

FISHERIES UPDATE FOR THE WEEK OF AUGUST 28 – SEPTEMBER 4, 2023.

Report #15

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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**Yakutat**

Yakutat Susan Oehlers, Forest Service, Tongass National Forest, (907)784-3359;
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Reporting completed for the 2023 season. Please contact author if you have questions.

Juneau

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No report for this week but expect season end escapement estimates at conclusion of season.

- **Salmon fisheries** - Sockeye fisheries in most areas have wound down, and escapements through the region are favorable. The Pink Salmon return is coming in well above the weak preseason expectations – the forecast was for a commercial harvest of 19 million fish, and now looks like it may exceed 50 million fish, limited mainly by processor capacity. Coho have begun moving into inside waters, and anecdotal reports are favorable.
- **Neva Lake** – The Neva Lake weir was installed on June 21, and is a cooperative project between the Hoonah Indian Association and the Forest Service. The weir is used to monitor Sockeye Salmon returns to Neva Lake. Harvesters are reminded that only Federally qualified subsistence users may harvest Sockeye from fresh water in the Neva/South Creek system. The harvest limit at Neva was increased from 10 to 20 Sockeye per household this year, and increased effort and harvest has been reported.



Figure 1. Video capture of an otter swimming through the Neva Lake weir.

Sheet'ká and Xunaa (Sitka and Hoonah) Area

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- **Chaas' Geeyí (Klag Bay)** - The Sitka Tribe of Alaska operates the Sockeye Salmon monitoring weir at Klag Bay which counts Sockeye entering Klag Lake and conducts on-site creel surveys of harvesters. The weir was operational as of June 25. As of September 04, 7,341 Sockeye have entered the lake, and 1,523 have been harvested. August 05, the Alaska Department of Fish and Game [closed the state subsistence and sport Sockeye Salmon fishery](#) at Klag Bay. In 2022, approximately 2,029 Sockeye migrated past the weir while an estimated 1,960 were harvested in the marine terminal area subsistence and sport fishery. Subsistence harvest accounted for approximately 99% of terminal area harvest.
- **Kunáa Shak.áayi (Redoubt Lake)** - The Forest Service operates the Redoubt Lake weir which was operational beginning June 12. As of September 04, 153,414 Sockeye Salmon had entered the lake. This year has already surpassed the annual escapement for all other years on record (40+ seasons). On June 28, the Alaska Department of Fish and game [announced a liberalization](#) of the state personal use and subsistence fishery at Redoubt which took affect on July 1. This emergency order changed the Sockeye Salmon limit, in the state subsistence fisheries, to 25 Sockeye Salmon per household with an annual limit of 100 Sockeye Salmon per household. On July 7, an [Emergency Special Action](#) was authorized through the Federal Subsistence Program, which increased the daily limit for qualified federal subsistence users to 50 Sockeye per household with no annual limit. A separate Federal Subsistence fishing permit, which can be acquired at the Forest Service office in Sitka, is required to participate in this opportunity.

In 2022, an estimated 90,005 Sockeye Salmon passed through the weir into Redoubt Lake. On July 9, in accordance with the Redoubt Lake Management Plan, the individual/household subsistence Sockeye possession limit was set at 25 and the individual/household subsistence Sockeye annual limit was set at 100. Preliminary personal use/subsistence harvest records indicate that 5,850 Sockeye Salmon were harvested from the Redoubt system under 246 subsistence/personal use permits. Approximately 5,549 Sockeye Salmon were harvested in Sitka Sound commercial fishery openings throughout the season. Most of these Sockeye are probably of Redoubt origin.



Figure 2. Weir technicians pass fish on a gorgeous sunny day at the Redoubt Lake weir.

Admiralty

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- **Sitkoh Lake** - The Sitkoh Lake weir is a cooperative project between the USFS and the Angoon Community Association (ACA). The weir was installed on July 12. The swim-through video weir records Sockeye and other fish as they enter the lake. A Forest Service crew recently began testing a Starlink system to connect the weir to the internet for remote monitoring (Figure 3).



Figure 3. SCA intern Chaney Haavik (left) and USFS fisheries technician Juliet HARRISON in front of the newly installed Starlink system at the Sitkoh Lake weir.

Kaachxana.áak’w and Séet Ká Kwáan (Wrangell and Petersburg) Area

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Reporting complete for the season, please contact author if you have questions.

Prince of Wales

- **Hetta Lake** – The Hydaburg Cooperative Association staff have passed 10,622 Sockeye Salmon so far.
- **Eek Lake** – The Hydaburg Cooperative Association staff have passed 489 Sockeye Salmon so far.

SOUTHCENTRAL ALASKA

Copper River, 8/28/2023 Update – Dave Sarafin, Copper River Federal Fisheries Management Biologist, Wrangell-St. Elias National Park and Preserve (WRST), (907) 822-7281, dave_sarafin@nps.gov

Reporting completed for the 2023 season, please contact author if you have questions.

Links:

ADFG Miles Lake daily sonar estimates

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

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, Copper River Delta, Chugach – Dr. Andrew Sanders, Chugach National Forest, Cordova. July 7, 2023 Contact – (907) 250-0439 or Andrew.sanders@usda.gov

OSM fisheries update September 1st, 2023

Chugach NF PWZ

Prince William Sound / Copper River Delta: The lower Copper River dipnet fishery opened on June 1st. As of Friday morning September 1st, 70 permits had been issued, and users reported a cumulative harvest of 176 Sockeye Salmon and 4 Chinook Salmon. The Copper River Highway is accessible to 36 Mile. For more information about conditions in the Copper River and the commercial drift gillnet fishery, please see the *Prince William Sound – Copper River* weekly update which can also be found in this report.

Water levels in areas streams have been high and flashy over the last week as storm systems have moved through. Coho Salmon are running and anglers have been successful in multiple Eastern Prince William Sound streams including Ibeck Creek and the Eyak River, when water levels have been low enough to fish. Angler pressure is moderate, with vehicles consistently seen parked at the Ibeck Creek bridge. As of September 1st, 87 permits have been issued for the subsistence fishery consisting of the freshwaters outside of the Copper River Drainage within the Chugach National Forest.

The Forest Service has been patrolling at Ibeck Creek to monitor conditions and to provide information on Federal subsistence regulations and bear safety. Anglers are asked to pack out their fish whole and process them at the cleaning stations in town (located at the city harbor and out Orca Road). Anglers are also asked to keep their stringers immediately next to them, and to utilize bear spray to defend their fish if approached by a bear. Bear activity is low, but patrollers have received isolated reports of brown bears in the area.

For further information about the federal subsistence fishery in the Lower Copper River, users can contact the US Forest Service Cordova District office by calling 907-424-7661 or Wrangell-St. Elias National Park and Preserve staff -- Dave Sarafin at 907-822-7281

or Barbara Cellarius at 907-822-7236. Updates regarding changes affecting the Federal subsistence fisheries in the Copper River are available by calling the Wrangell-St. Elias Visitor Center at 907-822-7250. More information regarding the federal subsistence fisheries in the remainder of the Copper River Delta area and Prince William Sound can be obtained by contacting the Chugach National Forest Subsistence Staff – Andrew Sanders at 907-424-4759

COOK INLET AREA – Kenneth Gates, Senior Fish Biologist, Kenai Fish and Wildlife Conservation Office

Reporting concluded for season.

Fish counts at some Alaska Department of Fish and Game-operated assessment projects are available on-line at
<http://www.adfg.alaska.gov/sf/FishCounts/index.cfm?ADFG=main.home>

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

Subsistence fishing has been completed for the 2023 season. Please call author if you have any questions.

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

Reporting complete for 2023 season.

Yukon River –USFWS Fairbanks Office. August 28-September 4, 2023
Federal Manager, Holly Carroll (907) 351-3029, holly_carroll@fws.gov

This will be the final report for the 2023 season, please contact author with questions.

Assessment and Management Information

The fall chum run is about 90% complete in the lower river. Genetic analysis applied to the Pilot Station sonar counts indicate that just over 250,000 fall chum have passed the lower river which means the drainage-wide run size is likely less than 300,000 fish. The Canadian-origin component of the fall chum run is making up less than the average 25% and therefore is unlikely to meet border escapement objectives. Coho salmon are also coming in well below average, and are nearing the ¾ point of the run in the lower river.

The Coho run is the second lowest on record. Therefore Coho retention from selective gear is being discontinued. At this time, closures to retention of chum salmon are already in place in Districts 1 through 6. Closures will likely need to stay in place until the majority of the fall chum run is through each area. Throughout the drainage, only pink, and sockeye salmon can be retained from selective gears. Gillnets are still limited to 4-inches maximum mesh size, and 60 feet maximum length. Because all salmon fishing opportunities for chum, Chinook and coho salmon are closed, there is no longer a need to limit fishing to federally qualified subsistence users only in Federal public waters. Therefore, effective September 2, all federal special actions are rescinded. See details in the News release: <https://www.doi.gov/sites/doi.gov/files/nr-08-31-23-yukon-river-area-federal-special-actions-rescinded.pdf>

Eagle sonar completed its inseason estimation of Chinook salmon on August 27th, for a total count of 15,304 Chinook salmon, which is well below the expected number of fish based on genetic analysis of the Canadian-origin stock at Pilot Station Sonar, and the previous Interim Management Escapement Goal of 42,500-55,000. Fall chum salmon passage estimation has begun at Eagle sonar as of August 28th. YRDFA weekly teleconferences concluded August 29th.

This week's Advisory Announcements co-authored by ADF&G and USFWS and distributed by ADF&G were:

- **Yukon River Fall Assessment Update #6:**
<http://www.adfg.alaska.gov/static/applications/dcfnewsrelease/1535856326.pdf>
- **Yukon River Fishing Schedule (Announcement #11):**
<http://www.adfg.alaska.gov/static/applications/dcfnewsrelease/1536564537.pdf>

Where to Find Yukon Fishery Information:

To hear the fishing schedule and fish counts please call the toll-free Fishing Schedule and Fish Counts hotline: 866-479-7387.

Recent Fishery special actions are posted here:

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

For Federal News Releases and Special actions, like www.facebook.com/subsistencealaska.

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

For daily counts and State Advisory announcements like the ADF&G Yukon River Facebook page at: www.facebook.com/YukonRiverFishingADFG/

In Season Manager – Boyd Blihovde, Refuge Manager, Yukon Delta National Wildlife Refuge Boyd_Blihovde@fws.gov; Contact Spencer Reardon (907)543-1023 or spencer_reardon@fws.gov

Reporting complete for the 2023 season, please contact author if you have questions.

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

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

This will be the last report from NWA for the 2023 season.

Commercial fishing closes by regulation on September 7 for the Norton Sound District, and on August 31 for the Kotzebue District. Subsistence fishing continues. Assessments of the 2023 Season will be included along with 2024 Season projections in our first reports for the 2024 season for comparison.

Norton Sound District

The focus of fisheries management has mostly shifted to coho salmon.

. Escapement Projects:

Several salmon escapement projects have completed operations for the season. Final escapements for each project will be included in future updates. There are projects that are currently operating or intend to operate once water levels and water clarity allow.

Shaktoolik (5) and Unalakleet (6) Subdistricts

Subsistence Fishing:

Shaktoolik and Unalakleet subdistricts are open to subsistence fishing in the marine and freshwaters.

Commercial Fishing:

The Shaktoolik and Unalakleet subdistricts opened to commercial fishing Wednesday, August 23, to gauge the strength of coho runs in those subdistricts. Catch rates for coho salmon were well below average and the department will forgo additional commercial fishing at this time to allow additional escapement into local area streams.

Unalakleet River Floating Weir - No escapement goals yet established. A cooperative project of Fish & Game, Native Village of Unalakleet, BLM and NSEDC; major funding provided by USFWS, Office of Subsistence Management. The weir was fish tight on July 1. The cumulative counts passed through are 40 kings, 13,400 chums, 4,600 coho, 7,200 pinks and 160 sockeyes, Rains caused the river to rise to such an extent that counting operations were suspended Monday, July 10 and resumed July 20. The department ceased operations and removed the weir on August 16.

North River Tower Camp J. B. - Escapement goals: king 1,200 to 2,600, chum no goal established, pink 25,000, silver 550-1,100 (aerial survey goal), A NSEDC project. The tower began operations June 24 and has passed 480 kings, 600 chums, 600 coho and 11,200 pink salmon. The tower has remained operational for most of the season with few days missed due to high murky water but became inoperable on August 18.

Shaktoolik Tower – No escapement goals yet established, A NSEDC project. The tower began operations on June 26 and has estimated 760 king, 5,000 chum, 29,300 pink, 1,600 coho and 80 sockeye salmon past the tower site. The tower was inoperable from July 10 through July 30, and high murky water caused the project to shut down again on August 20.

NORTON Bay Subdistrict (4)

Subsistence Fishing:

There are currently no restrictions to Subsistence fishing.

Commercial Fishing:

There was there was no commercial effort in Norton Bay during the most recent commercial opening and the department will forgo additional commercial fishing at this time to bolster coho escapement into local area streams. The Total commercial harvest remains confidential.

Elim Subdistrict (3)

Kwiniuk River Tower-Camp Joel - escapement goals: king 250, chum 9,100-32,600, pink 8,400, silver 650-1,300 (aerial survey goal). Fish and Game project. The Kwiniuk River Tower began operations on July 5. Current escapements are 18 king, 3,600 chum, 18,700 pink, 5,300 coho and 18 sockeye salmon.

Subsistence Fishing:

Subsistence fishing is allowed 7 days per week.

Commercial Fishing:

Coho salmon escapements at the Kwiniuk River Tower have been robust and have met the escapement objectives with the surplus available for commercial harvest the department scheduled two 48 hour commercial periods in the marine waters of subdistrict 3 from 6 p.m. Monday, August 28 through 6 p.m. Wednesday, August 30, and again from 6 p.m. Thursday, August 31 to 6 p.m. Saturday, September 2. Total commercial harvest in subdistrict 3 is 1,100 chum, 640 coho, 30 sockeye, and 20 pink salmon.

Golovin Subdistrict (2)

The Golovin Subdistrict transitioned to management based on coho.

Subsistence Fishing:

Subsistence fishing is allowed 7 days per week.

Commercial Fishing:

The Golovin subdistrict transitioned to management based on Coho. Catch rates from the last commercial opening in subdistrict 2 were below average. Escapements past the Niukluk River Tower have waned below expectations and the project escapement is near the lower end of the historic escapement goal based on Tower counts. Based on the most recent commercial opening and coho escapement performing below expectations, the

department has forgone additional commercial harvest at this time to allow additional coho escapement.

Nome Subdistrict (1)

The Nome Subdistrict has transitioned to coho management.

Subsistence Fishing:

The Nome subdistrict subsistence fishing schedule remains in effect and freshwaters are on a weekly basis from 6 p.m. Wednesdays to 6 p.m. Mondays. Marine Waters of the Nome subdistrict are currently open to subsistence net fishing 7 days per week. Beginning on September 1, net fishing in the marine and freshwaters of the Nome subdistrict will open on a continual basis. Additionally, beach seining closed Wednesday, August 15, and are no longer legal subsistence gear in the Nome subdistrict.

Commercial Fishing:

The Nome Subdistrict management is currently based on Coho salmon. Harvest rates from the most recent commercial fishery were about half of average, and escapements in the subdistrict remain slow. The department is forgoing additional commercial harvest at this time to bolster coho escapement into local area streams.

Nome River Weir – ADF&G Project. The Nome River Weir became operational on July 28 and current escapements are 1 king, 1,500 chum, 330 coho, and 2,800 pink salmon.

Snake River Weir – NSEDC Project. The Snake River Weir started counting on July 24 and current escapements are 2 king, 1200 chum, 90 coho, and 3400 pink salmon. This project became inoperable on August 19 due to high water levels.

Port Clarence District

Pilgrim River Weir – A NSEDC project. The weir has been fish tight since July 6. Passage has been slow with 12 king, 7,000 chum, 1,600 sockeye and 670 pink salmon passed the weir. Weir operations concluded for the season on August 16, Sockeye salmon did not reach the escapement goal in 2023,

Subsistence Fishing:

The Pilgrim River will remain closed to subsistence net fishing. Escapement of sockeye salmon to the Pilgrim River has been weak and did not meet escapement goals. Pilgrim River subsistence net fishing will remain closed in 2023.

Commercial Fishing:

No commercial fishing periods have been allowed due to lack of market interest and the Pilgrim River weir not reaching its escapement goal.

Kotzebue District

Subsistence Fishing:

No changes to existing subsistence fishing are anticipated.

Commercial Fishing:

Commercial salmon fishing opened for 8 hours daily from 10 a.m. until 6 p.m. Monday, August 21, through Friday, August 25, in the Kotzebue Sound District. In Subdistrict 1 of the Kotzebue District, marine waters adjacent to the end of the runway from the Weather Service Dome south of the main runway to the NANA building north of the main runway and extending one mile offshore into Kotzebue Sound perpendicular to the beach remains closed to both subsistence and commercial fishing in order to avoid birds being attracted to fishing nets near the end of the airport runway and becoming a safety hazard.