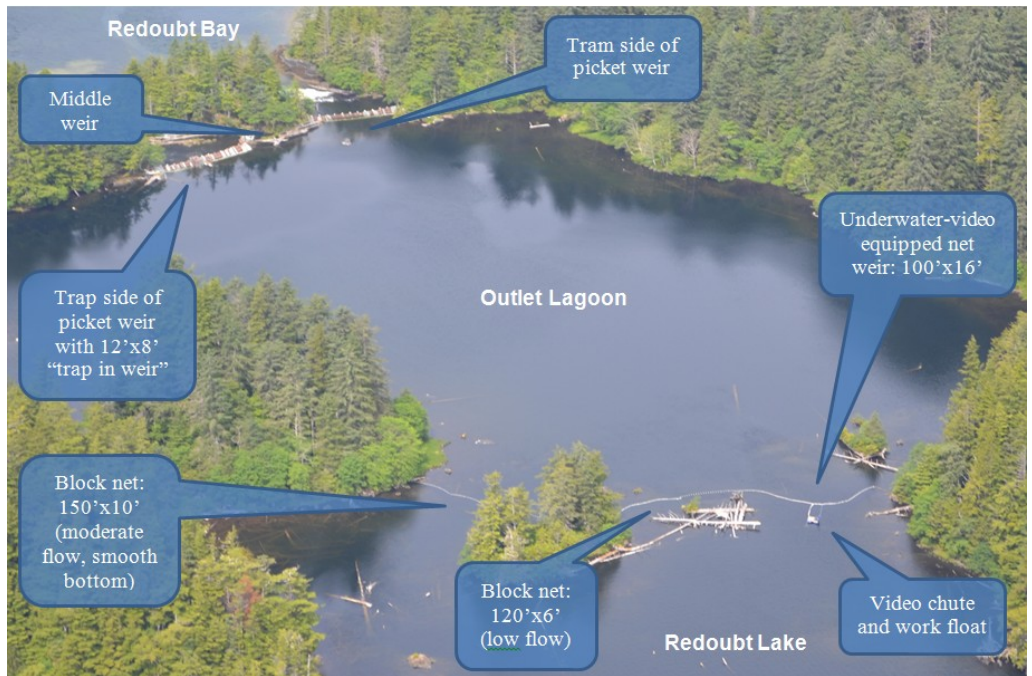


Figure 5. Aerial view (2013) of the outlet lagoon of Redoubt Lake showing the typical locations of the picket weir, net weir and block nets.

Wrangell/Petersburg Area Forest Service, Tongass National Forest, Contact to be announced.**Wrangell/Petersburg Area for Stat Week ending June 5**

This year's run of Chinook Salmon to the Stikine River is forecasted to be 18,300 fish which is too low, at this time, to support directed commercial, sport, or subsistence fisheries on this stock. ADF&G plans to protect Stikine Chinook Salmon by shifting the first commercial drift gillnet opening in Districts 6 and 8 from Monday, June 12 to Monday June 19, requiring a six-inch maximum mesh size, reducing fishing area, and opening for 48 hours instead of 72 hours.

Prince of Wales and Ketchikan District Area

Yakutat, Juneau, and Admiralty areas of Northern Southeast Alaska - Ben Van Alen (907-789-6257; bvanalen@fs.fed.us) and Jake Musslewhite (907-789-6256; jgmusslewhite@fs.fed.us), **Forest Service, Tongass National Forest**

Yakutat, Juneau, and Admiralty areas of Northern Southeast Alaska

The Sockeye Salmon runs and subsistence fisheries have not started yet in the Admiralty and Juneau areas. Project personnel are preparing for the Sockeye Salmon monitoring projects at Neva Lake, Kook Lake, and Sitkoh Lake which are scheduled to begin in mid to late-June. The personnel who work these projects are employed by the Hoonah Indian Association and the Angoon Community Association. All of us participated in pre-season safety training at the Juneau Ranger District office the week of May 22nd.

All projects use pairs of swim-through video weirs to get validated counts of salmon, trout, and char escaping into each lake. At Neva Lake, project personnel will remotely monitor the video weir site and remotely count the hourly fish passage into the lake. Working off-site from an Ocean Beauty Seafood's cabin in Excursion Inlet, or at the HIA office in Hoonah after the seafood plant closes at the end of the season, personnel will use the Blue Iris computer software application to record and review synchronized motion-triggered files from the four video chute cameras. Live video from the project surveillance and fish video cameras and recordings can be viewed at any time over the internet.



Figure 1. Neva weir crew, George Mills, Sr., Gerard White, Sr., and Mike Williams, Sr., and fish video computer, at the Excursion Inlet cabin, 2016.

The Angoon Community Association crew will live and work at Kook Lake in a floating wall tent set next to the pair of video net weirs at the outlet of the lake (Figure 2).



Figure 2. Pair of swim-through video net weirs and floating tent camp at the outlet of Kook Lake.

They will use the Blue Iris program on a laptop in camp to record and review motion-triggered video and make hourly counts of the numbers of salmon, trout, and char escaping into the lake. They will also make hourly counts of the numbers of fish, by species, swimming through the pair of video net weirs at the outlet of Sitkoh Lake (Figure 3). Weir personnel will visit the Sitkoh weir site on each crew exchange flight to

maintain the weirs and electronics and exchange memory cards. Live video from surveillance cameras and video chute cameras will allow 24/7 monitoring of the Sitkoh weir site and wireless communication system. We will also have a computer running the Blue Iris video recording and review program in the ACA office this year for counting fish into Sitkoh Lake.



Figure 3. Pair of remotely monitored swim-through video net weirs at the outlet of Sitkoh Lake, 2016.

In the Yakutat area, 5,211 steelhead kelts have been counted through the Situk weir through June 3rd. Sockeye Salmon runs usually begin in earnest in the Yakutat area in mid-June. ADF&G forecasts a run of only 475 Chinook Salmon to the Situk River this season. In order to meet ADF&G's escapement goal range of 450 to 1,050 large Chinook Salmon ADF&G will not allow retention of Chinook Salmon in their sport and commercial set gillnet fisheries and the Forest Service will not issue permits for the subsistence take of Chinook Salmon in the river unless escapements through the weir are well within the goal. This is the eighth season that we have taken management actions to protect Chinook Salmon returning to the Situk River. There is a broad overlap in timing of these two species through the fisheries and into the river.

ADG&G has forecasted a "strong" (80% confidence interval 27-59 million) harvest of wild pink salmon to all of southeast Alaska this season. In general, harvests and escapements of pink salmon have been declining in the region since the late-1990s. The even-year run of pink salmon to northern inside waters has collapsed and years of fishery restrictions will be needed to rebuild escapements and returns. Hatchery released of Chum, Pink, Coho, Chinook, and Sockeye Salmon have remained high or increased during this period despite declining survivals and returns of hatchery and wild stocks. The two aquaculture associations in the Region recently took over the financially troubled Klawock and Gunnek Creek Hatcheries and are also planning to expand releases into additional remote release sites with the hope of increasing returns, revenues, and brood stock options.

In Northern Inside waters, the Southeast Alaska purse seine fishery will begin on Sunday June 18 at Point Augusta, Tenakee Inlet, and Hidden Falls Hatchery area with a 15-hour opening targeting Chum and Pink Salmon. There will likely be some purse seine fishing in the Amalga Harbor special (hatchery) harvest area this season where hatchery Chum Salmon are targeted but harvests of other stocks and species are likely substantial.

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

The 2016 subsistence salmon fishery for Southeast Alaska and Yakutat areas had 254 permits issued for the fishery. To date, 90% of the permits have been returned reporting a harvest of 3 Chinook, 9 Chum, 353 Coho, 305 Pink, and 632 Sockeye Salmon. Also reported were 4 Steelhead Trout, 3 Rainbow Trout, 39 Cutthroat Trout and 31 Dolly Varden

The 2016 Prince of Wales/Kosciusko winter subsistence steelhead fishery ended on February 28th. Access was far more limited during this fishery than the previous year. A total of 24 permits were issued during the fishery. All permits were received back and a total of 2 Steelhead Trout were reported harvested.

The 2017 Prince of Wales/Kosciusko spring subsistence steelhead fishery ended on May 31st. A total of 42 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 8 Steelhead Trout.

Although Chinook Salmon abundance has been determined to be low, hatchery return Chinook Salmon are present in the local Craig and Klawock area resulting in many subsistence users actively fishing under sport fishing regulations at this time. Although a couple of Prince of Wales Island streams have June returns of sockeye, 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 2017. Weather was a major limiting factor this spring in getting the satellite monitoring cameras deployed. When weather did break enough to fly, aerial surveys were completed. Eulachon were observed in both the Unuk and Eulachon Rivers, but were not observed to be as strong as prior years. Returns to Southern Southeast Alaska, as well as British Columbia and Washington State were 3 weeks later than last year. Local managers, as well as those in Canada and Washington are managing Eulachon extra-conservatively as they do not believe the populations are stable enough to provide for fishing opportunity and are anticipating this trend to continue based on the declines in ocean conditions affecting salmon and other species.



Figure 1. Eulachon in the Eulachon River, March 30, 2017 (Jon Hyde photo).



Figure 2. Only school of Eulachon seen in main Unuk River, March 30, 2017 (Jon Hyde photo).

No Fisheries Resource Monitoring Projects for Sockeye Salmon are active yet on Prince of Wales Island. The Klawock Lake project will begin on July 1. Project start dates at Eek and Hetta Lakes have not yet begun for the projects run by the Hydaburg Cooperative Association.

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 – Dave Sarafin, Wrangell-St. Elias National Park/Preserve

In response to a very low forecast run size (29,000) of Copper River Chinook Salmon and with the intent of reducing harvest pressure on these fish to provide for a sustainable level of spawning escapement, the 2017 Federal subsistence season was delayed to June 1 and the harvest limit for Chinook Salmon taken by the combined gear types of dip net or rod and reel was reduced to 2 for the period of June 1 through July 15.

State managers also enacted preseason restrictions in their subsistence, sport, and personal use fisheries related to concerns of meeting sustainable escapement goals (24,000) for Copper River Chinook Salmon.

The commercial fishery in the Copper River District, from 5 open fishing periods through June 1, has harvested approximately 9,000 Chinook Salmon. This harvest level was greater than anticipated by State managers. From this, they deduced that the 2017 Chinook Salmon run may be greater than the 2017 preseason forecast. On June 3, the State announced relaxed Chinook Salmon restrictions in the Upper Copper River subsistence and sport fisheries, as well as a commercial open fishing period on June 5.

Federal managers are delaying action to rescind restrictions in place until more information is available, such as information collected inriver. The water level of the Copper River is still extremely low for this time of year. If Chinook Salmon are holding outside the mouth area awaiting the typical sensation of Copper River flow before entering the river system, it is possible the milling fish may have been harvested at a higher rate than expected. This could compound concerns for Chinook Salmon return if the run size reflects the inseason forecast.

As of June 4, 2017 the ADF&G sonar at Miles Lake (located just downstream of the Million Dollar Bridge in the Copper River) estimated that 235,263 salmon had migrated upstream for the season. This estimate is 46% more than the projected escapement of 160,972 for this date, or 74,291 more salmon. A daily estimate of 17,508 salmon migrated by the sonar counter on June 4.

The Chitina Subdistrict is scheduled to open on June 7 and is scheduled to remain open through June 11. It is then tentatively scheduled to reopen immediately on June 12 and remain open the entire week. The state and federal fisheries usually follow identical fishing schedules which are set by the state. Forty-four (44) Federal Chitina Subdistrict permits have been issued on the FWS 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 June 1 and is expected to remain open until September 30th. One hundred eight (108) Federal Glennallen permits have been issued on the FWS 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 opened on June 1.

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

The Tanada Creek fish weir is in the process of being installed. The water level in the creek is again extremely low.

As of June 4, 1,472 Chinook Salmon had been tagged at the two project fishwheels in Baird Canyon operated by the Native Village of Eyak. The upriver fishwheels at Canyon Creek have captured 78 Chinook Salmon, of which, 3 were recaptured fish that had been tagged at the downstream wheels.

ADF&G's counting tower in the Gulkana River began operation on June 2; no Chinook Salmon have been counted to date.

Five Special Actions have been issued by the inseason manager this season:

- Delaying Upper Coper River District Federal subsistence fisheries until June 1.
- Reducing the Chinook Salmon annual limit to 2 for the combined gear types of dip net or rod and reel in Upper Copper River District Federal subsistence fisheries.
- Delaying the starting date of the Chitina Subdistrict Federal subsistence salmon fishery to June 8 and setting the tentative pre-season schedule for this fishery.
- Allowing the use of bait and multiple hooks by Federal subsistence users while fishing with rod and reel in the mainstem Copper River.
- Revising the starting date for the Chitina Subdistrict Federal subsistence salmon fishery to June 7.

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>

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. 6 June 2017.

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

A total of 19 Federal Subsistence fishing permits have been issued for freshwaters within the Prince William Sound of Chugach National Forest to date. One-hundred and ten permits were issued in 2016. Harvest by this year's permit holders will not be known until reports are returned this winter. In 2016, 555 Coho and 234 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 Jeffrey_Anderson@fws.gov

The 2017 subsistence dip net fisheries for salmon will begin on the Kenai and Kasilof rivers June 15 and June 16, respectively. Seasons and areas for subsistence fishing with rod and reel are the same as for the taking of fish under Alaska sport fishing regulations. Most of the initial rod and reel subsistence effort will be focused at Sockeye Salmon in the Upper Kenai and Russian Rivers which opens on June 11.

Permits have been issued for community gillnet fisheries on the Kenai and Kasilof rivers. Regulatory dates for the Kasilof River experimental gillnet fishery are from June 16 through August 15. Regulatory periods for the Kenai River community gillnet fishery are from July 1 through August 15 and from September 10 – 30.

USFWS staff issue permits in Ninilchik on June 1. USFWS and USFS staff are scheduled to issue permits in Cooper Landing (June 7) and Hope (June 8).

Fish counts at some Alaska Department of Fish and Game-operated assessment projects are available on-line at

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

Fish counts at some Department-operated assessment projects are available on-line at

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

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

**Subsistence fisheries update for the period of May 29 – June 2, 2017
Kodiak Island Area – Michael Brady, Refuge Manager, Kodiak NWR**

The Buskin River sockeye salmon returns have been steady since the weir was installed on May 23, 2017. As of June 2, 2017, 2,044 sockeye salmon have been enumerated entering Buskin Lake. So far the 2017 returns are above the 10 year average and hopefully the escapement goal will be reached. Subsistence fishing efforts started on May 12, 2017 and slower increased over the past couple of weeks. The catch per unit effort has been sporadic over this time. Reports from fishermen have indicated that when the fishing was good they were only able to retrieve half the fish in the net due to sea lions.

There have not been reports of subsistence activity from the residents of Port Lions or Ouzinkie who travel to Litnik (Afognak Lake). The weir was installed on May 30, 2017 and no fish have passed yet.

The sockeye salmon returns to other monitored systems are very strong with 77,821 sockeye being enumerated at Karluk River weir, 2,646 sockeye enumerated at Ayakulik River weir, and 8,481 sockeye at Upper Station (Olga Lakes). The subsistence activity in the vicinity of the local villages started out slow but has increased recently.

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 Week of May 28, 2017**

(907) 271-2776 Jonathon_Gerken@fws.gov

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.

Bristol Bay:

The 2017 Bristol Bay Sockeye Salmon run is forecast to be approximately 41.47 million fish for nine river systems: Kvichak, Alagnak, Naknek, Egegik, Ugashik, Wood, Igushik, Nushagak, and Togiak. Based on the forecast 31.2 to 51.7 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 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
Togiak	SEG = 120,000 – 270,000

Chignik:

The 2017 Sockeye Salmon forecasted run size for the Chignik River Management Area (CMA) is 2,204,000 fish with a harvest estimate of 1,466,000 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 7,000 fish.

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	-25,000 in August and 50,000 in
September in addition to late run escapement goals	
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 Bear Lake stocks. The 2017 Sockeye Salmon run size projections are 585,000 for the Nelson River and 450,000 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.
Gerald_Maschmann@fws.gov or
 Fred Bue Fredrick_Bue@fws.gov
 Emmonak Summer Office (907) 949-1798

The Emmonak Field Office is open for summer management activities. The office can be contacted by calling (907) 949-1798.

Summer Season Outlook and Management Strategies

The Summer Chum Salmon run is projected to be above average and to provide for escapement and subsistence uses. A surplus of up to 1.5 million Summer Chum Salmon is anticipated to be available for commercial harvest. However, 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 size of 140,000 to 195,000 with managers optimistic the total run abundance could be near the upper end based upon recent performances of the 2015 and 2016 runs which came in unexpectedly near the upper end their projections and thus, 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 will be open 24 hours a day 7 days a week with 7.5-inch or smaller mesh gillnets.
- As early Chinook salmon enter each district, subsistence salmon fishing will be provided on a reduced regulatory schedule with 6-inch or smaller mesh gillnets.
- By regulation, fishing will close just before the first pulse of Chinook salmon enters each area.
- One day after salmon fishing with gillnets closes (just before first pulse is present), subsistence opportunity will begin with selective gear to target summer chum salmon. This opportunity will be offered up through subdistrict 5-C based on migration timing. Selective gear includes dip nets, beach seines, and manned fish wheels and requires the immediate release of all Chinook salmon alive.
- During subsistence salmon fishing closures, fishing is allowed with 4-inch or smaller mesh gillnets not exceeding 60-feet in length. While this mesh size is to target non-salmon species, any salmon caught in this mesh size can be kept.
- 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 on a reduced regulatory schedule will be considered, as well as short openings with 7.5-inch gillnets. Fishermen are reminded that whenever gillnets are allowed, they may choose to use smaller mesh gillnets than specified.
- Commercial fishing for summer chum will begin with selective gear, based on inseason run assessment.
- The sport fishery for Chinook salmon will begin the season closed (effective May 1) 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.

Assessment Information

Ice out on the lower Yukon River occurred on May 14, approximately seven days earlier than the historical average. Additionally, Bering Sea ice retreated off the coast early, leaving the Yukon River mouth ice free with no spring flooding. 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 small catches since ice out. The first subsistence caught Chinook Salmon was reported on May 26 in Alakanuk, and four more reported caught on May 28. Lower Yukon test fishing began on May 29 at the Big Eddy 8.5-inch set net site. The first Chinook was caught on June 1 and the first chum was caught on May 30. The Big Eddy 8.25-inch drift gillnet test fishery began on May 30th. The first Chinook was caught on May 31 and no chums have been caught. The Big Eddy 5.5-inch drift test fishery began on May 30. The first chum was caught on May 30 and the first Chinook was caught on May 31. Test fishing at Middle Mouth is anticipated to begin around June 5. Chinook and Summer Chum Salmon catches for both subsistence fishermen and the test fishery have been sporadic. Managers anticipate test fishery catches to increase in the coming days. The Pilot Station sonar began operations on May 31 and had their first full day of counts on June 1; however, test fishing catches have been too low to generate passage estimates. 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 overall strength of either the Chinook or Chum Salmon runs. The average first quarter point in the LYTF for Chinook Salmon is June 15, and June 19 for Summer Chum Salmon.

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 southern portion of the Coastal District is open 24 hours per day, seven days per week, and gear is restricted to 6-inch or smaller mesh gillnets. The northern portion of the Coastal District and District 1 will be managed as one district for 2017. Subsistence salmon fishing in Districts 1 and 2 has been placed on their regulatory schedules of two, 36-hour periods per week restricted to 6-inch or smaller mesh gillnet gear. Subsistence fishing in District 3 is open 24 hours per day, seven days per week, with gear restricted to 7.5-inch or smaller mesh gillnets. Subsistence fishing in District 3 will close at 8 a.m., June 6, and will reopen at 8 p.m. Wednesday, June 7 on their regulatory schedule of two, 36-hour periods per week and restricted to 6-inch or smaller mesh gillnet gear. Chinook Salmon caught incidentally may be retained for subsistence purposes. Lower Yukon districts should expect subsistence salmon fishing closures when the first pulse of Chinook Salmon enters the river.

Subsistence fishing in the Innoko River, Koyukuk River, Districts 4 and 5, Subdistricts 6-A and 6-B, Old Minto and Upper Tanana Areas are open 24 hours per day, 7 days per week and restricted to 7.5-inch or less mesh gillnet and fish wheel gear. 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 2016 and spring of 2017 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 Fairbanks that brought together representatives from most Alaskan Yukon River communities to discuss the run outlook and management options.

KUSKOKWIM RIVER

In Season Manager – Ken Stahlnecker, Refuge Manager, Yukon Delta National Wildlife Refuge Contact kenneth_stahlnecker@fws.gov; (907) 543-3151 or Lewis_Coggins@fws.gov

Summary:

Under State of Alaska Emergency Order #3-KS-V-01-17, effective May 1, 2017, the whole Kuskokwim River drainage is closed to the sports fishing of Chinook salmon until July 25, 2017, unless superseded by subsequent emergency order. In addition, only one unbaited, single-hook, artificial lure may be used in the Kuskokwim River drainage. All Chinook salmon caught incidentally while fishing for other species may not be removed from the water and must be released immediately.

The subsistence salmon fishery on the Kuskokwim River will be opened by State of Alaska Emergency Order #3-S-WE-03-17 from 9:00 a.m. to 9:00 p.m. Saturday, June 3, 2017 from the Yukon Delta NWR boundary at the mouth of the Kuskokwim River to the Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ADF&G) markers downstream from the mouth of the Holitna River. This fishery is restricted to 4-inch or less mesh size gillnets. These gillnets may not exceed 60 feet in length or 45 meshes in depth and may not be operated more than 100 feet from the ordinary high water mark.

Before 9:00 a.m. and after 9:00 p.m. June 3, 2017, the Kuskokwim River from the Yukon Delta NWR boundary at the mouth of the Kuskokwim to ADF&G regulatory markers downstream from the Holitna River mouth will be closed to all subsistence fishing with gillnets under State of Alaska Emergency Order #3-WR-01-17.

Under order #3E-WR-01-17, beginning 12:01 am Sunday, June 4, 2017, upstream of the ADF&G regulatory markers downstream from the Holitna river mouth to the headwaters of the Kuskokwim River will be closed to gillnet fishing. Also, fishing in the Kwethluk, Kasigluk, Kisarialik, Tuluksak and Aniak Rivers and also Kuskokuak and Old Kuskokuak

sloughs will be closed to gillnet fishing from 12:01 a.m. May 20, 2017 until further notice.

Alternative types of fishing gear such as subsistence hook and line, subsistence fishing with fish wheels with live wells, and subsistence fishing with beach seines or dip nets are currently allowed until further notice for other salmon species. All Chinook salmon caught must be released back into the river.

Test Fisheries:

As of June 2, 2017, the CPUE for Chinook salmon at the Bethel test fishery for the Kuskokwim River is at 1. There are no reports for the other species of salmon on the Kuskokwim.

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

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/>

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

Northwest Alaska – Ken Adkisson, National Park Service, Nome.
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People in northwest Alaska are still transitioning out of winter, but conditions are changing rapidly with the remaining shorefast ice quickly deteriorating and breaking off. The waters south of Bering Strait are largely open except for some ice in eastern Norton Sound and a few areas of quickly melting, broken shore and pack ice. However, the waters north of Bering Strait (the Chukchi Sea and Kotzebue Sound) are still largely ice covered or choked with broken ice (there is a narrow elongated area of open water stretching northward from about Wales to Point Hope). Consequently, a lot of the subsistence effort is currently focused on the hunting of sea mammals. Hunters are concerned with how to get their boats out to open leads and areas of open water, and in the hazards of navigating the sea ice while hunting seals and walrus. Birds and fish are taken opportunistically, but fish will soon begin to increase in importance.



Figure 1. Open lead near Shishmaref May 19, 2017 - note hunter right hand side. Photo by Curtis Nayokpuk



Figure 2. Hunter hauling boat across shorefast ice May 26, 2017 – Photo by Curtis Nayokpuk

Norton Sound District

2016 Season Summary:

No king salmon escapement goals were reached last year despite subsistence fishing restrictions and closures.

The combined commercial harvest of all salmon species (365,452 fish) ranked third highest in the last ten seasons in Norton Sound. There were 141 commercial permits fished in 2016, and this was the highest total since 1993. The 2016 fishery exvessel value of \$1,237,229 ranked fourth highest in the last ten years and was the sixth year in the last

seven years that the value exceeded 1 million dollars. The pink salmon catch was the majority (57 % of total number of fish) of the commercial salmon harvest in 2016, although the catch was an incidental harvest during the larger mesh openings targeting chum and Coho salmon. The Coho salmon catch was 23% above the 5-year average and was the seventh time the harvest exceeded 100,000 fish in the 56-year history of the fishery. The chum salmon catch was less than half the recent 5-year average.

2017 Outlook:

A weak king salmon run in Norton Sound is again expected in 2017. Therefore, ADF&G is planning to close the Unalakleet River to net fishing beginning June 1. Further subsistence fishing restrictions and closures in other marine and freshwaters of Subdistricts 4, 5 and 6, the Norton Bay, Shaktoolik and Unalakleet Subdistricts will occur the second week of June in order to ensure adequate numbers of king salmon reach spawning areas.

It is been 12 years since the last king salmon directed commercial fishing periods have occurred in southern Norton Sound. King salmon runs continue to be weak compared to historical levels. However, the runs of king salmon in 2014 and 2015 showed considerable improvement from the exceptionally weak runs observed from 2010 to 2013, but the 2016 run was considerably weaker compared to 2014 and 2015.

The Alaska Department of Fish and game announced on May 10 that they would be holding a series of meetings on May 16 in villages in eastern Norton Sound (Koyuk, Shaktoolik and Unalakleet) to discuss management options to allow for limited king salmon subsistence harvest opportunities while ensuring king salmon escapement goals can be achieved.

The ADF&G announced on May 24 that the Unalakleet River drainage from downstream of the North River and the North River will close effective June 1 to all subsistence net fishing, except for dip nets and cast nets. Any king salmon caught in a dip net or cast net must be immediately returned to the water. The subsistence net fishing closure will extend out to the marine waters within 500 yards of the Unalakleet River mouth. Set gillnets with a mesh size of 4 inches or less will be allowed to be fished in the Unalakleet River drainage upstream of the North River only.

The Department also announced that effective June 9, the marine waters of southern Norton Sound from Bald Head (near Elim) south to Wood Point (near Saint Michael) will close to subsistence salmon fishing. And except for the Koyuk River, subsistence salmon fishing in all freshwaters from Bald Head to Black Point will close on June 9. A limited fishing schedule beginning the second week of June will be set for Subdistrict 4, the Norton Bay Subdistrict, and Inglutalik River for the remainder of June and early July. For Subdistricts 5 and 6, the Shaktoolik and Unalakleet Subdistricts, the Department will set one 36-hour subsistence fishing period each week in the marine waters, with gillnets restricted to a mesh size of 6 inches or less during favorable weather conditions. If the king salmon run is stronger-than-expected the Department will increase fishing time as

warranted, and specific strategies will vary for each subdistrict depending on expected fishing effort and recent harvest patterns.

Herring catches have been reported in the Unalakleet area since Monday, May 15. Consequently, the ADF&G opened a commercial herring bait fishery to set gillnets on Wednesday, May 17 until further notice. This was done Unalakleet the request of the buyer, Norton Sound Seafood Products, which plans to buy approximately 75 tons of bait herring this season. Leaving the herring bait fishery open continuously will allow the buyer to direct the bulk of the fishing fleet to areas where harvest efficiency can be maximized. While the herring quota this year is over 6,000 tons, there is no buyer interest for the sac roe Fishery.

The Division of Sport Fish closed all freshwaters by Emergency Order from Bald Head to Point Romanof to sport fishing for king salmon effective Monday, May 1, 2017. The closure includes, but is not limited to, the Unalakleet, Shaktoolik, Koyuk, Inglutalik, and Golsovia river drainages. In addition, only one unabated, single hook, artificial lure may be used when sport fishing in those drainages. The EO will remain in effect through August 15, 2017 or until inseason assessments project at the escapement goal will be met for king salmon on the Unalakleet River.

The ADF&G Unalakleet field office is not open yet, and a test fishery crew will not be conducting operations this season.

Nome (Subdistrict 1)

The fishing situation should be similar to last year. The runs of chum salmon and pink salmon (if there is buyer interest) are expected to provide some commercial fishing opportunity. Coho salmon may also provide an additional commercial opportunity depending upon run strength.

Golovin (Subdistrict 2)

Subsistence permits are required when subsistence salmon fishing. No restrictions in subsistence fishing time are expected. The chum salmon run is expected to improve compared to last year, with commercial fishing time expected in late June if run strength comes in as expected. The pink salmon run should be sufficient to allow for commercial fishing periods in July if there is buyer interest. The Coho salmon run is also expected to support commercial fishing periods.

Elam (Subdistrict 3)

Except for 2014, when hook and line subsistence fishing for king salmon was closed, there have been no other subsistence restrictions in over 25 years in the subdistrict. Subsistence permits are required. Except for the possibility of inseason king salmon restrictions to achieve the Kwiniuk River Tower goal, no other restrictions are expected. Commercial openings for chum salmon and Coho salmon are expected.

Norton Bay (Subdistrict 4)

In the last 5 years, there have been record commercial harvest of pink (2012), chum (2013) and coho (2015) salmon. Commercial salmon fishing harvests are expected to be average in 2017, but restrictions on subsistence fishing time to protect king salmon will likely be needed again.

Shaktoolik (Subdistrict 5) and Unalakleet (Subdistrict6)

These two subdistricts have been managed as one fishery because past studies have shown that salmon bound for the subdistricts intermingle, and that the harvest in one subdistrict likely will affect the other. No commercial fishing for king salmon is expected because of recent poor runs and poor parent-year escapements. Chum and pink salmon will be targeted commercially depending upon market interest and gillnet fishing would likely occur after June to allow more time for king salmon to pass through the subdistricts. However there may be the possibility of commercial fishing with beach Seins for chum and pink salmon in June. The Alaska Board of fisheries passed a regulation effective this year allowing for commercial beach seining for chum and pink salmon without the restriction of occurring after July 1 if there are Chinook salmon restrictions. Chum and pink salmon directed commercial gillnet fishing periods are expected in July.

St. Michael and Stebbins

Subsistence fishing is open seven days per week in southern Norton Sound from Point Romanof to the Subdistrict 6 boundary. A new regulation passed by the Alaska Board of Fisheries allows for the restriction of gillnet mesh size in the subsistence fisheries throughout Norton Sound. The Department is protecting weak runs of king salmon in the Yukon River and in southern Norton Sound (Shaktoolik and Unalakleet Rivers) in 2017, and there likely will be no commercial king salmon fishing in either management area. Conservation measures will be required to meet escapement goals in these rivers. In order to conserve king salmon for spawning escapement and future uses by fishermen, it may be necessary to consider reducing the harvest of king salmon migrating through the St. Michael and Stebbins areas by having closures or gillnet mesh size restrictions in the subsistence fishery.

Port Clarence District

The sockeye salmon run is not expected to reach the inriver goal of 30,000 fish in the Pilgrim River, and therefore a commercial fishery targeting sockeye salmon would not occur. Subsistence salmon fishing permits are required for the Port Clarence District, Pilgrim River drainage and Salmon Lake. Catch limits are listed on the subsistence permits. Based on the well above average sockeye salmon runs in 2015 and 2016 the ADF&G expects 2017 to have a well above average run again. The Department will compare the 2017 sockeye salmon run with historical escapement counts at the Pilgrim

River weir after the first week of July and decide if it changes warranted in subsistence catch limits or for closure may be necessary to reach the escapement goal range. No other subsistence fishing closures are expected in the Port Clarence District.

Kotzebue District

2016 Season Summary:

The 2016 season saw only one major buyer, and the price of fish remained at an average of \$0.33 per pound. The harvest of 400,417 chum salmon was the highest harvest since 1985.

2017 Outlook:

The 2017 season outlook is based on the parent-year escapement and returning age classes that are observed in the commercial fishery and in the samples from the Kobuk River test fishery. The 4-year old component of the run is expected to be above average based on the 3-year old return in 2016. The 5-year-old component of the run is expected to be average based on the 4-year old return the 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 250,000 to 450,000 chum salmon if market conditions can accept that level of harvest. Two major buyers are expected in July, and another buyer is expressed interest in buying fish August. No subsistence fishing restrictions are expected in 2017.

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