

FEDERAL FISHERIES CLOSURE REVIEW
FCR27-10

ISSUE

FCR27-10 is a standard review of Federal subsistence fisheries closures for the Federal public waters of Kah Sheets Creek (**Map 1**) to non-federally qualified users (NFQUs) from July 1 to July 31. It is the Federal Subsistence Board's (Board) policy that Federal public waters should be reopened when closures are no longer necessary, and that closures will be reviewed at least once every four years. The purpose of this review is to determine if the closure of Kah Sheets Creek is still warranted.

Closure Location and Species

Kah Sheets Creek – all fish

Current Federal Regulation

§ __.27(b)

(16) Unless specified otherwise in this section, you may use a rod and reel to take fish without a subsistence fishing permit. Harvest limits applicable to the use of a rod and reel to take fish for subsistence uses shall be as follows:

(i) If you are required to obtain a subsistence fishing permit for an area, that permit is required to take fish for subsistence uses with rod and reel in that area. The harvest and possession limits for taking fish with a rod and reel in those areas are the same as indicated on the permit issued for subsistence fishing with other gear types.

§ __.27(e)(13)

(ii) You must possess a subsistence fishing permit to take salmon, trout, grayling, or char. You must possess a subsistence fishing permit to take eulachon from any freshwater stream flowing into fishing District 1.

(iv) In areas where use of rod and reel is allowed, you may use artificial fly, lure, or bait when fishing with rod and reel, unless restricted by Federal permit. If you use bait, you must retain all federally regulated fish species caught, and they apply to your applicable daily, seasonal, and annual harvest limits for that species.

(A) For streams with steelhead, once your daily, seasonal, or annual limit of steelhead is harvested, you may no longer fish with bait for any species.

(B) Unless otherwise specified in this paragraph (e)(13), allowable gear for salmon or steelhead is restricted to gaffs, spears, gillnets, seines, dip nets, cast nets, handlines, or rod and reel.

(v) Unless otherwise specified in this paragraph (e)(13), you may use a handline for snagging salmon or steelhead.

(xi) If a harvest limit is not otherwise listed for sockeye in paragraph (e)(13) of this section, the harvest limit for sockeye salmon is the same as provided for in adjacent State subsistence or personal use fisheries. If a harvest limit is not established for the State subsistence or personal use fisheries, the possession limit is 10 sockeye and the annual harvest limit is 20 sockeye per household for that stream.

(xxii) The Federal public waters of Kah Sheets Creek are closed from July 1 to July 31, except by federally qualified users.

Closure Dates

July 1 – July 31

Current State Regulation

No existing regulations specific to Kah Sheets Creek

Relevant State Regulations

Subsistence Regulations

5 AAC 01.710 Fishing seasons

(a) Except in the nonsubsistence areas described in 5 AAC 99.010(a)(1) and (2) and unless restricted in this section, 5 AAC 01.725, or under the terms of a subsistence

fishing permit, fish, other than rainbow trout and steelhead trout, may be taken in the Southeastern Alaska Area at any time.

5 AAC 01.745 Subsistence bag and possession limits; annual limits

(f) In the Petersburg-Wrangell Management Area, in waters open to subsistence salmon fishing under a household subsistence salmon fishing permit, the possession and annual limits for salmon per household are as follows:

(1) Sockeye Salmon may not be taken for subsistence uses, except that Sockeye Salmon may be taken in the vicinity of Point Baker as described in 5 AAC 01.710(f) and (c) of this section, and in the following waters, with the following possession and annual limits:

(B) District 6: in the following waters, the possession and annual limit is 30 Sockeye Salmon:

(i) Red Bay;

(ii) Salmon Bay;

Sport regulations

5 AAC 47.022 General provisions for seasons and bag, possession, annual, and size limits for the fresh waters of Southeast Alaska Area

(b) In the fresh waters east of the longitude of Cape Fairweather:

(2) salmon, other than king salmon: may be taken from January 1 December 31; no annual limit, no size limit; bag and possession limits, as follows:

(A) 16 inches or greater in length; bag limit of six fish per species; possession limit of 12 fish per species;

(B) less than 16 inches in length; bag and possession limit of 10 fish in combination;

5 AAC 47.023 Special provisions for seasons, bag, possession, annual, and size limits, and methods and means for the fresh waters of the Southeast Alaska Area

(h) In the Petersburg/Wrangell vicinity:

(5) in Kah Sheets Lake, Anan Lake, Thoms Lake, and Virginia Lake,

(A) only unbaited, artificial lures may be used;

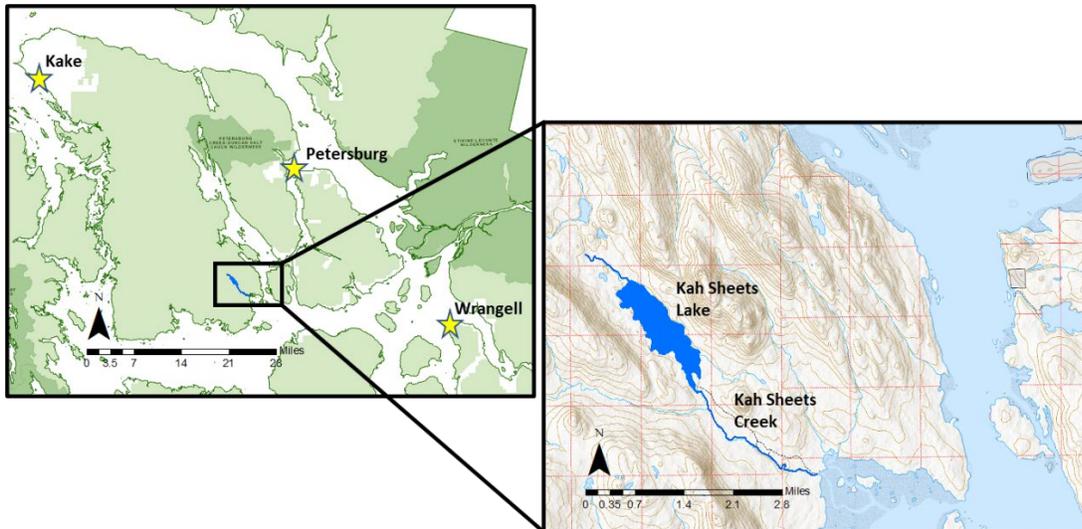
(B) rainbow and cutthroat trout, in combination, must be no less than 14 inches and no greater than 22 inches in length;

Regulatory Year Initiated: 2023 – as Fisheries Proposal FP23-21

The Board closure decision was made February 2, 2023 (FSB 2023), the regulation was published on February 29, 2024, in the Federal Register (89 FR 14746).

Extent of Federal Public Lands/Waters

For the purposes of this discussion, the phrase “Federal public waters” is defined as those waters described under 36 CFR 242.3 and 43 CFR 51.3. Federal public waters of Kah Sheets Creek and Kah Sheets Lake include freshwaters located within and adjacent to the exterior boundaries of the Tongass National Forest and encompass the entire watershed, approximately 11,034 acres (**Map 1**).



Map 1. Location of the Federal public waters of Kah Sheets Creek and Kah Sheets Lake on the southeast side of Kupreanof Island, as well as its relative location southwest of Petersburg, west of Wrangell, and southeast of Kake.

Customary and Traditional Use Determination

Rural residents of the Southeastern Alaska and Yakutat Fishery Management Areas have a customary and traditional use determination for all fish in the Southeastern Alaska Area and the Yakutat Area, including Sockeye Salmon in Kah Sheets Creek and Kah Sheets Lake.

Regulatory History

This closure is the result of Board deliberation on Fisheries Proposal FP23-21, submitted during the 2023 Federal fisheries regulatory cycle. FP23-21 requested that the Federal public waters of Kah Sheets Lake and Kah Sheets Creek be closed to the harvest of Sockeye Salmon by NFQUs, due to increasing competition and conflict between federally qualified and non-federally qualified users. The Southeast Alaska Subsistence Regional Advisory Council (Southeast Council) supported FP23-21 as modified by the Office of Subsistence Management (OSM). The modified proposal requested that Kah Sheets creek be closed to NFQUs only from July 1 to July 31, and that Kah Sheets Lake remain open to all users for the entire season. The Board adopted this modified version of the proposal, in deference to the Southeast Council (FSB 2023). Prior to the adoption of this modified proposal, there had been no Federal regulations specifically affecting fishing opportunities in Kah Sheets Creek or Kah Sheets Lake.

Closure last reviewed

No previous review

Justification for Original Closure (ANILCA Section 815 (3) criteria)

The closure was made due to the need to continue subsistence uses.

Section §815(3) of ANILCA states: Nothing in this title shall be construed as – (3) authorizing a restriction on the taking of fish and wildlife for nonsubsistence uses on public lands (other than national parks and monuments) unless necessary for the conservation of healthy populations of fish and wildlife, for the reasons set forth in section 816, to continue subsistence uses of such populations, or pursuant to other applicable law...

The Board closed the Federal public waters of Kah Sheets Creek to provide for the continuation of subsistence uses. Kah Sheets is one of three primary sockeye fishing locations for residents of Petersburg that does not require crossing large bodies of water, making it accessible to federally qualified subsistence users (FQSUs) with small boats. In addition, the one truly good fishing spot on the Kah Sheets Creek is located below the waterfall (**Figure 1**). Increasing competition between subsistence users and NFQUs at the falls led to user conflicts and decreased subsistence users' access and harvest success. Eliminating competition at the waterfalls from NFQUs coming from local lodges

while keeping Kah Sheets Lake open to all users was seen as a compromise that provided a subsistence preference to rural residents, while maintaining a nearby fishing opportunity for NFQUs.

Council Recommendation for Original Closure

The Southeast Council recommended closing Kah Sheets Creek to NFQUs from July 1 to July 31, while leaving Kah Sheets Lake open to all users (SERAC 2022).

State Recommendation for Original Closure

Oppose. The State opposed this proposal because they felt that the amount of harvest taken by NFQUs in this system did not pose a conservation concern or threat to the continuation of subsistence (FSB 2023).

Biological Background and Harvest History

Kah Sheets Lake encompasses approximately 384 acres (1.55km²). Kah Sheets Creek is the name of both the inlet stream and the outlet stream of the lake (**Map 1**). The outlet stream drains to Kah Sheets Bay, located in Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ADF&G) statistical area 6, near where Duncan Canal opens to Sumner Strait. The entire Kah Sheets watershed is approximately 11,034 acres. Approximately 34 acres around the mouth of the creek were harvested for timber in 1971. Otherwise, the watershed is unharvested and has no roads. The anadromous waters catalogue states that Chum, Coho, Pink, and Sockeye salmon, as well as cutthroat, Dolly Varden, and steelhead are all present in the system (Giefer and Evers 2025).

Efforts to quantify Sockeye Salmon in Kah Sheets Creek have been made through ground and aerial surveys (1931, 1933, 1949-1950, 1952-1962). The last estimate was made when a weir was installed and operated by the ADF&G during the 1965 and 1966 Sockeye Salmon runs, yielding escapement estimates of 5,128 and 2,446, respectively (**Figure 1**) (ADF&G 1965). These estimates should be treated as minimum counts because extreme water level fluctuations repeatedly compromised the rigid pipe and wire mesh weir used in this monitoring project. Furthermore, in 1966 the weir was removed a full month early despite observations of up to 1,500 Sockeye Salmon schooling behind the weir site. Regardless, there have been no recent estimates of Sockeye Salmon escapement made for this system, and it is not clear how much these older estimates might reflect the current situation.

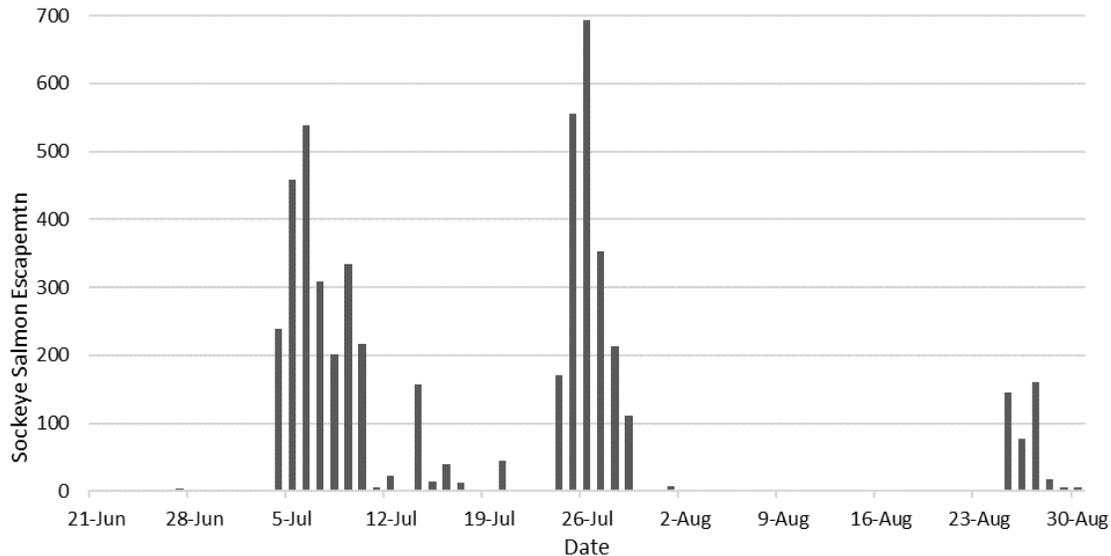


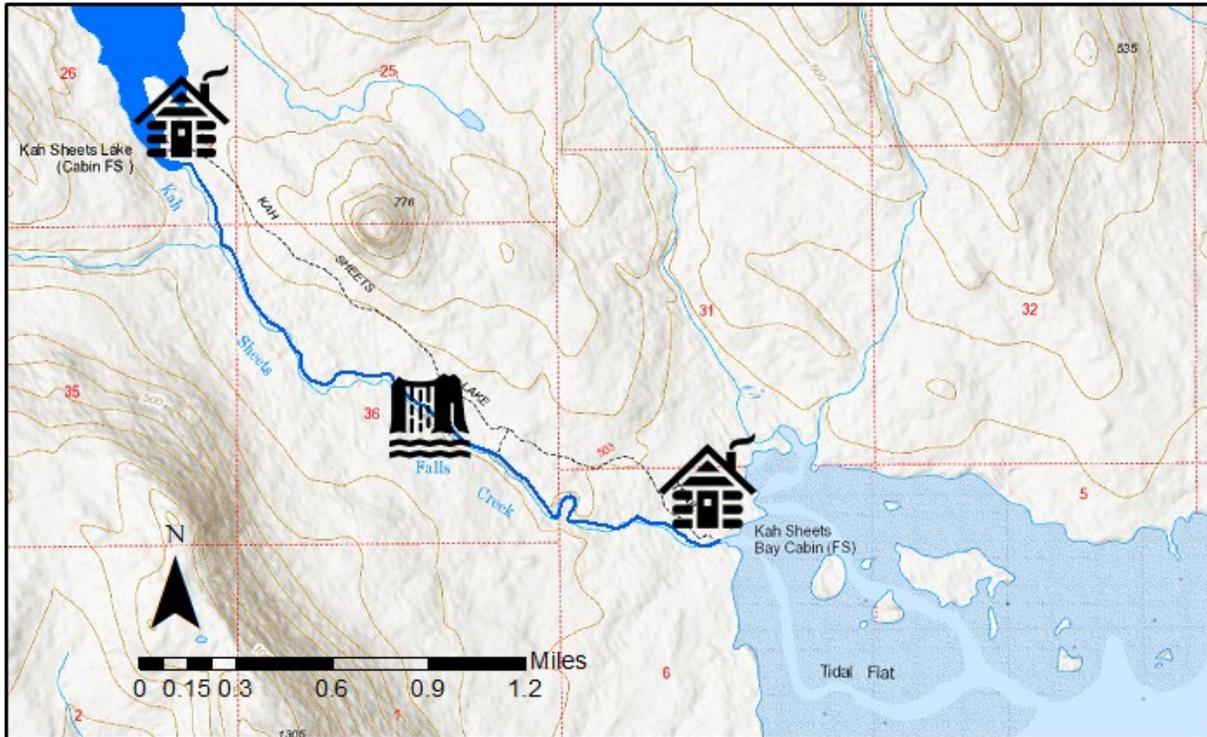
Figure 1. Kah Sheets Creek sockeye salmon weir count from June to September, 1965 (ADF&G 1965). ADF&G weir data from 1965 show thousands of fish migrating to the lake during July of that year.

ADF&G, in cooperation with the U.S. Forest Service (USFS), performed a series of harvest surveys of recreational cabin users on the Tongass National Forest during seven years between 1992 and 2012 (**Table 1, Map 2**). In 2012, the most recent survey year, a total of 17 fishing parties comprised of 56 individual users registered at the Kah Sheets Bay cabin and 10 fishing parties with 32 users registered at the Kah Sheets Lake cabin (**Table 1**). Kah Sheets Bay cabin users caught an estimated total of 92 trout and Steelhead, but they only retained 12 of these fish in 2012. Kah Sheets Lake cabin users caught an estimated total of 59 trout and Steelhead, but they did not retain any of these fish in 2012 (**Table 1**). The majority of respondents to the 2012 survey fished during their stay at the cabins (12 of 14 parties at Kah Sheets Bay, and 7 of 7 respondents at Kah Sheets Lake) (Coyle 2014). The survey data suggests that the majority of users visiting Kah Sheets typically participate in the fishery, though they do not tell us how many participated in the salmon fishery specifically. The recreational cabin use surveys stopped asking users specific questions about salmon (Kokanee) catch and harvest after the 1994 study year (**Table 1**). Over the course of the seven survey years, the average annual number of parties visiting the Kah Sheets Creek cabin was 20, and the average annual number of parties visiting the Kah Sheets Lake cabin was 31 (**Table 1**). However, it should be noted that survey data is not available for both Kah Sheets sites during some survey years. The Kah Sheets Creek cabin averaged about 55 total users per year for the surveys conducted in 2009 and 2012, while the Kah Sheets Lake Cabin averaged 51 total users (**Table 1**). From 2015-2024, the Kah Sheets Bay cabin averaged 48 users (range 36-59) per year, and the Kah Sheets Lake cabin averaged 67 users (range 38-94) per year (USFS 2025).

Table 1. Recreational cabin use and estimated fishing effort, catch, and harvest by users during seven survey years between 1992 and 2012 (Jones 1993, 1995, 1995; Jones and Kondzela 2001; Harding et al. 2005, 2009; Harding 2012; Coyle 2014).

Area & Year	Total Parties	Total Users in all Parties	Days Fished	Nights Cabin Reserved	Trout & Steelhead Caught & (Harvested)	Salmon Caught & (Harvested)	Dolly Varden Caught & (Harvested)
Kah Sheets Creek 1992	18	30	73	- ¹	157 (39)	0	2 (2)
Kah Sheets Lake 1992	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Kah Sheets Creek 1993	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Kah Sheets Lake 1993	44	-	404	-	797 (122)	3 (0)	93 (20)
Kah Sheets Creek 1994	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Kah Sheets Lake 1994	55	-	270	-	558 (48)	15 (0)	302 (166)
Kah Sheets Creek 1999	23	-	79	-	104 (20)	-	-
Kah Sheets Lake 1999	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Kah Sheets Creek 2002	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Kah Sheets Lake 2002	33	-	173	-	234 (46)	-	105 (37)
Kah Sheets Creek 2006	24	-	114	-	61 (8)	-	60 (6)
Kah Sheets Lake 2006	23	-	148	-	132 (31)	-	49 (14)
Kah Sheets Creek 2009	17	53	-	36	32 (0)	-	-
Kah Sheets Lake 2009	20	70	-	63	122 (33)	-	-
Kah Sheets Creek 2012	17	56	-	44	92 (12)	-	-
Kah Sheets Lake 2012	10	32	-	23	59 (0)	-	-
Kah Sheets Creek Average	20	46	89	40	89 (16)	0 (0)	31 (4)
Kah Sheets Lake Average	31	51	249	43	317 (47)	9 (0)	137 (59)

¹ Dashed boxes (-) indicate that this data was not collected or is not available for this site/year.



Map 2. Closeup of Kah Sheets Creek. The cabin icons illustrate access points to the creek, and the waterfall icon illustrates the location of the falls (both upper and lower) where subsistence users dip net Sockeye Salmon. The trail is represented by a dashed line. Subsistence users generally access the creek from the Kah Sheets Bay Cabin at the outlet, which requires navigating the wide tidal flat in Kah Sheets Bay, and then hiking the foot trail to the falls.

The annual Alaska Statewide Sport Fish Harvest Survey collects information from a random selection of licensed sport fish anglers through a mailed questionnaire designed to estimate fishing effort, catch, and harvest in Alaska sport fisheries each year (Smith et al. 2024). The current questionnaire specifically asks respondents about their activities within the Kenai Peninsula/Cook Inlet survey area, with respondents asked to write in the names of other places they may have also fished and provide information about their activities in those fisheries (Smith et al. 2024). For 2024, the most recently published survey year, questionnaires were mailed to a stratified random selection of 47,000 Alaska sport fish license holders for that year (Smith et al. 2025a). The overall response rate to delivered surveys was 24.7% (10,883 responses) for the 2024 survey year (Smith et al. 2025a). Declining response rate has been a long-term problem for this survey (Kirsch et al. 2022). For such reasons, these surveys typically do not provide an accurate estimate of fishing effort and harvest in small systems like Kah Sheets Creek and Kah Sheets Lake. Sport harvest estimates are only reported for sites receiving twelve or more survey responses in a given year (Smith et al. 2025b). Estimates for sites that receive fewer than twelve survey responses are aggregated with other similar sites (Smith et al. 2025b).

From 2011-2024, there were not enough (12 or greater) sport fish survey respondents reporting harvest from Kah Sheets Creek or Kah Sheets Lake to estimate harvest, but the surveys indicate that harvest was likely very low (Tydingco 2026, pers. comm). However, at least one respondent reported fishing in this location in each year from 2011-2019, but they were unsuccessful (Fowler 2022, pers. comm).

This indicates sport fishing does occur in these systems, but at relatively low levels. Collectively the respondents fishing in this location during this period reported fishing for Cutthroat and Rainbow trout, Sockeye Salmon, Coho Salmon, and Pink Salmon (Fowler 2022, pers. comm.). The freshwaters of Kah Sheets Creek and Lake are not listed as state subsistence areas and personal use fishing is not allowed under state regulations (Thynes 2026, pers. comm).

Over the last 10 years (2016-2025), an average of 5 Federal Subsistence salmon harvest reports were returned each year for Kah Sheets, ranging from 2 to 14 reports (Figure 2; OSM 2026). All of the reports from Kah Sheets belonged to residents of Petersburg. The number of days fished at Kah Sheets per permit from 2016 to 2025 averaged 1.5 days per fisher (Figure 3). Sockeye Salmon is the predominant species of fish harvested by subsistence users at Kah Sheets. From 2016-2025, the average combined harvest at Kah Sheets has been 31 sockeye salmon per year (range 5-113, Figure 4; OSM 2025). Over the last four years, though, the average combined harvest decreased to 13 Sockeye Salmon per year.

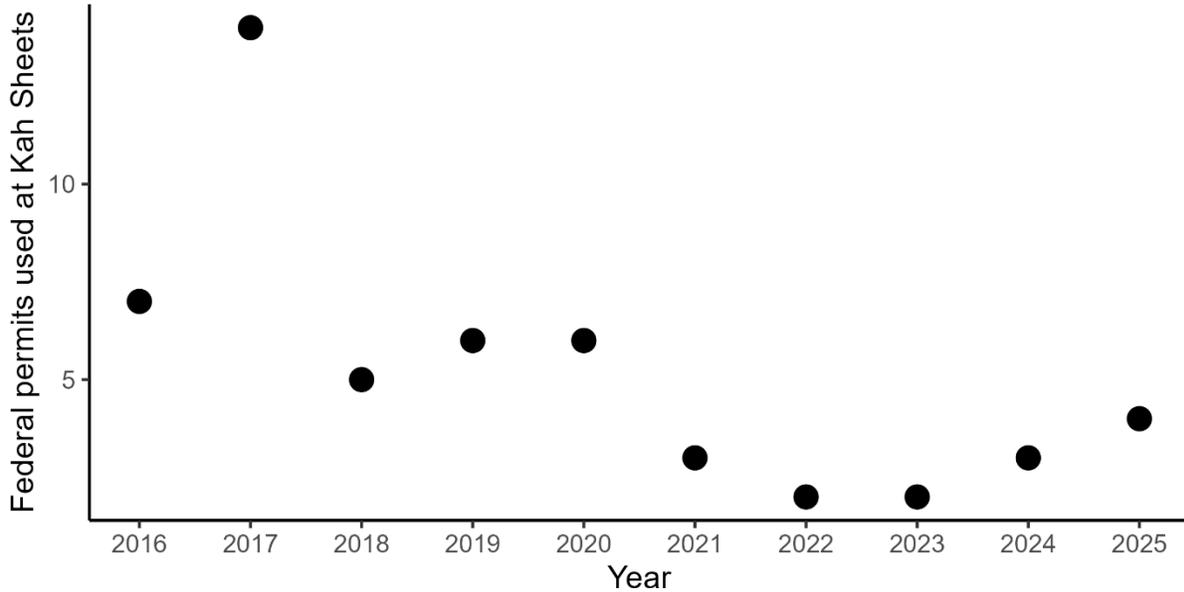


Figure 2. The number of federally qualified subsistence users reporting harvest at Kah Sheets 2016-2025 (OSM 2026).

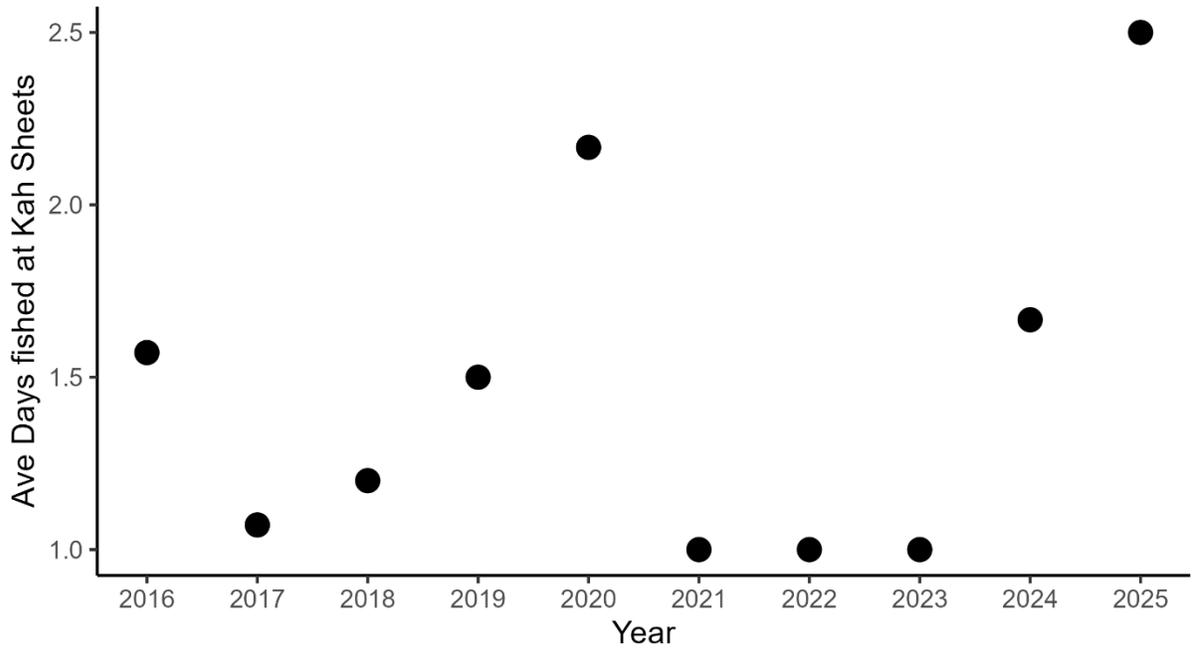


Figure 3. The average number of days that federally qualified subsistence users reported fishing at Kah Sheets from 2016-2025 (OSM 2026).

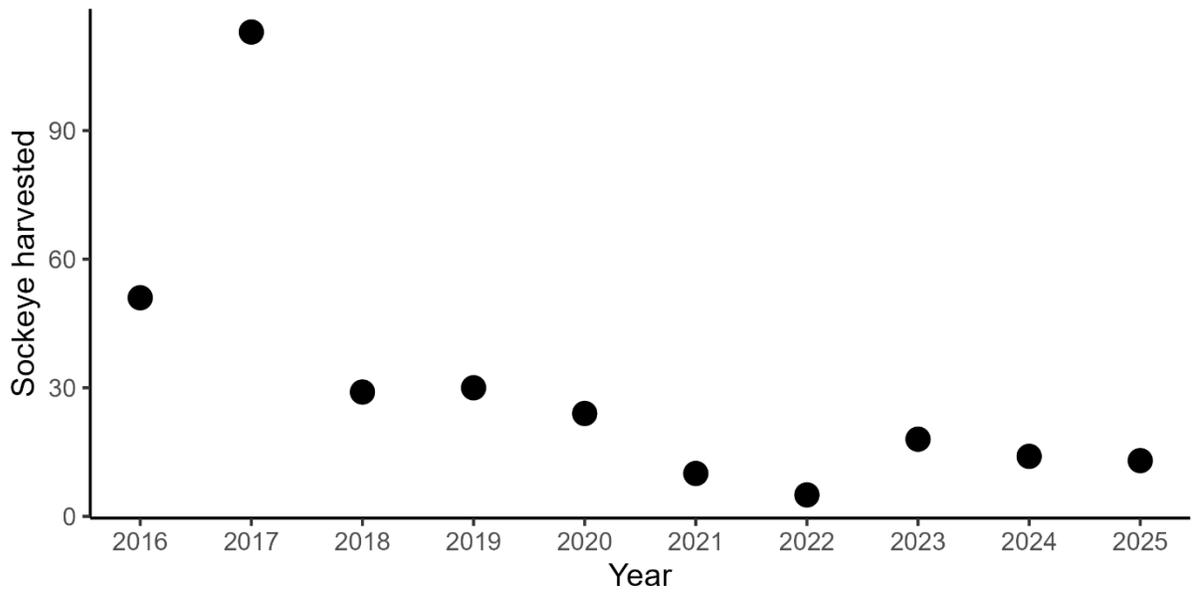


Figure 4. The combined number of Sockeye Salmon reportedly harvested by federally qualified subsistence users from Kah Sheets Creek from 2016-2025 (OSM 2025).

Cultural Knowledge and Traditional Practices

Community Background

Kah Sheets Bay on south Kupreanof Island lies within the traditional territory of the Stikine (Wrangell) Tlingit. In 1946, Petersburg resident Willis Hoagland reported that the bay was the territory of a Tlingit clan of the Raven moiety known as the *Kaach.ádi*, and that it was a hunting ground with a small salmon creek where people harvested and dried fish and also hunted bear, beaver, mink, and otter (Goldschmidt and Haas 1998). The Tlingit name “Kah Sheets” was said to mean “by the fisheries” or “given by the fisheries” by local navigators (Moser 1899, Orth 1967). More recent Tlingit placename documentation indicates “Kah Sheets” is a man’s name (Thornton 1999:153).

Researchers from the U.S. Fish Commission investigating Alaskan salmon fisheries visited Kah Sheets Creek in 1897 (Moser 1899). They described Kah Sheets Creek as being located “northward of a house occupied by a number of Indians” (Moser 1899:108). The report included a map sketch depicting two Native Alaskan residences along the shore of the bay. Kah Sheets Creek was one of 12 streams supplying fish to the cannery in Wrangell, which produced 4,118 Sockeye Salmon and 1,951 Coho Salmon during the summer of 1897 (Moser 1899).

Residents of Petersburg are the primary salmon harvesters in the Kah Sheets area. The community here grew up around a salmon cannery that was established in the late 1800s. At that time, the economy of Petersburg was centered on Norwegian and American commercial fishing interests, as well as a few smaller industries such as logging, mining, fur farming, and trapping.

According to local experts from Petersburg, most of the salmon used at home during the “early days” of the community were taken from commercial catches (Smythe 1988). Hand trolling, gill netting, and seining were the primary methods of salmon fishing, and all species were caught (Smythe 1988). Regulation changes later prohibited beach seines, which were replaced by commercial fishing methods like shore-based gill nets, before rod and reel eventually becoming a key subsistence fishing method in the area (Smythe 1988).

Over time, shrimp, clam, crab, halibut, and black cod fisheries developed in the area (Smythe 1988). Refrigeration and cold storage facilities also became increasingly more common, facilitating the preservation of fish to sell later (Smythe 1988). Petersburg experienced economic and population declines after WWII (Smythe 1988). However, large scale logging began in the area in the 1960s (Smythe 1988). Commercial fishing also intensified after the creation of the 200-mile fishing zone in 1975, and the introduction of limited entry regulations (Smythe 1988). The population of Petersburg has roughly doubled since 1960. In 2020, the population of the Petersburg Borough was estimated at 3,398 people (**Table 2**; ADCCED 2025).

Table 2. The population of the Petersburg Area 1960–2020 based on the U.S. Census (ADCCED 2025).

Community	1960	1970	1980	1990	2000	2010	2020
Petersburg CDP	1,520	2,042	2,821	3,207	3,224	2,948	3,042
Kupreanof City	26	36	47	23	23	27	21

Community	1960	1970	1980	1990	2000	2010	2020
Hobart Bay CDP	0	0	0	187	3	1	1
Petersburg Borough							3,398

Harvest and Use of Salmon

Harvest surveys were conducted with residents of Petersburg in 1987 and 2000 (Smythe 1988, Walker 2009). In 1987, an estimated 75% of Petersburg households harvested salmon, while almost all households used salmon (**Table 3**). The estimated average household salmon harvest was 151 pounds, accounting for about 22% of all wild foods harvested (Smythe 1988). About 77% of this estimated salmon harvest was taken with rod and reel, while 17% was removed from commercial catches, and 6% was taken with other gear (ADF&G CSIS 2025). Coho and Chinook salmon were the most heavily harvested species during this survey year (**Table 3**).

However, it is important to note that harvesting Coho and Chinook salmon with subsistence nets was not allowed in the Petersburg area in 1987. Fishing under subsistence regulations was limited to Sockeye, Pink, and Chum salmon at the time (Smythe 1988). Yet, subsistence gill net fishing was difficult in the Petersburg area because the locations open to subsistence fishing like Farragut Bay, Gut Bay, and the Bay of Pillars lay some distance from town, on neighboring islands or the mainland. Sockeye Salmon were the primary species targeted in these locations (Smythe 1988). In 1987, Smythe (1988: 83) noted the importance of the Kah Sheets system for subsistence fishing:

A small run of Sockeye Salmon in Petersburg Creek is fished by a few local rod and reelers, but a larger return in the Kah Sheets system is fished more heavily by Petersburg residents, according to ADF&G. The productivity of this area, which lies about a day’s run by boat from town, is susceptible to annual fluctuations in rainfall. Consequently, it is used more heavily in years when conditions are more favorable for rod and reel fishing.

Table 3. The harvest and use of salmon by residents of Petersburg in 1987, based on household surveys (ADF&G CSIS 2025, Smythe 1988).

Salmon Species	Households Using	Households Harvesting	Estimated Harvest (Fish)	Per Person Harvest (lbs. edible weight)
Salmon	97%	75%	19,373	45
Chum Salmon	16%	14%	1,089	2
Coho Salmon	70%	52%	6,979	14
Chinook Salmon	86%	68%	6,152	25
Pink Salmon	27%	16%	3,526	2
Sockeye Salmon	34%	11%	1,627	2

Based on household surveys conducted in 2000 (Walker 2009), an estimated 47% of Petersburg households harvested salmon, while 78% of households used salmon (**Table 4**). The estimated average

household salmon harvest was 166 pounds, accounting for about 37% of all wild foods harvested at this time (Walker 2009, ADF&G CSIS 2025). The primary species harvested were Chinook, Coho, and Pink salmon (**Table 4**). A total of 171 Sockeye Salmon and 26 Coho Salmon were harvested from Kah Sheets Creek by rod and reel. Researchers were only able to survey 125 households in Petersburg during the 2000 survey, so the harvest estimates at Kah Sheets should be considered minimum estimates (Walker 2009). About 61% of all the estimated salmon harvested by Petersburg residents in 2000 was taken with rod and reel, while 37% was removed from commercial catches, and 2% was taken with subsistence/personal use gear (predominantly dipnets and gillnets) (Walker 2009).

Salmon accounted for about 22% of Petersburg residents’ total wild resource harvest in pounds edible weight in 1987, while accounting for 37% of the total wild resource harvest in 2000 (ADF&G CSIS 2025). In both study years, salmon were also one of the resources that Petersburg households most frequently shared (ADF&G CSIS 2025). Taken together, this data indicates the continuing importance of salmon to the economy and culture of Petersburg.

Table 4. The harvest and use of salmon by residents of Petersburg in 2000, based on household surveys (Walker 2009, ADF&G CSIS 2025).

Salmon Species	Households Using	Households Harvesting	Estimated Harvest (Fish)	Per person harvest (lbs. edible weight)
Salmon	78%	47%	25,192	60
Chum Salmon	11%	6%	1,566	4
Coho Salmon	46%	27%	5,958	11
Chinook Salmon	65%	42%	9,056	36
Pink Salmon	9%	6%	4,828	4
Sockeye Salmon	27%	12%	3,784	6

In 2022, the proponent of FP23-21 explained that the primary method of fishing for salmon at Kah Sheets Creek was now dip netting (OSM 2023). However, the proponent noted that there was minimal space available for dip netting in Kah Sheets Creek, and that this harvest method was generally limited to a small pool located below a set of waterfalls that could only accommodate a few fishers at any given time (**Figure 5**). Fishing in Kah Sheets Creek was further complicated by the presence of a very large tidal flat that restricted access to periods during large tides. The proponent also described the Creek as being hydrologically “flashy,” which required paying close attention to rain totals and other conditions to ensure that your trip to Kah Sheets might be successful (OSM 2023). The proponent noted that subsistence harvests at Kah Sheets had been decreasing since 2012, due to increasing competition with non-federally qualified users coming from lodges in Petersburg (OSM 2023).

At that time, OSM noted that the average subsistence user at Kah Sheets fished for one to two days a season, harvesting between four and eight fish per day (SERAC 2022). The primary concern regarding the system was the lack of space (SERAC 2022). As the OSM analyst explained during a 2022 Southeast Council meeting, “When there are sport fishers present, they tend to fish for a long time in that spot. When subsistence harvesters are present, they tend to get their fish and leave. Often, if people

arrive at Kah Sheets and they see that sport fishers are present, they will not attempt to fish. They will just leave and go home” (SERAC 2022: 293). At the same meeting, a Southeast Council member also noted, “From my experience, going there [Kah Sheets] and just watching the Coho go up the falls, all of a sudden, I think about eight people from the lodge showed up and crowded around there. So, I can understand the comments from the writer of this proposal, being that they were overwhelmed by sport fishers” (SERAC 2022: 291).



Figure 5. A subsistence user dip netting salmon at Kah Sheets lower falls. The small size of the hole and steep cliff walls make it difficult for more than one person to harvest here at once (OSM 2023).

Alternatives Considered

Change the daily harvest limit for subsistence users – An issue discussed during deliberations on the original proposal, FP23-21, is that the daily Sockeye Salmon harvest limit for federally qualified subsistence users in this system is 10 fish per person, while the annual harvest limit is 20 fish. This requires subsistence users from Petersburg to make at least two fairly long and potentially expensive boat trips to Kah Sheets Creek to harvest their full limit (SERAC 2022). Therefore, it would be more efficient for subsistence users if the daily harvest limit were increased to 20 fish, allowing them to potentially fill their annual limit here in one day. However, this alternative is outside the scope of a closure review, and a separate proposal would have to be submitted for this harvest limit change to be considered.

Effects

If this closure is retained, FQSUs would continue to be allowed to harvest from Kah Sheets Creek throughout the year, while NFQUs would be prohibited from harvesting from Kah Sheets Creek from July 1 to July 31. All users would continue to be allowed to harvest from Kah Sheets Lake throughout the year. This would keep in place a rural priority for subsistence use of this area, while restricting non-subsistence use during the time of year sockeye salmon are prevalent in the creek.

If the closure is rescinded, NFQUs would be allowed to fish throughout the Kah Sheets watershed throughout the year, which could increase competition and reduce subsistence user harvest success in the small Kah Sheets Creek system.

OSM CONCLUSION

Retain the Status Quo

Rescind the Closure

Modify the Closure to reduce the closed area to 100 yards downstream of the upper edge of the lower falls and 150 yards downstream of the upper edge of the upper falls.

Defer Decision on the Closure or Take No Action

Justification

Kah Sheets Creek continues to be one of three primary sockeye salmon harvest locations for residents of Petersburg. The decreased competition with non-federally qualified users created by this closure reduces user conflicts and may be leading to increased harvest success for subsistence users.

Harvesters on Kah Sheets Creek are still limited by access to a singular harvest location below a waterfall. Eliminating competition by nonsubsistence users at this location, while keeping Kah Sheets Lake open to all users, gives a Federal preference to rural residents and reduces user conflicts over sockeye salmon.

The suggested modification for this closure would reduce the closed area of Kah Sheets Creek to the area surrounding and immediately downstream of the primary subsistence fishing spots, the lower and upper falls. This modification would allow for sport fishing in other sections of Kah Sheets Creek

during the month of July. This modification would continue to limit competition between FQSUs and sport fishermen, giving a Federal preference to rural residents, but would also allow for more opportunity for sport fishermen.

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