2025 Preliminary Yukon River Salmon Fisheries Review

Supplemental handout from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Yukon Team For the Fall Regional Advisory Council Meetings

Updated on September 15, 2025

This summary is preliminary, as abundance estimates may change post-season. Fall season data for chum and coho salmon are still being compiled at the time of submission and should be considered incomplete. This report was compiled by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) in cooperation with the Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ADF&G).

Ahead of the 2025 season, Yukon River fishers received preseason information outlining expectations for salmon run strengths and the management strategy. These were shared during the Yukon River Panel, Yukon River Intertribal Fish Commission preseason meeting, Yukon River Drainage Fishermen's Association (YRDFA) preseason meeting, and in a federal management strategy public hearing. The outlook flier detailing the management strategy was mailed to all Yukon River households in May.

In this report, we compare 2025 salmon run performance to the preseason forecasts and historical medians.

2025 Summer Season

The preseason drainage-wide outlook for Chinook salmon was 58,000 to 88,000 fish, with 24,000 to 37,000 expected to be Canadian-origin. Both are well below historical medians. No escapement goals were expected to be met, and complete closures were anticipated. Resulting runs were within the forecasted ranges.

As of September 7, the Pilot Station sonar passage estimate for Chinook salmon was 60,407 (Figure 1). Of these, an estimated 24,900 (+/- 7,700) were Canadian-origin, based on genetic mixed stock analysis. The spawning escapement estimate will be finalized post season, but the Eagle sonar estimate of 23,806 Chinook salmon indicates passage was well below the rebuilding target of 71,000 Chinook salmon and within the range of fish expected at the mainstem Canada border (Figure 2).

The preseason summer chum salmon outlook was 550,000 to 1.8 million fish. Run strength uncertainty and recent low returns prompted a cautious management approach. We started the season closed to harvest. Through July 18, Pilot Station sonar estimated 347,529 chum salmon (Figure 3) which is below both the preseason forecast and the escapement goal of 500,000 to 1.2 million fish. Subsistence fishing for Chinook and summer chum salmon remained closed for the entire season.

2025 Fall Season

The fall chum salmon preseason outlook was for 114,000 to 322,000 fish. We began with a conservative approach to management at the start of fall season based on low returns in recent years and low run expectation based on the relationship with the low summer chum salmon run.

Pilot Station sonar chum salmon counts include a mix of summer chum and fall chum salmon. Between July 19 and September 7 (fall season), an estimated 343,426 chum salmon passed Pilot Station sonar (Figure 4). Using genetic mixed stock analysis, we estimate the passage of fall chum salmon to be 276,467 fish (Figure 5). This in-season fall chum salmon run estimate is below the 300,000 fish required to meet the minimum drainage-wide escapement goal or support mainstem subsistence harvest. The U.S. tributary goal in the Teedriinjik (85,000–234,000) is unlikely to be met for the 2nd year in a row, while the Delta River goal (7,000–20,000) may be met but that data may not be available until December. The Canadian escapement objectives for the Fishing Branch (22,000–49,000) and mainstem Canada border (70,000–104,000) for fall chum salmon are not expected to be met for the 8th and 6th years in a row, respectively.

The preliminary tributary escapement counts for fall chum salmon are all below median, and as of September 14, are:

- Teedriinjik River sonar: 29,252 (historical median to date: 101,758)
- Sheenjek River sonar: 6,529 (historical median to date: 34,225)
- Fishing Branch weir/sonar: 1,313 (historical median to date: 4,869)
- Eagle sonar: 4,738 (historical median to date: 25,318). The current projection point estimate is 21,000 based on genetic mixed stock analysis of Pilot Station sonar counts (Figure 6).

Preseason, the coho salmon run was expected to be below average and management started with a cautious approach. As of September 7, Pilot Station sonar estimated 106,153 coho salmon (Figure 7). A run of this size allowed for some subsistence harvest opportunity, but restrictions to fishing gear and schedules were still required to reduce the incidental harvest of fall chum salmon.

Management Actions

The Office of Subsistence Management (OSM) received special action request FSA25-01 asking the Federal Subsistence Board (Board) to close Federal public waters of the Yukon River drainage to the harvest of Chinook, chum, and coho salmon except by federally qualified subsistence users from June 1 through September 30, 2025, and to require that Federal subsistence fishing schedules, openings, closures, and methods be determined by the Federal Fisheries Manager. This request was passed to the federal manager, who held a public hearing to discuss the proposed management strategy. Prior to the typical arrival of Chinook, chum, and coho salmon, harvest closures were implemented in Federal waters for all users. When coho salmon fishing opportunity was provided, fishing was limited to federally qualified subsistence users in Federal public waters.

2025 Yukon Federal management actions included:

- **Complete closures** of Chinook and chum salmon harvest. Gillnets were restricted to 4-inch mesh (or smaller), limited to 60 feet, and operated as a set net to target non-salmon only. We encouraged placement in areas that avoid salmon.
- **Selective gear** (such as dip nets and hook and line) allowed for non-salmon harvest with release of closed salmon species.
- **Chinook and summer chum protection:** 4-inch mesh set gillnets closed from the first quarter point to the third quarter point of the run (about 2.5 weeks) during peak Chinook migration to reduce incidental salmon harvest.
- **Fall chum protection**: 4-inch mesh set gillnets and fish wheels restricted to noon Thursdays through noon Sundays schedule to reduce incidental salmon harvest.
- **New fall whitefish opportunity** started in mid-August, 6-inch (or smaller) mesh set gillnets allowed in select non-salmon rivers and most lakes throughout the Yukon drainage.
- **Coho subsistence** started the season closed, but retention was allowed starting August 21, for 24 hours per day, 7 days per week in selective gear, and in manned fish wheels and 4-inch set gillnets on restricted schedule noon Thursdays to noon Sundays. **Harvest limited to Federally qualified subsistence users in Federal public waters.**
- **End of season actions:** Restrictions will be lifted as fall chum salmon migration ends or escapement goals are achieved. Some tributaries such as the Koyukuk River and the Porcupine River will remain closed to protect spawning fall chum salmon through December.

The USFWS Yukon River Fishery Management team recognizes the immense hardship these multi-year salmon closures have placed on Yukon River communities. The inability to harvest salmon for food, culture, and tradition has a devastating impact, and we do not take the decision to close subsistence fishing lightly. Our management focus continues to be the long-term conservation and rebuilding of salmon stocks in the Yukon River, so these runs can continue for future generations. We express a special thank you to those who have stayed involved at various public meetings to help represent your communities during these challenging times.

Tribal Consultation, Public Outreach, and Meetings

In spring 2025, the USFWS offered formal Tribal Consultations by request. While no meetings occurred, pre-season management strategies were shared with Tribes and a public hearing on these strategies generated productive discussion and feedback. USFWS welcomes one-on-one Tribal Consultations with interested Tribal Governments and ANCSA corporations.

In-season assessment data and management updates were shared weekly during YRDFA teleconferences through early August. Staff also responded to daily emails and phone calls from community members. Federal special actions were issued in coordination with ADF&G advisories and distributed via email, the OSM website, the Subsistence Facebook page, and to City and Tribal Government offices. If you did not receive announcements or wish to provide feedback, please contact the Federal team directly.

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The 2025 preliminary estimates listed below are not directly comparable to escapement goals as these estimates will be reconstructed post season using various methods that consider escapement, genetic analysis, and harvests. For final published estimates, see the Joint Technical Committee (JTC) annual report, which is published each spring. All estimates for 2025 are preliminary.

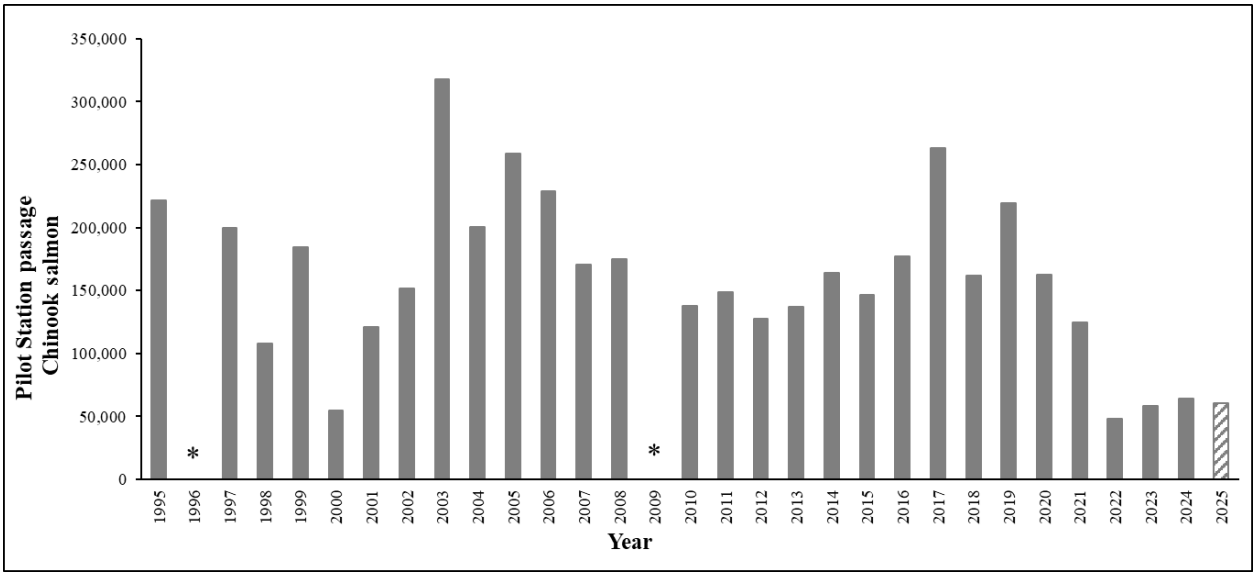

Figure 1. Cumulative passage of Chinook salmon at Pilot Station sonar from 1995 through 2025 (1995-2024, JTC Report, Appendix A1, 2025, excluding 1996 and 2009). The preliminary estimate for 2025 is the count at Pilot Station sonar. There is no drainage-wide escapement goal for Chinook salmon. However, runs near and lower than 150,000 Chinook historically failed to meet established escapement goals.

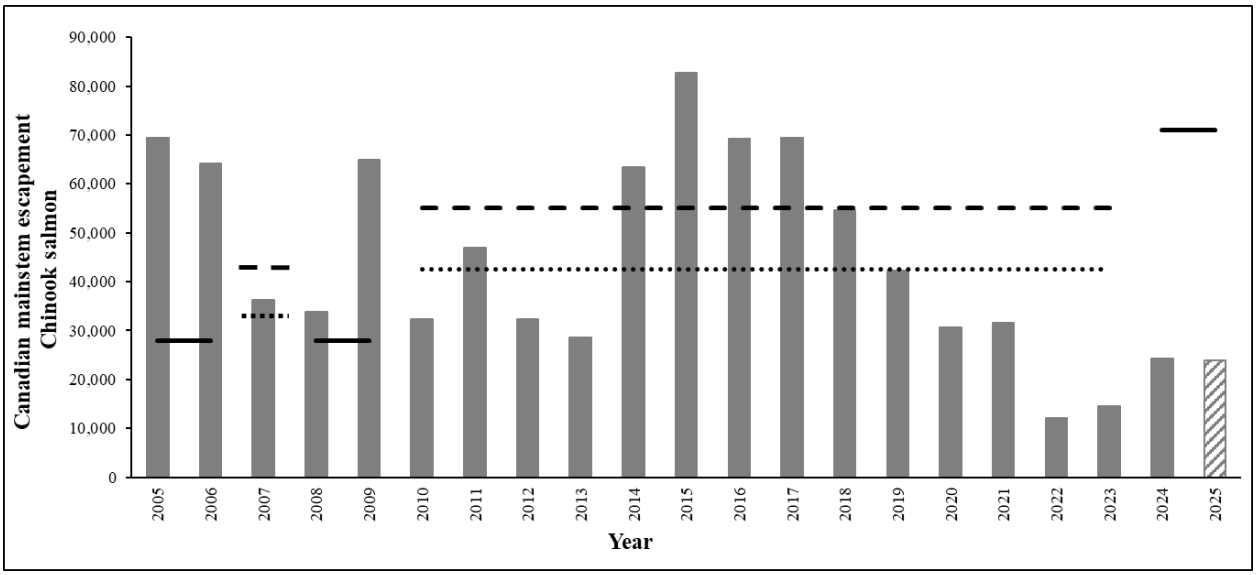

Figure 2. Estimated spawning escapement for Canadian-origin Yukon River mainstem Chinook salmon are derived from an integrated drainage-wide run reconstruction model (2005-2024, JTC Report, Appendix B11, 2025). The preliminary estimate for 2025 is the count at Eagle sonar. Previous goal ranges are shown, as well as the current rebuilding target of 71,000.

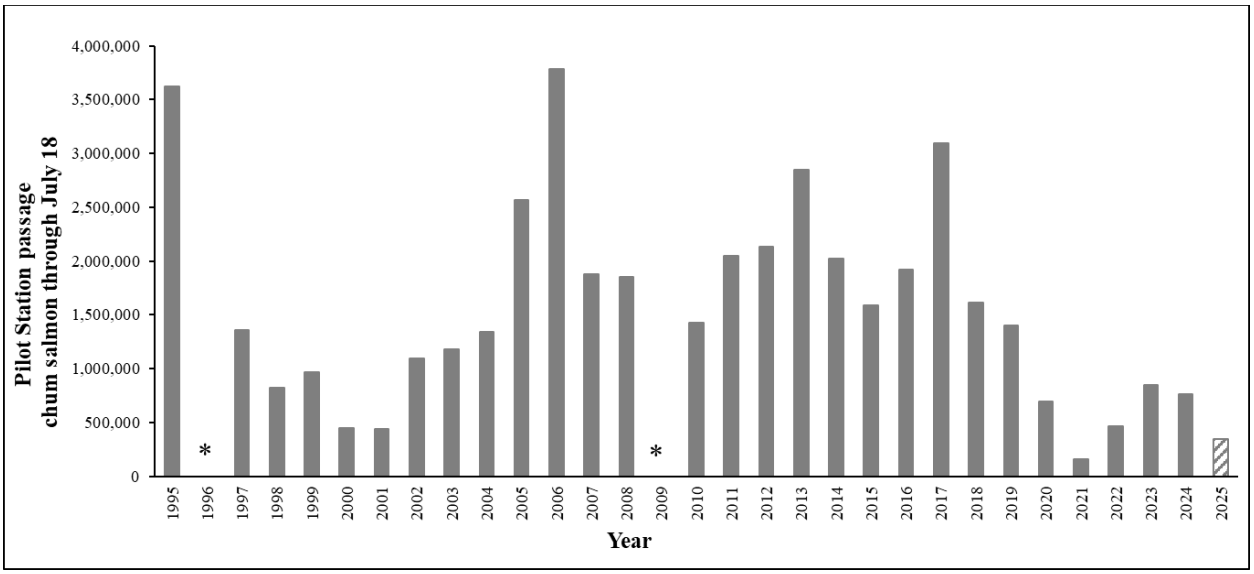

Figure 3. Cumulative passage of chum salmon at Pilot Station sonar during summer season (through July 18) from 1995 through 2025 (1995-2024, JTC Report, Appendix A1, 2025, excluding 1996 and 2009). The preliminary estimate for 2025 is the count at Pilot Station sonar. Not included in the figure is the summer chum salmon drainage-wide escapement goal of 500,000 to 1.2 million fish as estimates of genetic mixed-stock analysis, harvest, and escapement are not accounted for in these passage estimates.

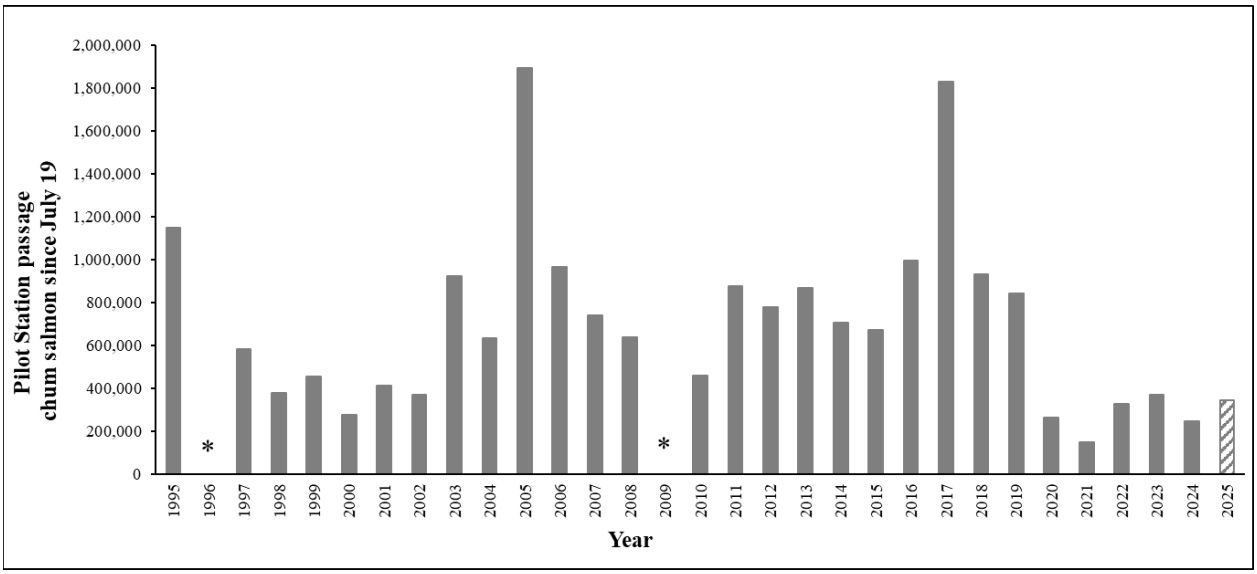

Figure 4. Cumulative passage during fall season (since July 19) at Pilot Station sonar from 1995 through 2025 (1995-2024, JTC Report, Appendix A1, 2025, excluding 1996 and 2009). The preliminary estimate for 2025 is the count at Pilot Station sonar. The counts in this figure include a mix of both summer and fall chum salmon. Harvest and escapement are not accounted for in these passage estimates.

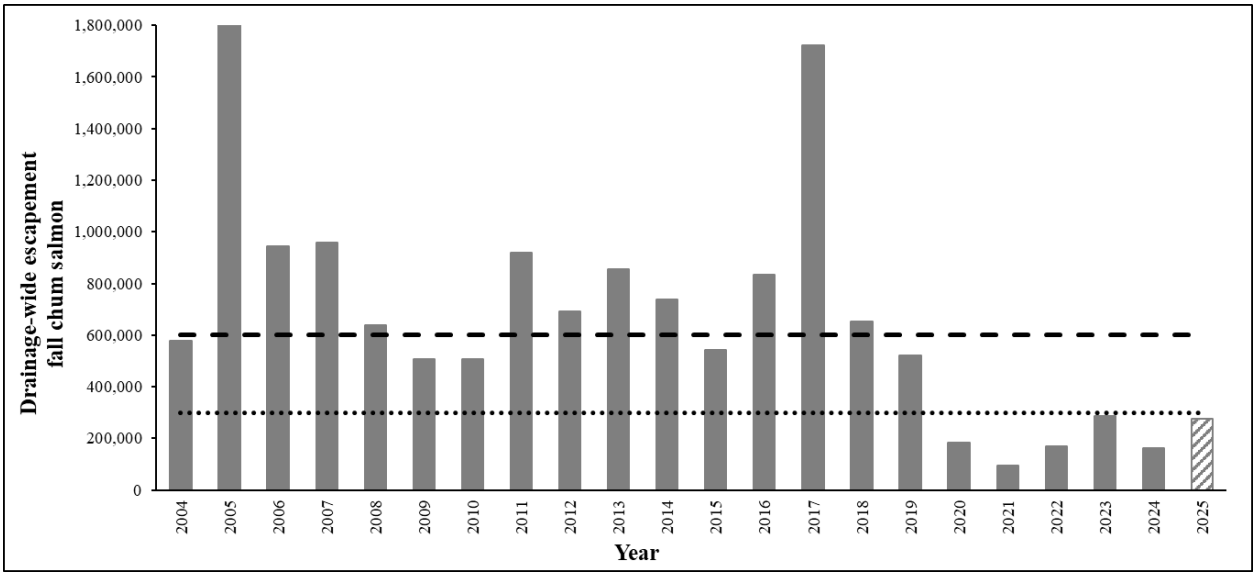

Figure 5. Drainage-wide fall chum salmon spawning escapement estimates are derived from a Bayesian model (2004-2024, JTC Report, Appendix B14, 2025). The estimate for 2025 is preliminary based on genetic mixed stock analysis of fall chum salmon at Pilot Station sonar since July 19. The drainage-wide fall chum salmon escapement goal range (300,000–600,000) is included.

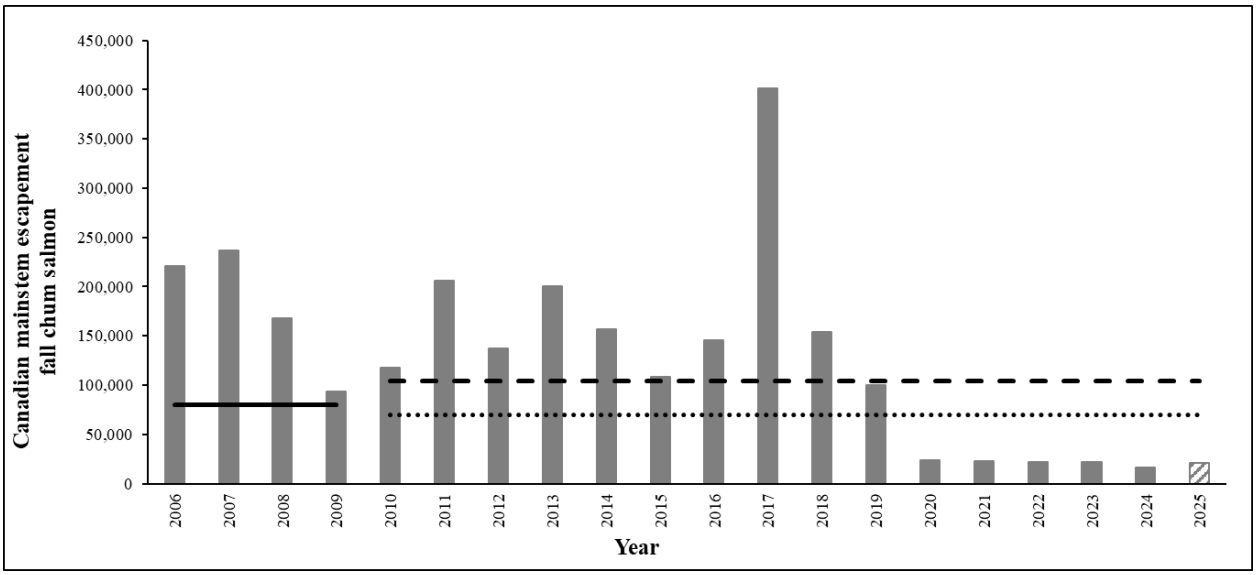

Figure 6. Estimated spawning escapement for Canadian-origin Yukon River mainstem fall chum salmon based on Eagle sonar passage minus estimated harvest above sonar (2006-2024, JTC Report, Appendix B16, 2025). The preliminary 2025 estimate is the projection of fall chum based on Pilot Station passage mixed stock analysis (as of September 15). The current escapement goal range (70,000–104,000) and a previous target goal are included.

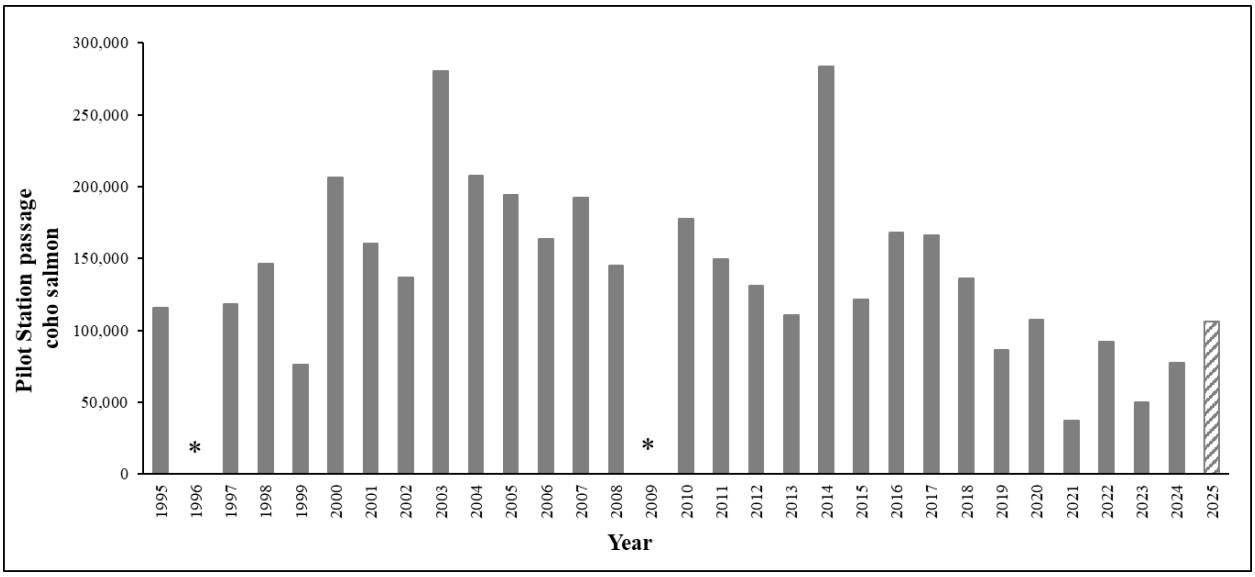

Figure 7. Cumulative passage of coho salmon at Pilot Station sonar from 1995 through 2025 (1995-2024, JTC Report, Appendix A1, 2025, excluding 1996 and 2009). The preliminary estimate for 2025 is the count at Pilot Station sonar. The sonar ceases operation before the coho salmon run is complete, so estimates are considered minimum.