



# United States Department of the Interior

## NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

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### Wrangell-St. Elias National Park and Preserve Fisheries Report Fall 2025

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#### SUMMARY OF KEY UPDATES

- Fisheries Biologist Dave Sarafin has retired as of May 30<sup>th</sup> after 22 years of service at Wrangell-St. Elias National Park and Preserve. He has been missed, and we wish him a happy retirement!
- As of July, the Ahtna Intertribal Resource Commission (AITRC) has taken lead in running the Tanada Creek weir at Batzulnetas. Thank you to Dan Gorze, Tim Olson, and other AITRC staff for managing the weir. Thank you to NPS staff who helped in early June as well.
- The Copper River salmon run had the daily count at Miles Lake sonar surpassing the daily management objective by May 22<sup>nd</sup> and cumulative count surpassing the cumulative management objective by May 23<sup>rd</sup>. The run continued strong throughout the season, and harvest opportunities remained open. The Sockeye Salmon sustainable escapement goal has likely been met.
- Miles Lake sonar estimated a season total passage of 895,509 salmon, which is 48% above the management objective of 604,249 salmon (through July 28).
- Assessments by the Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ADF&G) of in-river Chinook Salmon are ongoing. ADFG management actions restricted retention of Chinook Salmon in the State Chitina Personal Use Fishery of the Upper Copper River by mid-season as well as in the sport fisheries of the Upper Copper River drainage.
- As of August 25<sup>th</sup>, Upper Copper River Federal subsistence fishery permits issued were 250 Chitina Subdistrict, 323 Glennallen Subdistrict, and 3 Batzulnetas permits.
- Historical Federal subsistence harvests in the Upper Copper River through 2024 (as of May 29, 2025) are provided in Tables 1-4.
- Several outstanding harvest reports remain from the 2024 season; 12 reports for the Chitina Subdistrict (94% returned) and 34 reports for the Glennallen Subdistrict (88% returned). Please return your harvest reports, even if you do not fish.
- Federal subsistence fishery in the Lower Copper River: as of August 25<sup>th</sup>, 146 permits were issued, and total in-season reported harvest was 894 Sockeye Salmon and 21 Chinook Salmon.



**Figure 1: Dave Sarafin collecting otoliths from salmon carcasses, 2007**

### **PERSONNEL UPDATES**

Fisheries Biologist Dave Sarafin has recently retired from the National Park Service. Dave started his career with seasonal work with the Bureau of Land Management and the U.S. Forest Service before transitioning to the Department of Fish and Game in 1991. He worked in Kodiak until 1999, when he moved to Glennallen. In 2003, he started working as a seasonal fisheries technician at Wrangell-St. Elias, and continued to build his career, culminating in the Copper River Federal Fisheries Management Biologist role in 2016. Dave still lives in Tazlina and continues to serve as a member of the Copper Basin Fish and Game Advisory Committee. Happy trails, Dave!

### **FISHERIES RESEARCH AND MONITORING PROJECTS**

#### ***Tanada Creek Salmon Weir***

This year, funding through the Fisheries Resource Monitoring Program had been transferred to the Ahtna Intertribal Resource Commission (AITRC) to operate the Tanada Creek salmon weir located at Batzulnetas. Weir installation was completed on June 4. While waiting for the funding to transfer, NPS staff helped monitor the weir, and their hard work is much appreciated. AITRC took over management of the weir in early July.

#### ***Inventory of harvestable fish in select waters of Wrangell-St. Elias National Park and Preserve to inform stewardship***

Dan Gorze, AITRC fisheries biologist, is the primary investigator for this project which will document the presence, distribution, size, relative abundance, and general habitat conditions of species such as arctic grayling, burbot, Dolly Varden, lake trout, rainbow trout, and whitefish in several lakes across Wrangell-St. Elias National Park and Preserve. At least ten sites have been chosen for inventory. This is in conjunction with the NPS Inventory Program which assists with a detailed implementation plan and facilitates project progress. This project kicked off with a meeting in June 2025. Fieldwork is scheduled for summer 2026 with a report published by spring 2027.

## UPPER COPPER RIVER FISHERIES

### *2025 Copper River Salmon Run Strength and Management Actions*

The 2025 Copper River sockeye salmon had a strong run throughout the season, differing from a pattern of a delayed run timing seen 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.

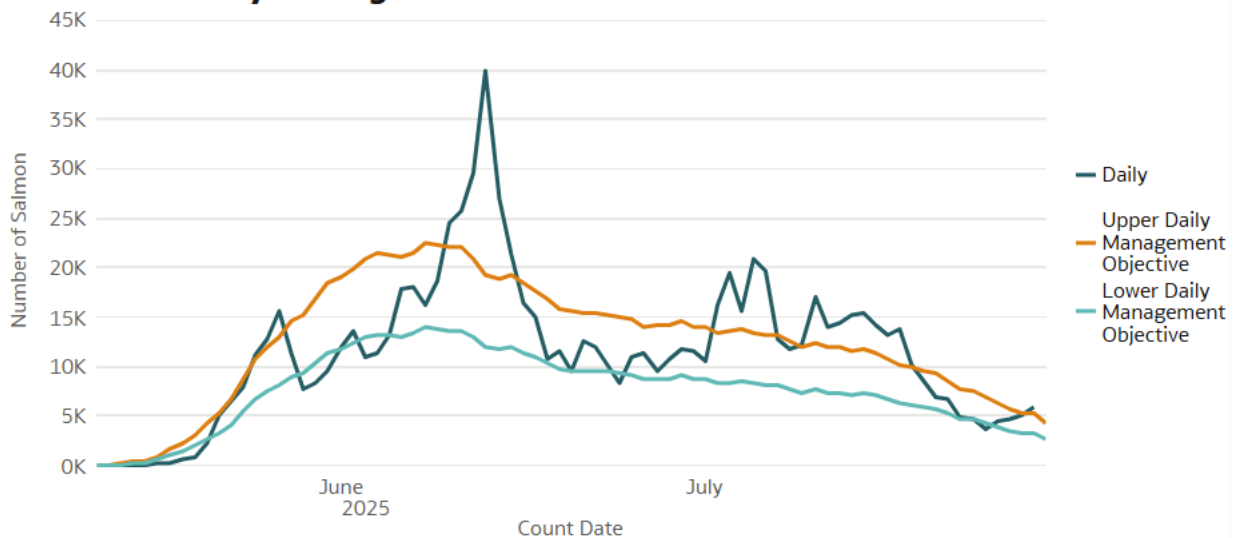
Regulatory changes in State management plans for the Copper River District commercial fishery and Chitina personal use fishery took effect in 2025. The commercial fishery was delayed and opened on May 21. The Chitina personal use fishery had been delayed and opened on June 10. It remained closed to the retention of Chinook Salmon for the season. The Copper River District commercial fishery manager often initiated the Expanded Inside Chinook Salmon Closure Area and limited hours for openers out of concern for Chinook salmon as well.

As the run developed, fishing opportunities were expanded during the season. The season total commercial harvest for the Copper River District through August 11 is reported to include 838,637 Sockeye Salmon (a decrease of 561,363 salmon from 2024), and 5,492 Chinook Salmon (a decrease of 3,379 salmon from 2024).

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 895,509 salmon were estimated in migration upstream for the season. The season passage estimate is 48% above the July 28 management objective of 604,249 salmon.

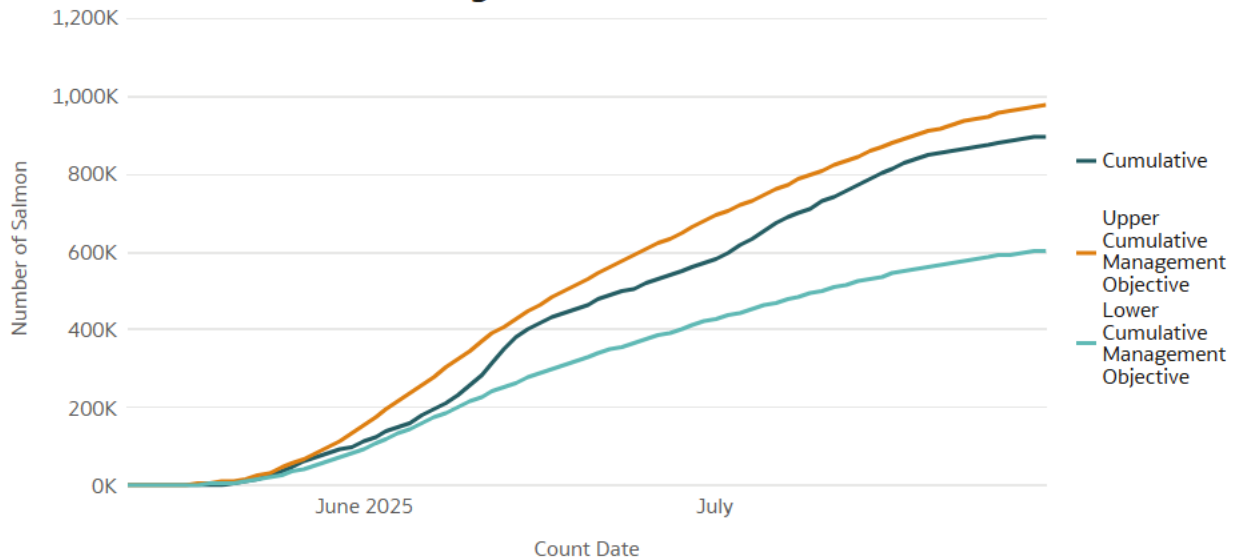
### **2025 Copper River Salmon Passage at Miles Lake Sonar**

#### **Miles Lake Daily Passage**



**Figure 2: Miles Lake Sonar Daily Passage**

### Miles Lake Cumulative Passage



**Figure 3: Miles Lake Sonar Cumulative Passage**

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

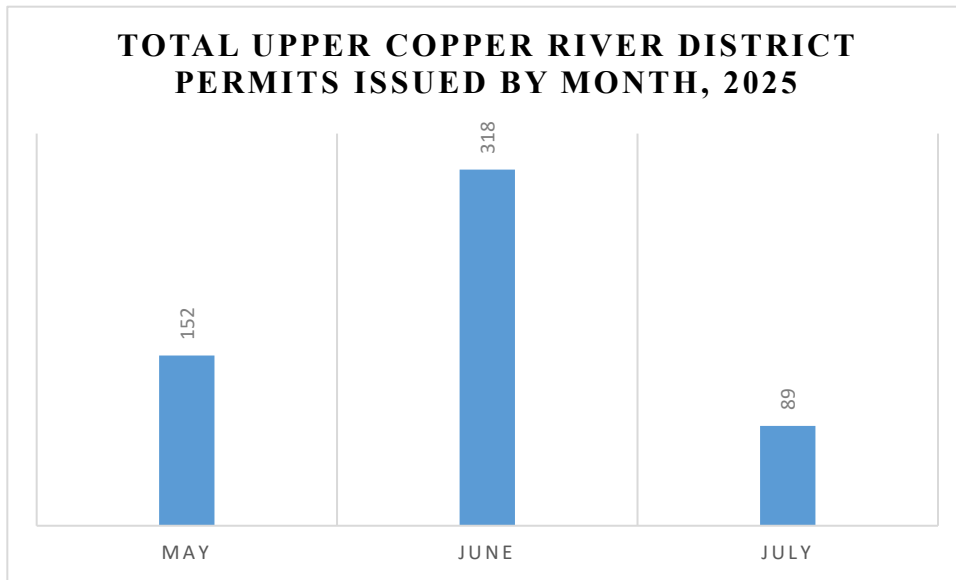
Source: [http://www.adfg.alaska.gov/index.cfm?adfg=commercialbyareacopperriver.salmon\\_escapement](http://www.adfg.alaska.gov/index.cfm?adfg=commercialbyareacopperriver.salmon_escapement)

In line with the pre-season forecast, in-season assessments by ADFG biologists of the numbers of Chinook Salmon in-river raised concern about meeting the sustainable escapement goal for the season. In response to the in-season assessment, the ADFG restricted retention of Chinook Salmon in the Chitina Personal Use Fishery and in the sport fisheries of the Upper Copper River drainage. No closures were made to the State subsistence fishery of the Glennallen Subdistrict.

These restrictions did not affect those fishing under Federal subsistence regulations.

### ***2025 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. Through August 25th, WRST has issued 250 Chitina Subdistrict, 323 Glennallen Subdistrict, and 3 Batzulnetas permits (numbers of permits issued are preliminary until records from remote issuing stations are received). Permits are issued at the Slana Ranger Station, the Visitor Center in Copper Center, Tetlin National Wildlife Refuge Visitor Center in Tok, and at permitting events in McCarthy and Chitina. Figure 4 shows the distribution of permits issued by month—June is the highest month for permits. Tables 2 through 5 show historical reported and expanded harvests for the Federal subsistence fisheries in each subdistrict through the 2024 season as of May 29, 2025.



**Figure 4: Permit Issuance by Month, 2025**

***2025 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. To date, there have been 146 permits issued through the OSM database, an increase from 88 permits issued last year. A total of 894 Sockeye Salmon and 21 Chinook Salmon were reported in harvest through July 28. Table 5 details past permits and harvest data.

**Table 1. Federal Subsistence Fish Harvest in All Upper Copper River Fisheries, including Harvest by Gear Type<sup>1</sup>**  
**All Species, Approximate Harvest by Gear Type**

Year	Expanded Harvest Estimates <sup>2</sup>										Fish						
	Steelhead/ Rainbow Trout					Other Species					Total Harvest	Fish Wheel %	Total Wheel	Dip Net %	Total Dip Net	Rod and Reel %	Total Rod and Reel
	Sockeye	Chinook	Coho	Trout	Species	Total	Wheel %	Total	Dip Net %	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											
2013	20,850	396	36	8	93	21,382											
2014	25,659	456	97	14	57	26,284											
2015	29,157	430	29	15	218	29,849											
2016	21,106	465	52	6	406	22,035											
2017	20,497	485	10	8	549	21,550											
2018	20,634	2,763	31	4	45	23,476											
2019	22,302	1,025	22	3	59	23,411											
2020	16,337	837	26	7	60	17,266											
2021	20,481	610	3	6	32	21,132											
2022	17,489	994	45	16	60	18,603											
2023	21,364	823	15	11	19	22,231											
2024	21,504	550	1	0	21	22,076											
5-yr. Avg. 2019-2023	19,595	858	22	8	46	20,529											
10-yr. Avg. 2014-2023	21,503	889	33	9	150	22,584											

<sup>1</sup> This table reflects entries to the online database from 2011 through 5/29/2025. Data prior to 2011 relies on NPS records. Data for all years subject to changes resulting from entry error corrections.

<sup>2</sup> 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 Harvests<sup>1</sup>**

Year	Permits Issued	Percentage of Permits Reported		Sockeye			Chinook			Coho			Steelhead/Rainbow Trout			Other Species			All Species Total Harvest Estimate <sup>2</sup>	
		Reported	Harvest	Harvest Estimate <sup>2</sup>	Reported	Harvest	Harvest Estimate <sup>2</sup>	Reported	Harvest	Harvest Estimate <sup>2</sup>	Reported	Harvest	Harvest Estimate <sup>2</sup>	Reported	Harvest	Harvest Estimate <sup>2</sup>	Reported	Harvest		Harvest Estimate <sup>2</sup>
		80.6	8,009	9,937	564	700	16	20	77	62	35	43	10,777							
2002	201	80.6	8,009	9,937	564	700	16	20	77	62	35	43	10,777							
2003	221	83.3	13,623	16,354	554	665	145	174	16	13	20	24	17,233							
2004	261	78.9	17,704	22,439	636	806	152	193	15	12	12	15	23,468							
2005	267	85.8	19,973	23,279	331	386	47	55	7	6	32	37	23,763							
2006	254	87.4	16,711	19,120	430	492	28	32	17	15	32	37	19,698							
2007	281	84.3	15,225	18,060	569	675	34	40	7	6	21	25	18,808							
2008	269	81.4	11,347	13,940	705	866	148	182	21	17	44	54	15,063							
2009	274	85.0	11,836	13,925	494	581	34	40	22	19	31	36	14,605							
2010	269	87.7	12,849	14,651	300	342	64	73	44	39	22	25	15,136							
2011	277	87.7	14,163	16,145	701	799	53	60	6	5	248	283	17,293							
2012	275	92.0	14,461	15,718	371	403	78	85	43	40	104	113	16,363							
2013	273	89.0	15,834	17,789	331	372	24	27	7	6	62	70	18,264							
2014	315	90.5	21,603	23,877	399	441	23	25	11	10	52	57	24,412							
2015	325	92.3	24,695	26,753	384	416	13	14	8	7	201	218	27,408							
2016	320	82.8	15,884	19,181	369	446	9	11	6	5	332	401	20,044							
2017	338	85.2	15,691	18,415	399	468	1	1	8	7	468	549	19,442							
2018	335	91.3	15,287	16,736	2,432	2,662	0	0	4	4	41	45	19,448							
2019	343	90.1	15,873	17,620	849	942	0	0	3	3	53	59	18,624							
2020	376	90.7	11,456	12,632	682	752	0	0	7	6	54	60	13,450							
2021	355	86.5	13,117	15,168	434	502	0	0	6	5	28	32	15,708							
2022	297	83.5	12,133	14,530	743	890	2	2	16	13	48	57	15,495							
2023	290	85.2	12,971	15,229	572	672	8	9	11	9	16	19	15,939							
2024	293	80.9	14,170	17,518	370	457	0	0	0	0	16	20	17,995							
5-yr. Avg. 2019-2023	332	87	13,110	15,036	656	752	2	2	8	7	40	45	15,843							
10-yr. Avg. 2014-2023	329	88	15,871	18,014	726	819	6	6	8	7	129	150	18,997							

<sup>1</sup> This table reflects entries to the online database from 2011 through 5/29/2025. Data prior to 2011 relies on NPS records. Data for all years subject to changes resulting from entry error corrections.

<sup>2</sup> 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 Harvests<sup>1</sup>**

Year	Percentage		Sockeye		Chinook		Coho		Steelhead/Rainbow Trout		Other Species		All Species		
	Permits Issued	Permits Reported	Reported Harvest	Estimate <sup>2</sup>	Reported Harvest	Estimate <sup>2</sup>	Reported Harvest	Estimate <sup>2</sup>	Reported Harvest	Estimate <sup>2</sup>	Reported Harvest	Estimate <sup>2</sup>	Reported Harvest	Estimate <sup>2</sup>	
			Estimate <sup>2</sup>	Estimate <sup>2</sup>	Estimate <sup>2</sup>	Estimate <sup>2</sup>	Estimate <sup>2</sup>	Estimate <sup>2</sup>	Estimate <sup>2</sup>	Estimate <sup>2</sup>	Estimate <sup>2</sup>	Estimate <sup>2</sup>	Estimate <sup>2</sup>	Estimate <sup>2</sup>	Estimate <sup>2</sup>
2002	122	73.0	575	788	33	45	0	0	0	0	0	0	N.A.	N.A.	833
2003	100	82.0	717	874	18	22	70	85	0	0	0	0	N.A.	N.A.	982
2004	109	76.1	1,215	1,597	7	9	18	24	0	0	0	0	N.A.	N.A.	1,629
2005	76	84.2	1,265	1,502	22	26	0	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	0	1,655
2007	98	88.8	929	1,046	26	29	40	45	0	0	0	0	0	0	1,120
2008	82	85.4	789	924	22	26	74	87	0	0	0	0	0	0	1,036
2009	68	91.2	817	896	8	9	11	12	0	0	0	0	0	0	917
2010	92	85.9	2,061	2,399	17	20	33	38	1	1	0	0	0	0	2,459
2011	85	85.9	1,766	2,056	13	15	8	9	0	0	0	0	0	0	2,081
2012	89	93.3	1,332	1,427	6	6	8	9	1	1	0	0	0	0	1,443
2013	99	90.9	1,999	2,199	17	19	8	9	1	1	10	11	0	0	2,239
2014	113	94.7	1,549	1,636	14	15	68	72	3	3	0	0	0	0	1,726
2015	111	92.8	2,231	2,404	13	14	14	15	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	0	1,991
2017	132	79.5	1,454	1,828	12	15	7	9	0	0	0	0	0	0	1,852
2018	132	91.7	3,144	3,430	92	100	28	31	0	0	0	0	0	0	3,561
2019	181	90.6	4,053	4,473	75	83	20	22	0	0	0	0	0	0	4,578
2020	215	89.3	3,249	3,638	76	85	23	26	0	0	0	0	0	0	3,749
2021	194	91.8	4,765	5,193	99	108	3	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	5,304
2022	177	87.6	2,555	2,918	91	104	37	42	0	0	2	2	0	0	3,066
2023	196	86.7	5,138	5,924	131	151	5	6	0	0	0	0	0	0	6,081
2024	202	88.6	3,461	3,906	82	93	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	3,999
5-yr. Avg. 2019-2023	193	89	3,952	4,429	94	106	18	20	0	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	1	3,435

<sup>1</sup> This table reflects entries to the online database from 2011 through 5/29/2025. Data prior to 2011 relies on NPS records. Data for all years subject to changes resulting from entry error corrections.

<sup>2</sup> 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 Harvests<sup>1</sup>**

Year	Sockeye				Chinook		Other Species	
	Permits Issued	Percentage	Reported	Harvest	Reported	Harvest	Reported	Harvest
		of Permits Reported	Harvest	Estimate <sup>2</sup>	Harvest	Estimate <sup>2</sup>	Harvest	Estimate <sup>2</sup>
2001	1	100	62	62	0	0	0	0
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

<sup>1</sup> This table reflects entries to the online database from 2011 through 5/29/2025. Data prior to 2011 relies on NPS records. Data for all years subject to changes resulting from entry error corrections.

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

**Table 5: Lower Copper River Federal Subsistence Fishery Permits Issued and Harvest by Year**

Year	Permits Issued	Sockeye Harvest	Chinook Harvest
2022	69	104	3
2023	71	197	4
2024	88	425	2
2025*	146	894	21

Source: Federal Subsistence Permit Database

\*Harvest data as of 8/25/2025