



United States Department of the Interior

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Winter/Spring 2025 Fisheries Report

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SUMMARY OF KEY UPDATES

- The NPS Tanada Creek weir at Batzulnetas documented passage of 14,704 Sockeye Salmon and 13 Chinook Salmon (preliminary count estimates). A cooperative agreement has been drafted with intent to transfer the lead of future year (collaborative) weir operations to Ahtna Intertribal Resource Commission (AITRC).
- Inventory of harvestable freshwater fish in waters of Wrangell-St. Elias National Park and Preserve (WRST) is planned for the 2025 field season and led by Dan Gorze of AITRC.
- Similar to recent years, the Copper River salmon run began in relatively low numbers during the start of the season, then increased in strength as the season progressed. Harvest opportunities continued throughout the 2024 season and the Sockeye Salmon sustainable escapement goal was achieved.
- Miles Lake sonar estimated a season total passage of 946,188 salmon, which is 58% above the management objective of 599,157 salmon (through July 28).
- In-river run assessment of Chinook Salmon indicate an abundance that may not have met the minimum bound of the sustainable escapement goal range of 21,000 to 31,000 fish. The Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ADFG) closed all State Chinook Salmon fisheries of the Upper Copper River by mid-season.
- No management actions were taken in Federal subsistence fisheries of the Copper River.
- Upper Copper River Federal subsistence fishery permits; issued were: 202 Chitina Subdistrict, 293 Glennallen Subdistrict, and 2 Batzulnetas permits.
- Historical Federal subsistence harvests in the Upper Copper River through 2024 are provided in Tables 1-4 and Figure 3 displays historical harvests and in-river return estimates of salmon from 2005 through 2024.
- Federal subsistence fishery in the Lower Copper River; 80 permits were issued, and total in-season reported harvest was 425 Sockeye Salmon and 2 Chinook Salmon.
- Regulatory changes in State management plans for the Copper River District commercial fishery and Chitina personal use fishery will take effect in 2025. The commercial fishery will be delayed and may only open after May 21. The Chitina personal use fishery may open June 10 or later and will be closed to Chinook Salmon harvest until after June 30.



Tanada Creek Salmon Weir, 2024

FISHERIES RESEARCH AND MONITORING PROJECTS

Tanada Creek Salmon Weir

The WRST Fisheries Program operated the Tanada Creek salmon weir located at Batzulnetas (funded through the Fisheries Resource Monitoring Program (FRMP)). Weir installation was completed on June 25. The first salmon was documented passing the weir on June 26 and a total of 14,704 Sockeye Salmon and 13 Chinook Salmon recorded in passage for the season. The season count is below the historical average of approximately 18,000 fish. The weir operated through September 25.

Staff of AITRC were again invited to participate in the project during the season and their Fish Biologist Dan Gorze assisted with the installation and removal of the weir. This provided an opportunity to continue building on transferring knowledge of project operations to AITRC, who has expressed interest in taking over the project in future years. A draft cooperative agreement is under review and includes AITRC as a co-investigator beginning in the 2025 season.

Inventory of Harvestable Fish

The NPS Inventory and Monitoring Program is providing funds to AITRC to lead a project to document the presence, distribution, and condition of harvestable freshwater fish species in select waters of the park and preserve. This project is a collaborative effort with staff of the WRST Fisheries Program. Target sites will emphasize both lakes and flowing waters most readily accessible (near or along road or river corridors) and which have existing or potential interest for both subsistence harvest and recreational fishing opportunities. We anticipate much of the sampling effort will concentrate in the Nabesna Road area.

UPPER COPPER RIVER FISHERIES

2024 Copper River Salmon Run Strength and Management Actions

The 2024 Copper River salmon run began in low numbers relative to the date in season. The return then increased in strength as the season progressed. A similar pattern of delayed run timing for these stocks has been observed in recent years. Federal managers monitored run strength indices throughout the season to evaluate the need for appropriate fisheries management actions. No Federal Special Actions were issued by the in-season manager in the fisheries of the Copper River Drainage. Harvest opportunities continued throughout the season.

Commercial fishing opportunities in the Copper River District were limited during the early season in response to low numbers of returning salmon at the start of the season. As the run developed, fishing

opportunities were expanded. The season total commercial harvest for the Copper River District through August 13 was reported to include 1,400,000 Sockeye Salmon and 8,871 Chinook Salmon

The ADFG sonar at Miles Lake (located just downstream of the Million Dollar Bridge in the Copper River) discontinued operation on July 28. A total of 946,188 salmon were estimated in migration upstream for the season. The season passage estimate is 58% above the July 28 management objective of 599,157 salmon.

Figure 1. 2024 Copper River Salmon Daily Passage at Miles Lake Sonar

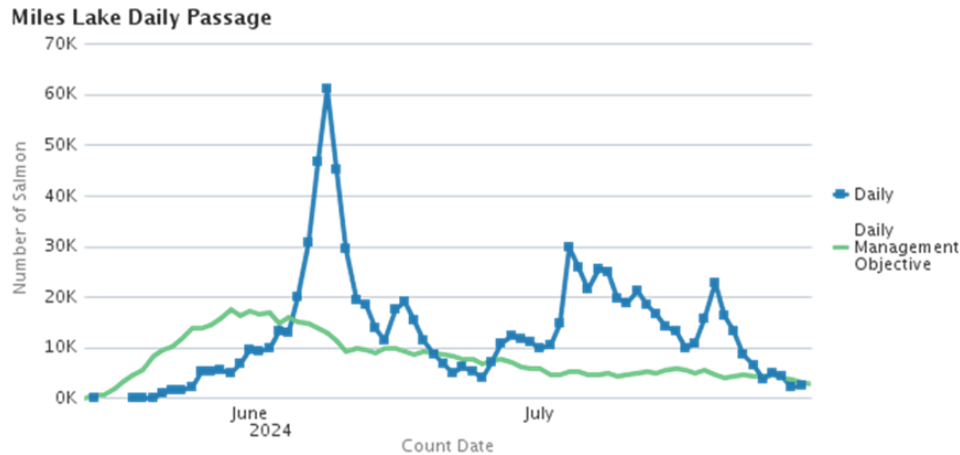
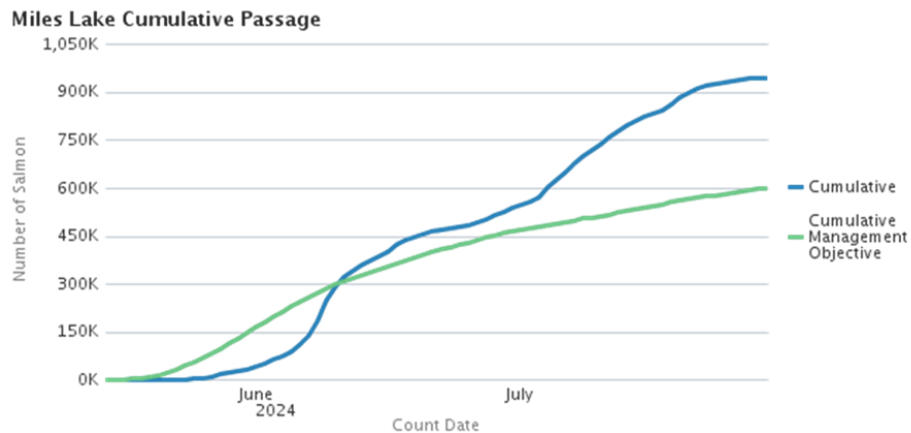


Figure 2. 2024 Copper River Salmon Cumulative Passage at Miles Lake Sonar



*Management objectives are based on historical run-timing to achieve the in-river goal.

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

In contrast to the high sonar estimates, assessments of the numbers of Chinook Salmon in-river indicate a weak return that may not have met the sustainable escapement goal for the season. In response to the in-season assessment, the ADFG closed all State fisheries of the Upper Copper River drainage to Chinook Salmon harvest, including catch and release in sport fisheries and the State subsistence fishery of the Glennallen Subdistrict. All State users were required to closely attend fish wheels being operated so Chinook Salmon could be immediately released.

Regarding the in-river Chinook Salmon estimate, the Native Village of Eyak (NVE) investigator provided a point estimate of 21,069 fish which would not meet the escapement goal after accounting for in-river harvest. However, it was noted that a low sample size in the study resulted in a standard error (SE = 5,984) and confidence interval (95% CI = 9,340–32,797) which are both below study objectives.

These restrictions did affect those fishing under Federal subsistence regulations. After careful consideration and consultation no Federal Special Action was issued by the in-season manager to restrict harvest Chinook Salmon harvest in fisheries of the Copper River Drainage.

Although Federal actions were not taken, WRST prepared and distributed advisory announcements to inform all subsistence users of the concerns for Copper River Chinook Salmon. The announcement strongly recommended that users release healthy Chinook Salmon from all gear types.

2024 Upper Copper River Federal Subsistence Fishing Season, Permits, and Historical Harvests

The Federal subsistence salmon fisheries of the Upper Copper River are open from May 15 through September 30. WRST issued 203 Chitina Subdistrict permits, 293 Glennallen Subdistrict permits, and 2 Batzulnetas permits. Tables 1 through 4 show historical reported and expanded harvests for the Federal subsistence fisheries in each subdistrict through the 2024 season. Figure 3 shows Upper Copper River Federal subsistence harvest and total in-river salmon estimates for the 20-year period of 2005-2024, along with linear trend lines.

2024 Lower Copper River Federal Subsistence Fishery

The Federal subsistence salmon fishery in the Lower Copper River near Cordova is open from June 1 through September 30. There were 80 permits issued through the OSM database. A total of 425 Sockeye Salmon and 2 Chinook Salmon were reported in harvest during the season.

2025 Recent State Regulatory Actions Affecting Copper River Salmon Fisheries

During the December 2024 meeting of the Alaska Board of Fisheries (BOF) in Cordova, regulatory changes were made to the Copper River District Salmon Management Plan and the Copper River Personal Use Dip Net Salmon Fishery Management Plan; both changes affect State salmon fisheries of the Copper River and may allow more early run fish to make it to upriver spawning tributaries and harvest locations.

Proposal 51 was submitted by WRST to address concerns of disproportionately high harvest of early run salmon stocks in the commercial fishery. Two similar proposals addressed this same concern (Proposal 52 submitted by AITRC and Proposal 53 submitted by the Copper Basin Advisory Committee). Proposals 52 and 53 were not addressed; however, in deliberating Proposal 51, the BOF Chair submitted substitute language found in Record Copy 122 (RC122) with a stated priority goal to maintain Chinook Salmon escapement in the Copper River. Included in RC122 are changes to both the Copper River District commercial fishery and the Chitina Subdistrict personal use fishery. Proposal 51 as amended by RC122 was adopted to regulation. The commercial fishery now may only open after May 21, which will be a delay from previously being allowed to open after May 14. For the Chitina personal use fishery, Chinook Salmon harvest will not be allowed during the month of June and instead of the season being mandated to open between June 7 and 15 based on sonar passage, it now may only open June 10 or later, with no date specified for a delayed opening.

Proposal 59, submitted by ADFG, was adopted and amends the Copper River Personal Use Dip Net Salmon Management Plan to allow an increase in the Sockeye Salmon annual harvest limits when the upper bound sustainable escapement goal is projected to be exceeded. This provides ADFG with a management tool for avoiding potential overescapement.

2025 Preseason Copper River Salmon Forecast

The ADFG forecast was not available at the time of preparing this document.

2025 Early Season Management Strategy for Federal Subsistence Fisheries

Unless in-season run assessments prompt concerns of meeting salmon escapement goals, we anticipate all Federal subsistence salmon fisheries of the Upper Copper River to be open from May 15 through September 30.

Table 1. Federal Subsistence Fish Harvest in All Upper Copper River Fisheries, including Harvest by Gear Type¹

Year	Expanded Harvest Estimates ²											All Species, Approximate Harvest by Gear Type					
	Steelhead/				Fish							Dip Net		Rod and Reel			
	Sockeye	Chinook	Coho	Rainbow Trout	Other Species	Total Harvest	Fish Wheel %	Fish Wheel Total	Dip Net %	Dip Net Total	Rod and Reel %	Rod and Reel Total					
2002	10,933	745	20	77	N.A.	11,775											
2003	17,393	687	259	16	N.A.	18,355											
2004	24,217	815	216	15	N.A.	25,264											
2005	24,781	412	55	7	37	25,292											
2006	20,737	507	55	17	37	21,353											
2007	19,108	704	85	7	25	19,929											
2008	14,865	892	268	21	54	16,100											
2009	14,821	590	52	22	36	15,521											
2010	17,156	362	111	46	25	17,700											
2011	18,214	814	70	6	283	19,387											
2012	17,297	410	93	45	113	17,958	90.3%	15,978	9.6%	1,697	0.1%	25					
2013	20,850	396	36	8	93	21,382	88.4%	17,142	11.4%	2,206	0.2%	39					
2014	25,659	456	97	14	57	26,284	90.4%	16,228	9.4%	1,684	0.3%	45					
2015	29,157	430	29	15	218	29,849	85.9%	18,369	14.1%	3,013	0.0%	0					
2016	21,106	465	52	6	406	22,035	89.3%	23,458	10.8%	2,825	0.0%	3					
2017	20,497	485	10	8	549	21,550	90.1%	26,900	9.7%	2,883	0.2%	66					
2018	20,634	2,763	31	4	45	23,476	90.0%	19,820	10.0%	2,197	0.1%	18					
2019	22,302	1,025	22	3	59	23,411	96.2%	20,724	3.7%	804	0.1%	19					
2020	16,337	837	26	7	60	17,266	83.4%	19,579	16.5%	3,878	0.1%	19					
2021	20,481	610	3	6	32	21,132	79.0%	18,485	21.0%	4,909	0.1%	16					
2022	17,489	994	45	16	60	18,603	75.9%	13,098	24.1%	4,159	0.1%	9					
2023	21,364	823	15	11	19	22,231	70.8%	14,951	29.2%	6,175	0.0%	6					
2024	21,566	561	1	0	21	22,150	80.2%	14,919	19.8%	3,676	0.0%	7					
5-yr. Avg. 2019-2023	19,595	858	22	8	46	20,529	70.6%	15,695	29.4%	6,536	0.0%	1					
10-yr. Avg. 2014-2023	21,503	889	33	9	150	22,584	75.3%	15,430	24.7%	5,091	0.0%	8					
							82.5%	18,763	17.4%	3,804	0.1%	16					

¹ This table reflects entries to the online database from 2011 through **1/14/2025**. Data prior to 2011 relies on NPS records. Data for all years subject to changes resulting from entry error corrections.

² Expanded Harvest estimate derived from a basic, direct ratio expansion based on the percentage of permits that reported.

Table 2. Glennallen Subdistrict Federal Reported and Expanded Subsistence Fishery Harvests¹

Year	Percentage of Permits Reported														
	Sockeye			Chinook			Coho			Steelhead/Rainbow Trout			Other Species		All Species
	Permits Issued	Permits Reported	Harvest Estimate ²	Permits Reported	Harvest Estimate ²	Harvest Estimate ²	Permits Reported	Harvest Estimate ²	Harvest Estimate ²	Permits Reported	Harvest Estimate ²	Harvest Estimate ²	Permits Reported	Harvest Estimate ²	Total Harvest Estimate ²
2002	201	80.6	8,009	9,937	700	564	16	20	62	77	35	43	10,777		
2003	221	83.3	13,623	16,354	665	554	145	174	13	16	20	24	17,233		
2004	261	78.9	17,704	22,439	806	636	152	193	12	15	12	15	23,468		
2005	267	85.8	19,973	23,279	386	331	47	55	6	7	32	37	23,763		
2006	254	87.4	16,711	19,120	492	430	28	32	15	17	32	37	19,698		
2007	281	84.3	15,225	18,060	675	569	34	40	6	7	21	25	18,808		
2008	269	81.4	11,347	13,940	866	705	148	182	17	21	44	54	15,063		
2009	274	85.0	11,836	13,925	581	494	34	40	19	22	31	36	14,605		
2010	269	87.7	12,849	14,651	342	300	64	73	39	44	22	25	15,136		
2011	277	87.7	14,163	16,145	799	701	53	60	5	6	248	283	17,293		
2012	275	92.0	14,461	15,718	403	371	78	85	40	43	104	113	16,363		
2013	273	89.0	15,834	17,789	372	331	24	27	6	7	62	70	18,264		
2014	315	90.5	21,603	23,877	441	399	23	25	10	11	52	57	24,412		
2015	325	92.3	24,695	26,753	416	384	13	14	7	8	201	218	27,408		
2016	320	82.8	15,884	19,181	446	369	9	11	5	6	332	401	20,044		
2017	338	85.2	15,691	18,415	468	399	1	1	7	8	468	549	19,442		
2018	335	91.3	15,287	16,736	2,432	2,432	0	0	4	4	41	45	19,448		
2019	343	90.1	15,873	17,620	942	849	0	0	3	3	53	59	18,624		
2020	376	90.7	11,456	12,632	752	682	0	0	6	7	54	60	13,450		
2021	355	86.5	13,117	15,168	502	434	0	0	5	6	28	32	15,708		
2022	297	83.5	12,133	14,530	890	743	2	2	13	16	48	57	15,495		
2023	290	85.2	12,971	15,229	672	572	8	9	9	11	16	19	15,939		
2024	293	78.8	13,827	17,538	466	367	0	0	0	0	16	20	18,024		
5-yr. Avg. 2019-2023	332	87	13,110	15,036	752	656	2	2	7	8	40	45	15,843		
10-yr. Avg. 2014-2023	329	88	15,871	18,014	819	726	6	6	7	8	129	150	18,997		

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² Expanded Harvest estimate derived from a basic, direct ratio expansion based on the percentage of permits that reported.

Table 3. Chitina Subdistrict Federal Reported and Expanded Subsistence Fishery Harvests¹

Year	Percentage		Sockeye		Chinook		Coho		Steelhead/Rainbow Trout		Other Species		All Species	
	Permits Issued	Permits Reported	Reported Harvest	Harvest Estimate ²	Reported Harvest	Harvest Estimate ²	Reported Harvest	Harvest Estimate ²	Reported Harvest	Harvest Estimate ²	Reported Harvest	Harvest Estimate ²	Reported Harvest	Total Harvest Estimate ²
2002	122	73.0	575	788	33	45	0	0	0	0	0	0	N.A.	833
2003	100	82.0	717	874	18	22	70	85	0	0	0	0	N.A.	982
2004	109	76.1	1,215	1,597	7	9	18	24	0	0	0	0	N.A.	1,629
2005	76	84.2	1,265	1,502	22	26	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1,529
2006	75	85.3	1,379	1,617	13	15	20	23	0	0	0	0	0	1,655
2007	98	88.8	929	1,046	26	29	40	45	0	0	0	0	0	1,120
2008	82	85.4	789	924	22	26	74	87	0	0	0	0	0	1,036
2009	68	91.2	817	896	8	9	11	12	0	0	0	0	0	917
2010	92	85.9	2,061	2,399	17	20	33	38	1	1	0	0	0	2,459
2011	85	85.9	1,766	2,056	13	15	8	9	0	0	0	0	0	2,081
2012	89	93.3	1,332	1,427	6	6	8	9	1	1	0	0	0	1,443
2013	99	90.9	1,999	2,199	17	19	8	9	1	1	10	11	0	2,239
2014	113	94.7	1,549	1,636	14	15	68	72	3	3	0	0	0	1,726
2015	111	92.8	2,231	2,404	13	14	14	15	7	8	0	0	0	2,441
2016	128	80.5	1,549	1,925	16	20	33	41	0	0	4	5	0	1,991
2017	132	79.5	1,454	1,828	12	15	7	9	0	0	0	0	0	1,852
2018	132	91.7	3,144	3,430	92	100	28	31	0	0	0	0	0	3,561
2019	181	90.6	4,053	4,473	75	83	20	22	0	0	0	0	0	4,578
2020	215	89.3	3,249	3,638	76	85	23	26	0	0	0	0	0	3,749
2021	194	91.8	4,765	5,193	99	108	3	3	0	0	0	0	0	5,304
2022	177	87.6	2,555	2,918	91	104	37	42	0	0	2	2	0	3,066
2023	196	86.7	5,138	5,924	131	151	5	6	0	0	0	0	0	6,081
2024	202	84.7	3,342	3,948	81	96	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	4,045
5-yr. Avg. 2019-2023	193	89	3,952	4,429	94	106	18	20	0	0	0	0	0	4,556
10-yr. Avg. 2014-2023	158	89	2,969	3,337	62	69	24	27	1	1	1	1	1	3,435

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² Expanded Harvest estimate derived from a basic, direct ratio expansion based on the percentage of permits that reported.

Table 4. Batzulnetas Federal Reported and Expanded Subsistence Fishery Harvests¹

Year	Sockeye				Chinook		Other Species	
	Permits Issued	Percentage	Reported Harvest	Harvest Estimate ²	Reported Harvest	Harvest Estimate ²	Reported Harvest	Harvest Estimate ²
		of Permits Reported						
2002	1	100.0	208	208	0	0	0	0
2003	1	100.0	164	164	0	0	0	0
2004	1	100.0	182	182	0	0	0	0
2005	1	100.0	0	0	0	0	0	0
2006	0	N.A.	0	0	0	0	0	0
2007	1	100.0	1	1	0	0	0	0
2008	1	100.0	1	1	0	0	0	0
2009	0	N.A.	0	0	0	0	0	0
2010	3	100.0	106	106	0	0	0	0
2011	3	66.7	9	14	0	0	0	0
2012	3	66.7	101	152	0	0	0	0
2013	3	100.0	862	862	5	5	12	12
2014	2	100.0	146	146	0	0	0	0
2015	4	100.0	0	0	0	0	0	0
2016	0	N.A.	0	0	0	0	0	0
2017	1	100.0	254	254	2	2	0	0
2018	1	100.0	468	468	0	0	0	0
2019	1	100.0	209	209	0	0	0	0
2020	1	100.0	67	67	0	0	0	0
2021	1	100.0	120	120	0	0	0	0
2022	2	100.0	41	41	0	0	0	0
2023	2	100.0	211	211	0	0	0	0
2024	2	100.0	80	80	0	0	1	1
5-yr. Avg. 2019-2023	1	100	181	181	0	0	0	0
10-yr. Avg. 2014-2023	2	100	217	217	1	1	1	1

¹ This table reflects entries to the online database from 2011 through **1/14/2025**. Data prior to 2011 relies on NPS records. Data for all years subject to changes resulting from entry error corrections.

² Expanded Harvest estimate derived from a basic, direct ratio expansion based on the percentage of permits that reported.

Figure 3. Upper Copper River Federal Subsistence Fish Total Harvest and Annual Total Inriver Salmon Return Estimates, 2005-2024

