



Federal Subsistence Board

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FISH and WILDLIFE SERVICE
BUREAU of LAND MANAGEMENT
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE
BUREAU of INDIAN AFFAIRS

FEDERAL SUBSISTENCE EULACHON FISHERY CLOSED IN DISTRICT ONE EXCEPT THE UNUK RIVER DRAINAGE

EMERGENCY SPECIAL ACTION: FEDERAL SUBSISTENCE BOARD

Under authority of: 36 CFR 242.10 and .19
50 CFR 100.10 and .19

Special Action No: FSA 13-EU-01-23 Issued at: Ketchikan Alaska, February 08, 2023

Effective Date: 12:01 a.m. Wednesday, March 01, 2023

Expiration Date: 11:59 p.m. Saturday, April 15, 2023, unless superseded by subsequent emergency special action.

EXPLANATION: This emergency Special Action closes Federal public waters draining into District 1 except the Unuk River drainage. Harvest within waters of the Unuk River drainage shall be limited to one 5-gallon bucket of whole eulachon per household, and gear is restricted to dip net and/or cast nets. All Eulachon incidentally caught outside of the Unuk River must be immediately released into the water unharmed. A Federal subsistence fishing permit is required, and harvesters must abide by the terms of that permit. Harvesters are encouraged to provide a few fish to the Ketchikan Misty Fjords Ranger District to sample for age and genetic analysis.

The Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ADF&G) is implementing a full closure of District 1 eulachon for State subsistence, personal use, and commercial fisheries.

REGULATION: 50 CFR 100.27(e)(13)(ii) and 36 CFR 242.27(e)(13)(ii) are amended to read:

§___.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 Sections 1C or 1D. All waters draining into District 1 are closed to the taking of Eulachon, except the Unuk River drainage, from 12:01 a.m., March 01 through 11:59 p.m., April 15, 2023. Harvest within the Unuk River drainage is limited to one 5-gallon bucket of whole Eulachon per household and gear is restricted to cast net and/or dip net from 12:01 a.m., March 01 through 11:59 p.m., April 15, 2023.

Federal Subsistence Board by delegation to

CATHERINE
TIGHE

Digitally signed by
CATHERINE TIGHE
Date: 2023.02.07 13:25:07 February 8, 2023

CATHY TIGHE

District Ranger

Ketchikan Misty Fjords Ranger District

JUSTIFICATION:

Populations of Eulachon in District 1 have been at critically low levels since 2005. Monitoring efforts by the U.S. Forest Service, ADF&G, and local fisherman since 2001 have provided base line information that indicated a decline in the populations of District 1 Eulachon. Although surveys have occurred to document adult returns, little is known about Eulachon after they leave river systems for saltwater.

District 1 historically supported subsistence, personal use, and commercial fisheries for Eulachon, primarily in the Unuk River system. Annual harvest of Eulachon from the 1980's through the 1990's averaged over 12,000 pounds, with some harvest years exceeding 30,000 pounds. By 2004, only 1,500 pounds of Eulachon were harvested and very low numbers of returning Eulachon were observed by subsistence fisherman and Forest Service personnel. Between 2005 and 2010, little to no Eulachon were observed during annual surveys. This five-year absence of Eulachon alarmed managers because the Eulachon life cycle is typically only five years, suggesting an entire life cycle may have been lost.

Due to the sharp declines in observed numbers of Eulachon, along with critically low numbers returning to the area, portions of District 1 have been closed since 2005. With the stocks at these low levels, there were few options available to managers for conservation other than closure.

Efforts to monitor populations within District 1 have proven difficult, despite intensive onsite survey efforts. However, since 2011, managers have observed Eulachon returning to the Unuk River. Between 2011 and 2015, Eulachon were observed in both the Unuk River, Burroughs Bay area, and in the Carroll Inlet area. Genetic analysis of Carroll Inlet fish showed these fish to be genetically like Unuk River Eulachon. Eulachon again returned to the Unuk River area between 2016 and 2022, though in far less abundance than observed between 2011 and 2015.

Even though Eulachon appear to be returning to the Unuk River regularly since 2011, the stock sizes within District 1 remain at levels lower than those observed prior to the 2005 population collapse.

However, because monitoring efforts have documented Eulachon returning consistently since 2011, the Federal fishery was opened on the Unuk River in 2021 and again in 2022 to a limited harvest with gear restrictions to federally qualified subsistence users. Harvest was restricted to one five-gallon bucket per household and limited to cast net and dip net only methods. The State of Alaska Eulachon fishery remained closed in 2021 and 2022. Based on the observations made by biologists and reports from local subsistence users the 2022 Eulachon run appeared to be low, however because of the low harvest observed in 2022, and the consistent numbers of Ooligan observed in 2022, Managers feel that returns will be sufficient to continue with another limited harvest in 2023 on the Unuk River in District 1.

A limited harvest in 2023 will aid in managers' efforts to obtain biological data and better assess run sizes, as well as provide Federally qualified subsistence users an opportunity to harvest. Data collected will help managers determine if the Eulachon population can support sustained harvest and if future harvest limits should be changed.

DISTRIBUTION:

RADIO

KRBD Radio; KTKN Radio; KFMJ Radio; KRSA Radio; KTSK Radio; KFSK Radio

PRINT

Ketchikan Daily News; Petersburg Pilot; Wrangell Sentinel

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