

FISHERIES UPDATE FOR THE WEEK OF MAY 22-29, 2022. Report #1
Compiled by George Pappas - (907) 317-2165, George_Pappas@fws.gov Office of
Subsistence Management, USFWS.

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 – Forest Service, Tongass National Forest
Jake Musslewhite, 907-789-6256 jacob.g.musslewhite@usda.gov

May 31, 2022

Herring – The 2022 Sitka Sound commercial sac roe herring fishery was conducted between March 26 and April 10, and harvested approximately 25,500 tons of herring. The harvest represented 56% of the guideline harvest level of 45,164 tons set by the Alaska Department of Fish and Game. Aerial and boat-based surveys mapped 91.5 miles of herring spawn between March 27 and April 28. This was the fifth largest estimate since 1953 and higher than the 10-year average of 63 miles of spawn.

Sockeye Salmon – Sockeye Salmon fisheries in the area have not begun for the season.

Falls Lake – The Falls Lake weir project was operated for the 21st consecutive year in 2021. The project monitors escapement and terminal harvest of Sockeye Salmon returning to Falls Lake each year. In 2021, an estimated 1,189 Sockeye escaped to the lake, while 315 were harvested in terminal subsistence and sport fisheries (Figure 1). The escapement and harvest were lower than in recent years. However, spawn-recruit analyses indicate that maximum recruitment of Falls Lake Sockeye Salmon occurs at lower escapements – around 2,000 fish. So, the low escapements seen in 2020 and 2021 may still provide for an adequate number of returning adults in several years.

The Falls Lake project was not funded for operation in 2022.

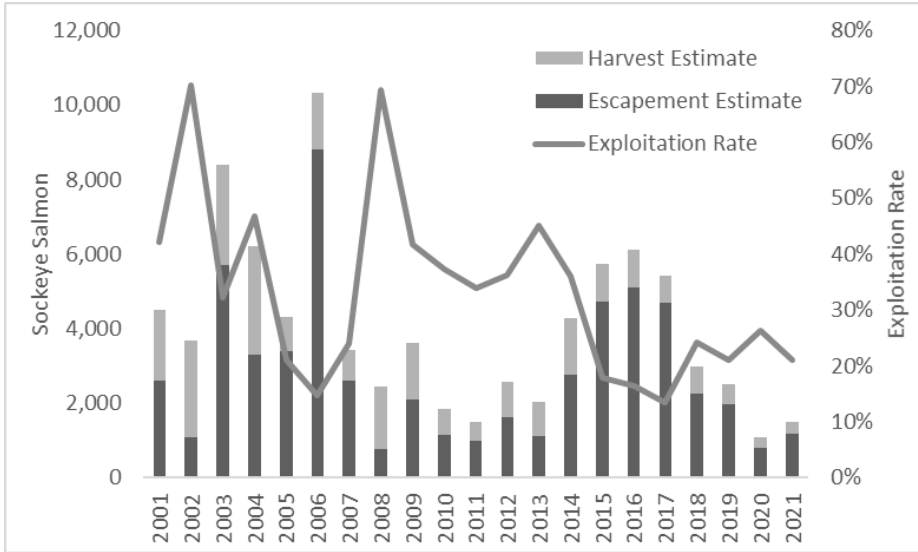


Figure 1. Escapement estimate and onsite harvest estimate for Falls Lake Sockeye Salmon, 2001-2021.

Petersburg and Wrangell Area – Robert Cross, Forest Service, Tongass National Forest
Robert Cross, (907)772-5944 robert.cross@usda.gov

No report submitted for this reporting period.

Juneau and Yakutat – Forest Service, Tongass National Forest
Jake Musslewhite, 907-789-6256 jacob.g.musslewhite@usda.gov

May 31, 2022

Sockeye Salmon - Sockeye Salmon fisheries in the area have not begun for the season. Most subsistence fisheries begin in late June, as returning fish start to show up at the mouths of streams.

Sitkoh Lake – The Sitkoh Lake weir is a cooperative project between the Forest Service and the Angoon Community Association, and monitors Sockeye Salmon escapement to the lake using a remotely monitored video weir. In 2021, we counted a total of 5,303 Sockeye Salmon through the weir. This was an improvement from the poor escapements of 2017-2019, but less than the 8,000-12,000 fish seen in previous years (Figure 1). The Sitkoh Lake project will continue to operate in 2022, with the weir to be installed in early July. Returns are likely to be on the low side, based on the poor escapements in parent years.

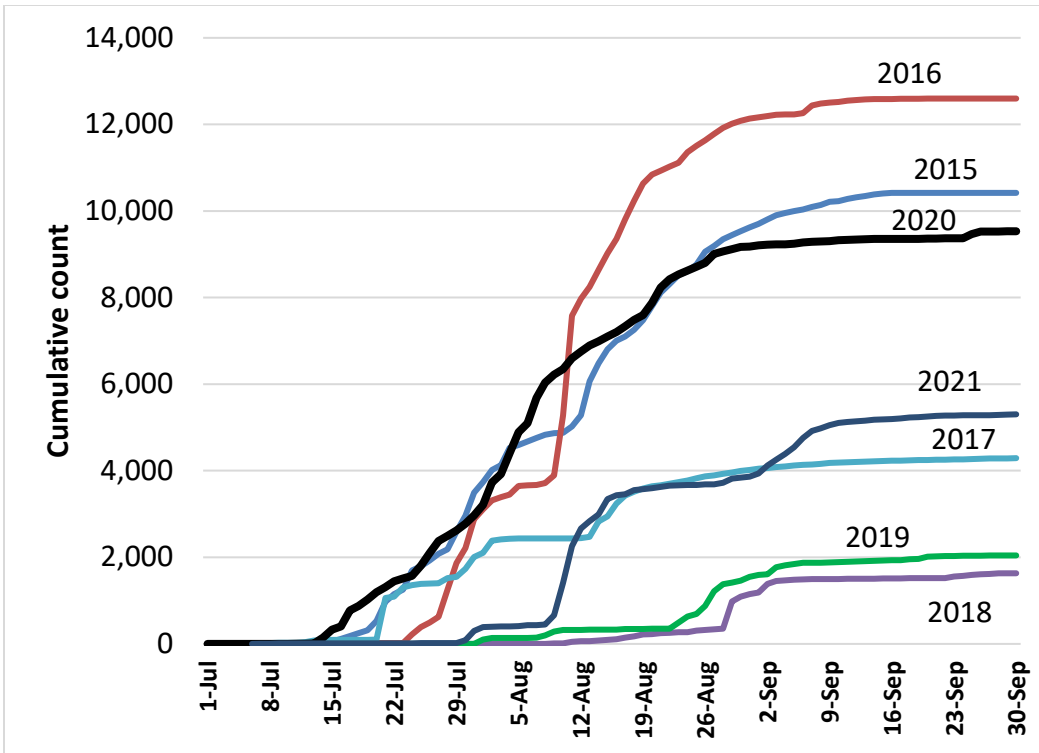


Figure 2. Estimated cumulative escapement of Sockeye Salmon into Sitkoh Lake through video weirs, 2015 to 2021.

Neva Lake – The Neva Lake weir is a cooperative project operated by the Forest Service and the Hoonah Indian Association, and uses a video weir to count Sockeye Salmon entering Neva Lake, near the community of Excursion Inlet. In 2021, we counted a total of 4,262 Sockeye Salmon through the weir. Escapements have generally improved since a low point in 2015 (Figure 2). The Neva Lake project will continue to operate in 2022, with the weir to be installed in mid June.

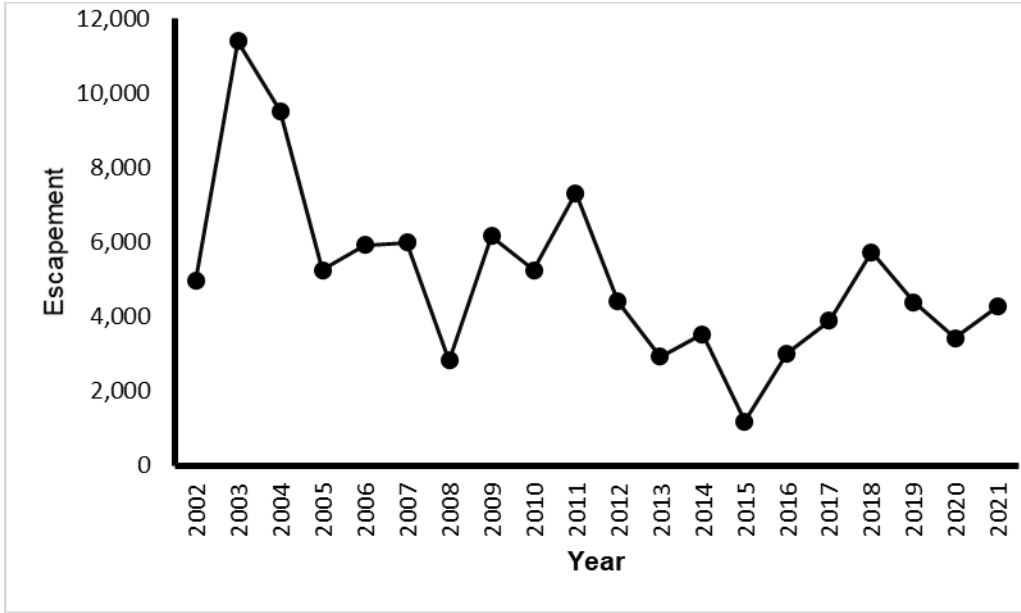


Figure 3. Estimated escapement of Sockeye Salmon at the Neva Lake weir, 2002-2021.

Yakutat- The preseason forecast for Situk River Chinook Salmon is 1,600 large fish, and the escapement goal range is 450 – 1,050 fish. In order to ensure that the escapement goal is met, subsistence and commercial fisheries on the mouth of the Situk have been closed until further notice (Figure 3). Escapement of Chinook Salmon will be monitored at the Situk weir, and fisheries may reopen if adequate escapement is seen through the weir.



Figure 4. Situk-Ahrnklin Inlet waters closed to commercial and subsistence fishing in 2022.

Prince of Wales and Ketchikan District Area – TBA, Forest Service, Tongass National Forest. (907) 826-1649

USFS Weekly Summary Author position vacant - TBA.

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, 5/29/2022 Update – Dave Sarafin, Wrangell-St. Elias National Park and Preserve (WRST), (907) 822-7281, dave_sarafin@nps.gov

The Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ADFG) provided preseason forecasts of 40,000 Copper River Chinook Salmon and 1,379,000 wild stock Copper River Sockeye Salmon. Relative to recent 10-year averages, these forecasts are 13% below average for Chinook Salmon and 29% below average for Sockeye Salmon. In early May, Federal and State fisheries managers met to discuss this forecast, regulatory changes, anticipated early season management strategies, and plans for maintaining communications with local stakeholders throughout the season.

The commercial fishery in the Copper River District has been limited in response to low early season numbers of salmon. Three 12-hour open commercial fishing periods have occurred through May 28. ADFG reports preliminary cumulative commercial harvest to be 93,733 Sockeye Salmon and 7,476 Chinook Salmon. Commercial harvest from the most recent 12-hour period was 69,338 Sockeye Salmon and 1,976 Chinook Salmon. For this most recent open period, the projected harvest was 51,100 Sockeye Salmon. The Copper River District is currently closed.

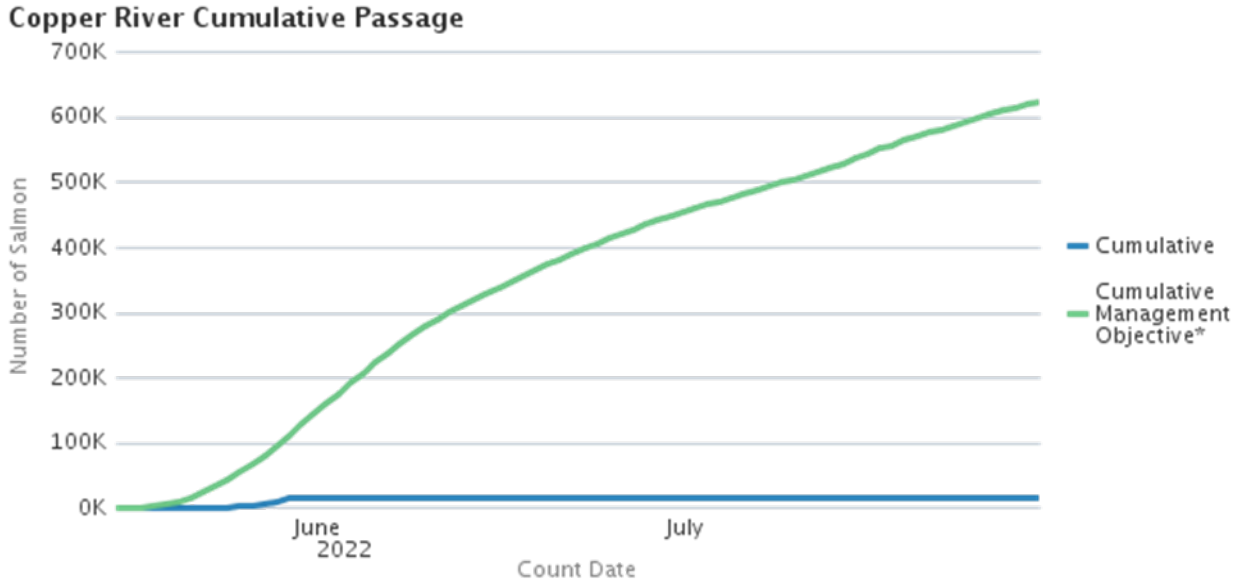
The ADFG sonar at Miles Lake (located just downstream of the Million Dollar Bridge in the Copper River) began limited operation of only the North Bank sonar on May 17. Salmon passage was first recorded on May 18. Early season ice flow delayed the operation of the South Bank sonar, which began operation on May 25. As of May 29, 15,350 salmon have been estimated migrating upstream for the season. This estimate is 14% of the cumulative management objective of 111,123 for this date. A daily estimate of 4,921 salmon migrated by the sonar on May 29.

Performance in the commercial fishery and in river sonar salmon passage estimates are the primary early season assessments of the Sockeye Salmon return to the Copper River. The initial two commercial fishing periods resulted in relatively low harvest. However, the most recent period had a significant increase in Sockeye Salmon harvest, which did exceed the projected harvest for this period. Daily sonar estimates have shown a significant increasing trend since May 26 (which was the first day of both bank sonar units). It is important to keep in mind that the Copper Basin experienced record snowfalls during the winter of 2022. This and a delayed timing of the melt off could be associated with a delayed start to the salmon return. It is too early to differentiate the low numbers in the return from a delay in run timing. Federal managers will continue to monitor run strength indices to evaluate the need for appropriate fisheries management actions in the Copper River Drainage. No Federal Special Actions have been issued by the in-season manager this season.

The State subsistence fishery in the Glennallen Subdistrict is scheduled to open June 1. The State personal use fishery in the Chitina Subdistrict is tentatively scheduled to open for a 24-hour fishing period on June 7. However, this initial open period may be delayed due to poor early season run assessments.

2022 Upper Copper River Salmon Passage at Miles Lake Sonar through May 26





Source:

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

The Federal subsistence fisheries in the Chitina Subdistrict, the Glennallen Subdistrict, and the Batzulnetas vicinity opened on May 15 and are expected to remain open through September 30. Through the Office of Subsistence Management (OSM) Federal subsistence permit website, fifty-one (51) Chitina Subdistrict permits, sixty-six (66) Glennallen Subdistrict permits, and zero (0) Batzulnetas permits have been issued to date.

In April 2022, the Federal Subsistence Board (Board) adopted a proposal to allow subsistence salmon harvest opportunities in the Lower Copper River near Cordova. The season was adopted to be open from June 1 through September 30. As regulations of this new fishery would not be in effect until later in the year when the Federal Register was published, a Fisheries Special Action Request, was considered and adopted by the Board on May 19 which will put these regulations in place temporarily for the 2022 season. This fishery will open on June 1. Salmon harvest is only allowed in the Copper River within ½ mile of the Copper River Highway, only by dip net or rod and reel, dip netting from boats is prohibited, and all salmon harvest must be reported within 48 hours. Permits will be available at the Cordova Ranger Station (Chugach National Forest).

With funding through the Fisheries Resource Monitoring Program (FRMP), WRST is planning to operate the Tanada Creek salmon weir located at Batzulnetas. Due to record winter snowfall and delayed warming this spring, groundwater and creek level conditions have limited our ability to access the site to initiate the project. A site visit is planned on May 31 to begin installation.

Links:

ADFG 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>

ADFG Copper River Inseason Commercial Harvest Estimates

<http://www.adfg.alaska.gov/index.cfm?adfg=commercialbyareacopperriver.harvestsummary>

ADFG Sport Fish Emergency Orders and News Releases

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

**PWS and Copper River Delta – Milo Burcham, Chugach National Forest, Cordova.
28 June 2021.**

**PWS and Copper River Delta – Milo Burcham, Chugach National Forest, Cordova.
31 May 2022 (907) 424-4759 mburcham@fs.fed.us**

A total of 2 Federal Subsistence fishing permits have been issued for freshwaters within the Chugach National Forest portion of the Prince William Sound area (FFPW01) to date. Harvest statistics of this year's permit holders will not be known until reports are returned this winter. Most harvest under these permits takes place during the coho fishery in fresh waters of the Copper River Delta in August and September. Seventy-four permits were issued in 2021 and 28 were fished. Reported harvest was 459 Coho Salmon, 19 Sockeye Salmon and 4 Cutthroat Trout.

The new dip net fishery in the Lower Copper River Area (FFPW05) begins tomorrow (June 1). Three permits have been issued so far and given the 48-hour reporting requirement, in-season harvest updates will be presented in future reports throughout the season.

COOK INLET AREA – Kenneth Gates, Senior Fish Biologist, Kenai Fish and Wildlife Conservation Office (907) 260-0132 Kenneth_Gates@FWS.GOV

No report submitted this week.

Kodiak Island Area – Michael Brady, Refuge Manager, - Kodiak NWR

(907) 487-2600/0230 michael_brady@fws.gov or

Kevin Van Hatten (907) 487-0230 Kevin_VanHatten@fws.gov

No report submitted this week.

FISHERIES UPDATE FOR THE WEEK OF May 22, 2022.

***BRISTOL BAY, CHIGNIK, ALASKA PENINSULA, and ALEUTIAN ISLANDS –
Jonathon Gerken Fisheries Branch Chief Anchorage Fish and Wildlife Field Office***

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 waters under Federal -managed waters.

Bristol Bay:

The 2022 Bristol Bay Sockeye Salmon run is forecast to be approximately 73 million fish for the nine river systems: Kvichak, Alagnak, Naknek, Egegik, Ugashik, Wood, Igushik, Nushagak, and Togiak. Based on the forecast 60 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 Sockeye Salmon 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
Nushagak	SEG = 55,000 – 270,000 Chinook Salmon
Togiak	SEG = 120,000 – 270,000

Chignik:

The 2022 Sockeye Salmon forecasted total-run size for the Chignik River Management Area (CMA) is 1,272,000 fish with a harvest estimate of 562,000 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 approximately 6,000 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	-10,000 in August and 10,000 in September in addition to minimum escapement objectives
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 (post July 31) Bear Lake stocks. The 2022 Sockeye Salmon run size projections are 285,000 fish for the Nelson River and 394,000 fish 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.

Yukon River – Gerald Maschmann, Fish Biologist USFWS Fairbanks Office. May 23 – May 29, 2022

Federal Manager, Holly Carroll (907) 351-3029, holly_carroll@fws.gov, Keith Herron Ivy, (907) 312-3397, keith_ivy@fws.gov, Gerald Maschmann, (907) 456-0406, Gerald_Maschmann@fws.gov

The USFWS Emmonak Field Office will be **closed** this season due to staffing shortages. Essential services will be provided to fishermen online and over the phone. ADF&G management staff are expected to begin arriving at their Emmonak Field Office on June 1 and USFWS will continue to work closely with their management and research staff daily.

Summer Season Outlook and Management Strategies

The drainagewide Chinook salmon outlook is for a run size of 99,000 to 150,000 fish, and the Canadian-origin Chinook salmon run size outlook is for a run of 41,000 to 62,000 fish. Therefore the 2022 run is likely to be similar to 2021. Because of the poor projected run size, salmon fishing closures are required until inseason run strength estimates indicate a harvestable surplus above escapement needs. This will likely require closures at least through the midpoint of the run.

The drainagewide summer Chum salmon outlook is for a run size of 333,000 fish, with a range of 162,000 to 542,000 fish. This outlook is poor, and unless the run comes in at the upper end, the fishery will likely require closures for most of the run.

The drainagewide fall Chum salmon outlook is for a run size of 110,000 fish, with a range of 78,100 to 148,000 fish. The fall Chum salmon projection will be revised in mid-July based on the 2022 summer Chum salmon run size.

Management Strategies based on the preseason outlooks and inseason assessment:

- Starting on June 2 in District 1 and the Coastal District, subsistence salmon fishing will close. Closures in upriver districts will be announced based on salmon travel time.
- These closures may be weeks long until the midpoint of the Chinook salmon run is assessed at Pilot Station sonar (likely around June 23). If inseason assessment indicates runs closer to the lower end of the outlooks, subsistence fishing for salmon will remain closed.
- The sport fishery for Chinook salmon will begin the season closed 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.
- If confidence is high that the summer Chum salmon run is near the upper end of the outlook, and the drainagewide escapement goal is likely to be met, subsistence fishing opportunities with selective gear (dip nets, beach seines, and manned fish wheels) may be allowed.
- Pink and Sockeye salmon may be targeted by hook and line gear in waters from the coast up to and including the Nulato River, and in other areas of the drainage where subsistence fishing with hook and line gear is allowed.
- Fishing for non-salmon species with 4-inch or smaller mesh gill nets will be allowed during salmon fishing closures; however, net length will be reduced to a maximum of 60 feet at the start of the season. If there are indications that Chinook and Chum salmon are being targeted with this gear, this gear may be discontinued.
- Other non-salmon gear types, including hook and line, longline, jigging gear, hand line, beach seine, fyke net, spear, or lead may be used to fish for non-salmon species all year,

even during salmon fishing closures. Chinook and Chum salmon should be avoided and released alive if incidentally caught.

- During the fall season, selective gear may be allowed (dip nets, beach seines, and manned fish wheels) for non-salmon and Pink, Sockeye, and Coho salmon. If there is a conservation concern for Chum or Chinook salmon, these species will be required to be released alive in these gears. Subsistence fishing restrictions may be in place until October 1 in the Lower Yukon and this date will be transitioned upriver to fishing districts based on salmon migration timing. Important fall Chum salmon spawning tributaries may remain closed through December (Koyukuk, Teedriinjik, Porcupine, and District 6 tributaries of Tanana River).

Assessment Information

Assessment projects in the lower river will be launching the first week of June. Beginning June 7, assessment project and management updates will be given on the **YR DFA weekly teleconferences each Tuesday at 1:00 pm at the following number: 1-800-315-6338, Passcode: 98566#**. To hear the fishing schedule and fish counts please call the toll-free Fishing Schedule and Fish Counts hotline: 866-479-7387.

Management Actions

The Federal Subsistence Board closed Federal public waters of the Yukon River drainage to the harvest of Chinook, summer and fall Chum, and Coho salmon except by Federally qualified subsistence users, effective June 1, 2022, through September 30, 2022, with harvest opportunities to be determined by the Federal fisheries manager if run strength is sufficient to allow a Federal subsistence fishery. Under the Delegated letter of Authority, and in consultation with Regional Advisory Council chairs and Office of Subsistence management staff, the Federal In-season Manager will be issuing emergency special actions to close salmon fishing in each district, starting on June 2, and moving the closures upriver based on salmon migration timing. Until more assessment data becomes available, management decisions will be based on the preseason projections. Subsistence salmon fishing in the Yukon River drainage is open 24 hours per day, seven days per week, with 7.5-inch or smaller mesh gillnets. Subsistence salmon fishing in the Coastal District and District 1 will be closed by Emergency Special Action (2-KS-01-22) effective 8 p.m. Thursday, June 2. Subsistence salmon fishing in District 2 will close effective 8 p.m. Saturday, June 4. These management actions were taken in consultation with ADFG and announced by Advisory Announcement #2

(<https://www.doi.gov/subsistence/fisheries-special-actions>)

(<http://www.adfg.alaska.gov/static/applications/dcfnewsrelease/1265697609.pdf>)

If you'd like to receive emails and notifications on the Federal Subsistence Management Program you may subscribe for regular updates by emailing fws-fsb-subsistence-request@lists.fws.gov

For detailed information on management actions and assessment, subscribe to ADF&G advisory announcements at <http://www.adfg.alaska.gov/index.cfm?adfg=cfnews.search>

Consultation

Extensive public outreach and Tribal Consultation meetings were held during the fall of 2021 and spring of 2022 to inform and seek input from Yukon River Tribal Governments, fishermen and stakeholders regarding Yukon River fisheries and fisheries management. Run outlooks and possible management strategies were discussed at Federal RAC meetings and State AC meetings, the Yukon River Panel meeting, the Yukon River Intertribal Fish Commission, and at the annual Yukon River Drainage Fisheries Association (YRDFA) meeting.

Management strategies and recommendations were incorporated into a lilac colored information sheet which outlined the preseason outlooks and management strategy. This information was distributed as a cooperative ADF&G and USFWS Advisory Announcement, and mailed to over 3,000 Yukon River fishing households in late April.

Get announcements and more by liking the ADF&G Yukon River Facebook page at: www.facebook.com/YukonRiverFishingADFG/

KUSKOKWIM RIVER

In Season Manager – Boyd Blihovde, Refuge Manager, Yukon Delta National Wildlife Refuge Contact Boyd_Blihovde@fws.gov; (907) 543-3151 or spencer_rearden@fws.gov

No report was submitted this week however a fishery for Federally qualified subsistence users only has been announced.

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:
<http://www.adfg.alaska.gov/sf/FishingReports/index.cfm?ADFG=R3.home>

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

Northwest Alaska – Ken Adkisson, National Park Service, Nome.
 (907) 443-6104 ken_adkisson@nps.gov

FISHERIES UPDATE FOR THE WEEK OF MAY 22-May 28 , 2022.
Northwest Alaska – Ken Adkisson, National Park Service, Nome.
 (907) 443-6104 Ken_Adkisson@nps.gov [Report #1](#)

There is still considerable pack ice north of the Seward Peninsula, in the Bering Strait and southwest toward St. Lawrence Island. Many of the more northern communities are still engaged in marine mammal hunting. However much of the waters south of Bering Strait are rapidly becoming ice free although there are still some areas of pack ice at St. Lawrence Island and southwest of the Island. Residents are also hoping for a good summer of fishing.



Bearded seals resting on ice near Gambell, Alaska.
 Photo By Clarence Irigoo , Jr. 05/16 2022

The area covered in these weekly Fisheries Updates for Northwest Alaska include two federal subsistence management regions (the Seward Peninsula and the Northwest Arctic) and three State of Alaska districts (Norton Sound, Port Clarence and Kotzebue). The

Seward Peninsula Region (Federal) contains two of the State districts: Norton Sound and Port Clarence. In turn, the Norton Sound District includes six numbered subdistricts: Unalakleet (6), Shaktoolik (5), Norton Bay (4), Elim (3), Golovin (2) and Nome (1). The Port Clarence District also includes the Pilgrim River and Salmon Lake. The Northwest Arctic Region contains one district (Kotzebue). The districts and subdistricts are based on the Alaska Department of Fish and Game organizational structure for the management of commercial and subsistence fisheries. Two other references a reader might encounter are Northern Norton Sound and Southern Norton Sound. Northern Norton Sound includes all marine and fresh waters of Subdistricts 1 through 3 (Nome, Golovin and Elim) as well as the Cape Wooley area of the Norton Sound District, and the Port Clarence District. Southern Norton Sound waters include the Norton Bay Subdistrict beginning at Bald Head, between Elim and Koyuk, to the southern Norton Sound District boundary at Point Romanof. This area includes Subdistricts 4 (Norton Bay), 5 (Shaktoolik) and 6 (Unalakleet). Report updates will generally begin with the southernmost areas, then move progressively northwards.

Since we are so far north, our commercial fishing seasons tend to trail behind those in the more southerly areas so that we currently are seeing very little activity. Therefore, we will begin this year's reports with snapshot summaries of the 2021 season followed by the 2022 season forecasts for a comparative starting point. As the season progresses and activity increases, we will add in new events.

Norton Sound District

2021 Season Summary:

Poor runs of chum and coho salmon in 2021 resulted in low commercial salmon harvest for those species. Overall commercial harvest in the Norton Sound Area was near average due to above-average pink salmon harvest. The pink salmon run was near average; however, increased buyer interest led to this being the fifth largest harvest in the 61-year fishery history. Escapement goal ranges were reached for 1 of 5 chum salmon stocks, 1 of 2 coho salmon stocks, and all 3 pink salmon stocks. Escapement goals were not reached for Chinook or sockeye salmon. There were 131 commercial permits fished in 2021, slightly below the recent 5-year (140 permits) and 10-year (132 permits) averages. Total commercial salmon harvests in 2021 were approximately 15 Chinook, 470 sockeye, 7,000 coho, 290,000 pink, and 6,000 chum salmon. In addition to the commercial harvest, 1 Chinook, 19 sockeye, 13 coho, 61 pink, and 4 chum salmon commercially harvested were retained for personal use.

Chinook Salmon

Harvest Summary: Commercial fishing targeting Chinook salmon was prohibited during the 2021 season. Although lower than last year, the run was higher than most runs in the previous decade.

Sockeye Salmon

Harvest Summary: Although sockeye salmon harvest accounts for a small portion of the overall harvest in Norton Sound, the 2021 commercial harvest of 473 fish, not including personal use, was less than one quarter of the record harvests of the last 5 years.

Coho Salmon

Harvest Summary: The 2021 coho salmon harvest of 7,189 fish, not including personal use, was 5% of the recent 5-year average (141,864 fish). Like last year, the average weight of coho salmon (5.7 lb) was the lowest on record, well below the 2019 average weight of 6.4 lb that was tied for the previous record low weight.

Pink Salmon

Harvest Summary: The pink salmon run was average, unlike the 5 previous years of record runs in Norton Sound. However, increased buyer interest resulted in a record odd-numbered year harvest of 289,912 pink salmon in 2021, which does not include personal use.

Chum Salmon

Harvest Summary: The 2021 chum salmon harvest of 6,410 (not including personal use) was 5% of the recent 5-year average (127,216 fish).

2022 Season Outlook

Salmon outlooks and harvest projections for the 2022 salmon season are based on qualitative assessments of parent-year escapements, sibling relationships, subjective determinations of freshwater overwintering and ocean survival, and in the case of the commercial fishery, the projections of local market conditions. The department expects a better coho salmon run in 2022 than last year if there is an average return of four-year-old fish. However, the chum salmon run is again expected to be poor. The Chinook salmon run is expected to be similar to or slightly lower than last year's run.

The regular subsistence fishing schedule will start June 15 in the Shaktoolik and Unalakleet Subdistricts and the possibility of a subsistence fishing closure is likely during the last week June if the run is like the last two years when the escapement goal was not reached. No commercial fishing for Chinook salmon is expected and the sale of incidentally caught Chinook salmon in commercial fisheries will not be allowed if subsistence fishing is closed.

Chum salmon harvest is forecasted to be 5,000 to 10,000 fish with almost all the harvest expected to be an incidental catch in the pink and coho salmon fishery.

The department expects the pink salmon run to be average for an even-numbered year and nowhere near the record runs of the three previous even-numbered year runs. However, even-numbered year runs are almost always much stronger than odd-numbered year runs and the pink salmon harvest could be 250,000 to 1 million fish if there is buyer capacity.

The coho salmon run is expected to be much better than last year, but below average based on ocean survival conditions in recent years and the commercial harvest is expected to be 50,000 to 100,000 fish. In the Port Clarence District, the commercial fishery will remain closed because the in-river goal of 30,000 sockeye salmon at Pilgrim River is not expected to be reached. The department expects a poorer run than last year and subsistence fishing closures in the Pilgrim River may occur after July 4 if the run is projected to not reach the sockeye escapement goal.

KOTZEBUE DISTRICT

2021 Season Summary:

2021, which was the lowest effort since 2008. The highest fishing effort this season occurred on August 16 when 34 permit holders made landings.

Chinook Salmon

Harvest Summary: Permit holders retained 12 Chinook salmon for personal use in 2021.

Sockeye Salmon

Harvest Summary: Buyers in the Kotzebue Sound Area purchased 5 sockeye salmon in 2021. Permit holders retained 42 sockeye salmon for personal use.

Coho Salmon

Harvest Summary Buyers in the Kotzebue Sound area purchased 2 coho salmon in 2021. Permit holders retained 63 coho salmon for personal use.

Pink Salmon

Harvest Summary: Permit holders retained 192 pink salmon for personal use in 2021.

Chum Salmon

Run and Escapement Summary: No aerial surveys were flown in 2021. The Kobuk River test fish project was ineffective in catching fish because of flooding conditions.

The Kotzebue District salmon fisheries management outlook is to inform fishermen, processors, and other interested people of the management strategies for the commercial salmon fishery. The Kotzebue District includes all waters from Cape Prince of Wales to Point Hope. The Kotzebue District is divided into three subdistricts. Subdistrict 2, near the mouth of the Noatak River is closed to commercial fishing by regulation. Most fishing occurs in Subdistrict 1, which is subdivided into six statistical areas to help managers determine catch location. Within the Kotzebue District, chum salmon *Oncorhynchus keta* are the most abundant anadromous fish. Other salmon species (Chinook *O. tshawytscha*, pink *O. gorbuscha*, coho *O. kisutch*, and sockeye salmon *O. nerka*) occur in lesser numbers, as do Dolly Varden *Salvelinus malma*, and sheefish (inconnu) *Stenodus leucichthys*.

2022 Season Outlook

The Kotzebue District salmon fisheries management outlook is to inform fishermen, processors, and other interested people of the management strategies for the commercial salmon fishery. The Kotzebue District includes all waters from Cape Prince of Wales to Point Hope. The Kotzebue District is divided into three subdistricts. Subdistrict 2, near the mouth of the Noatak River is closed to commercial fishing by regulation. Most fishing occurs in Subdistrict 1, which is subdivided into six statistical areas to help managers determine catch location. Within the Kotzebue District, chum salmon *Oncorhynchus keta* are the most abundant anadromous fish. Other salmon species (Chinook *O. tshawytscha*, pink *O.*

gorbuscha, coho *O. kisutch*, and sockeye salmon *O. nerka*) occur in lesser numbers, as do Dolly Varden *Salvelinus malma*, and sheefish (inconnu) *Stenodus leucichthys*.

The outlook for the 2022 season is based on the parent-year escapements and returning age classes observed in the commercial fishery. The 5-year-old component of the run is expected to be well below average based on the 4-year-old return in 2021. The 4-year-old component of the run is expected to be below average based on the 3-year-old return last year. The 3-year-old and 6-year-old age classes are much smaller components of the run and are expected to be below average. The commercial harvest is expected to fall within the range of 100,000 to 200,000 chum salmon. Two major buyers are expected in July and a lower volume, value-added buyer has expressed interest in buying fish.

<http://alaska.fws.gov/asm/pdf/fishregs11/norton.pdf>