MATANUSKA-SUSITNA BOROUGH Fish & Wildlife Commission

350 E Dahlia Ave., Palmer, Alaska 99645

Special Meeting

December 5, 2024

Meeting Packet - Table of Contents

***Pg.* = *Item*:**

Physical Location of Meeting: Assembly Chambers, DSJ Bldg, 350 E. Dahlia Ave., Palmer
Remote Participation: See attached agenda on p. 1

MATANUSKA-SUSITNA BOROUGH
MSB Fish and Wildlife Commission
AGENDA

Edna Devries, Mayor

Andy Couch – Chair
Peter Probasco – Vice Chair
Gabriel Kitter
Howard Delo
Larry Engel
Tim Hale
Bill Gamble
Kendra Zamzow
Jim Sykes – Ex officio member

Rebecca Skjothaug – Staff

Michael Brown, Borough Manager

PLANNING & LAND USE DEPARTMENT
Alex Strawn, Planning & Land Use Director
Vacant, Planning Services Manager
Jason Ortiz, Development Services Manager
Fred Wagner, Platting Officer

Assembly Chambers
Dorothy Swanda Jones Building
350 E. Dahlia Avenue, Palmer

December 5, 2024
SPECIAL MEETING: Alaska Department of Fish & Game (ADF&G)
Fishing Season Summary
5:00 p.m.

Ways to participate in MSB Fish and Wildlife Commission meetings:

IN-PERSON: Assembly Chambers, DSJ Building

REMOTE PARTICIPATION VIA MICROSOFT TEAMS:

Join on your computer:
Click here to join the meeting
Meeting ID: 212 411 183 809
Passcode: wq6yVK

Or call in (audio only):
1-907-290-7880
Phone Conference ID: 956 490 599#

I. CALL TO ORDER

II. ROLL CALL – DETERMINATION OF QUORUM

III. LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT & RECOGNITION

"We acknowledge that we are meeting on traditional lands of the Dena'ina and Ahtna Dene people, and we are grateful for their continued stewardship of the land, fish, and wildlife throughout time immemorial."

IV. PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

V. APPROVAL OF AGENDA

VI. INTRODUCTIONS

A. FWC Opening Statement *(5 min)*
B. ADF&G Opening Statement *(5 min)*

VII. AUDIENCE PARTICIPATION (*three minutes per person – 30 min, may vary*)

VIII. PRESENTATIONS

A. Staff Report *(5 min)*
B. ADF&G
    i. Commercial Fishing Notable Highlights & Observations *(10 min)*
    ii. Sport Fishing Notable Highlights & Observations *(10 min)*
C. NOAA
    i. Federal Inseason Management Report *(10 min)*

IX. ITEMS OF BUSINESS

A. Dialogue on Upper Cook Inlet Fisheries & FWC Questions *(30 min)*

X. ADF&G/NOAA/FWC FINAL COMMENTS *(10 min)*

XI. NEXT MEETING DATE: Thursday, December 12, 2024 @ 4:00 pm Assembly Chambers

XII. ADJOURNMENT

Disabled persons needing reasonable accommodation in order to participate at a MSB Fish and Wildlife Commission Meeting should contact the borough ADA Coordinator at 861-8432 at least one week in advance of the meeting.

Division of Commercial Fisheries
Forrest Bowers, Acting Director

Soldotna Office
43961 K Beach Rd.
Soldotna Ak. 99669

Alaska Department of Fish and Game
Doug Vincent-Lang, Commissioner

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Advisory Announcement
For Immediate Release: **November 13, 2024**

CONTACT: Colton Lipka, Area Management Biologist
Lucas Stumpf, Assistant Area Management Biologist
(907) 262-9368

2024 Upper Cook Inlet Commercial Salmon Fishery Season Summary

The following is an overview of the 2024 Upper Cook Inlet (UCI) commercial salmon season. All data are preliminary. The 2024 Upper Cook Inlet sockeye salmon total run of 6.6 million fish was 15% greater than the preseason forecast of 5.7 million fish (Table 1). The commercial harvest of 2.0 million salmon was 34% less than the recent 20-year average annual harvest of 3.1 million fish (Table 2). This is likely influenced by the second consecutive year that the East Side Set Net (ESSN) fishery was closed for the entire season and generally low abundance of all species except sockeye salmon. The 2024 exvessel value of all salmon species was $19.2 million and was 17% less than the previous 20-year average annual exvessel value of $23.2 million (Table 3). Of the five species of Pacific salmon harvested in UCI, sockeye salmon accounted for 92% of the total exvessel value over the past 20 years (Table 3). The 2024 king salmon harvest of 169 fish and the coho salmon harvest of 24,750 fish are the lowest on record for each species respectively. Low commercial harvest of king and coho salmon corresponds to low abundance trends and restricted fishing effort observed this season. Overall participation in UCI was less than in previous years with 596 permits making deliveries, which is 34% less than the 20-year average of 897 permits (Tables 5 and 6).

Escapement goals were met or exceeded in the five UCI sockeye salmon escapements monitored by the department in 2024. Fish Creek and Larson Lake were within their respective sustainable escapement goals (SEG). The Kasilof River exceeded the biological escapement goal (BEG). The Kenai River sockeye salmon late-run exceeded the inriver goal (IRG). The Packers Creek (Kalgin Island) escapement was within the SEG range. The Judd Lake and Chelatna Lake weirs were not operated in 2024 due to not having funding (Table 4).

In 2024, neither the Kenai River early-run nor the late-run large king salmon optimal escapement goals (OEG) were achieved. Of the three southern Kenai Peninsula king salmon systems with escapement goals, the SEG was achieved at the Anchor River and not achieved for the Ninilchik River wild run. The Deep Creek king salmon run was not assessed due to lack of funding. In the Northern Cook Inlet region, the Little Susitna River king salmon SEG was not achieved, and the Deshka River king salmon BEG was not achieved. The SEG on the Chuitna River in the West Cook Inlet area was also not achieved. King salmon escapements for the Susitna River Drainage are currently undergoing post-season analysis but preliminary results from aerial surveys indicate low abundance of king salmon.

In 2024, UCI coho salmon weir counts on the Deshka and Little Susitna Rivers were considered

incomplete due to flooding; however, it is likely the SEG's for these systems were not achieved. The coho salmon SEG for Jim Creek was not achieved and the coho salmon SEG for Fish creek was achieved. The chum salmon SEG for Clear Creek in Chinitna Bay was not achieved.

SOCKEYE SALMON

2024 Run and Fishery Summary

In 2024, approximately 5.7 million sockeye salmon were forecasted to return to the UCI (Table 1). Of these, 3.7 million sockeye salmon were estimated to be available for harvest, including commercial, sport, and personal use fisheries. The total run estimate for UCI sockeye salmon in 2024, which includes both harvest and escapement estimates, is 6.6 million fish (Table 1). This total run estimate is 847,000 fish, or 15%, higher than forecasted. The performance of individual stocks varied. The Kenai River stock total run exceeded its forecast by 344,000 fish, or 10%, while the Kasilof River stock surpassed its forecast by 672,000 fish, or 60%. In contrast, the Fish Creek stock was estimated to be 47,000 fish, or 46%, below forecast. The Susitna River stock also fell short, with a total run of 248,000 fish, or 18%, below forecast. Additionally, the combined total run estimate for all other UCI systems, known as minor systems, was 757,000 fish, or 9%, lower than forecasted (Table 1).

The final passage estimated at the river mile 19 sonar of 1,926,350 sockeye salmon exceeded the Kenai River sockeye salmon middle tier inriver goal range (1,100,000–1,400,000 fish) (Table 4). The peak day of sockeye salmon passage in the Kenai River occurred on July 17 with an estimate of 191,328 fish. During the previous 20 years, the average date when 50% of the sonar passage occurred in the Kenai River was July 26. In 2024, the midpoint of sockeye salmon passage occurred on July 21, which is five days earlier than the previous 20-year average (2004–2023). Approximately 10% of the sockeye salmon run past the sonar site during the month of August, which is above the recent 20-year average (2004–2023) of 44% of the run passing the sonar site in August.

The Kasilof River sockeye salmon sonar count of 1,048,092 fish exceeded the Kasilof River BEG of 140,000–320,000 fish and the OEG of 140,000–370,000 fish. The passage midpoint for Kasilof River sockeye salmon occurred on July 16, which was two days earlier than the 20-year average (2004–2023) midpoint of July 18. Peak daily Kasilof River sockeye salmon passage of 99,436 fish occurred on July 17.

The 2024 total UCI commercial harvest of 1.9 million sockeye salmon was 26% below the 2004–2023 average annual harvest of 2.5 million fish (Table 2). Prices varied during the season but, based on an estimated average price of $1.70 per pound, the total exvessel value for sockeye salmon harvested was $18.7 million, or 98% of the total 2024 exvessel value of all salmon in UCI (Table 3).

East Side Set Net and Dip Net Fishery

The ESSN fishery did not open for the 2024 season due to a poor forecast of Kenai River late-run large king salmon, the department issued emergency order (EO) No. 2-KS-1-09-24 closing the king salmon sport fishery in the Kenai River beginning July 1, 2024. Consistent with provisions of the *Kenai River Late-Run King Salmon Stock of Concern Management Plan* ((KRLKSSOC); 5 AAC 21.382), EO 2-F-H-2-24 was issued for the ESSN fishery on April 12, which closed the ESSN fishery prior to the start of the season and remained closed through the end of the season on August 15. The closure includes the Kenai, Kasilof, and East Forelands Sections of the Upper Subdistrict along with the Kasilof Special Harvest Area (Figures 1 and 2).

At the 2024 Upper Cook Inlet Board of Fish meeting, dip nets were added as an alternative gear type for the ESSN during times of king salmon conservation. The KRLKSSOC stipulated the dip net commercial fishery would be open from June 20 through July 31, for up to three 12-hour periods per week based on the abundance of sockeye salmon.

The 2024 dip net commercial fishery preliminary harvest was 1 king, 27,730 sockeye, 21 coho, 134 pink, and 21 chum salmon. Approximately 101 permits delivered fish in the dip net fishery. Harvest was largely concentrated during the peak of the Kenai River sockeye salmon run from July 16 to July 25 and the highest success was seen on beaches near the mouth of the Kenai River. There was no commercial set net harvest in 2024 (Table 5).

In 2024, three commissioner's permits were issued to experiment with the use of beach seines in the Upper Subdistrict to harvest sockeye salmon and release king salmon utilizing existing beach infrastructure. Of the three permits issued, two actively fished the experimental gear type. Harvest from this fishery consisted of zero king, 21,763 sockeye, 21 coho, 410 pink, and zero chum salmon with approximately 15 days when fishing took place (Table 5).

Drift Gillnet Fishery

The drift gillnet fishery management fell into the provisions of the middle run size tier for sockeye salmon (2.3–4.6 million fish) but unlike the ESSN fishery, this fishery was not impacted by the KRLKSMP. Beginning in 2024 the exclusive economic zone (EEZ) of Cook Inlet was managed directly by the National Marine Fisheries Service under a separate Federal Fisheries Management Plan. The remaining State of Alaska waters were managed following stipulations in the *Central District Drift Gillnet Fishery Management Plan* (CDDGFMP 5 AAC 21.353, Figure 3).

The drift gillnet fishery opened on June 20, districtwide except Chinitna Bay, for regulatory Monday and Thursday fishing periods from the beginning of the season through July 8. Additional fishing opportunities were provided in the Expanded Kasilof Section (Figure 3) on June 22, June 25, June 29, July 2, and July 3. Additional fishing opportunities were provided districtwide, except Chinitna Bay, on July 6 and July 7.

From July 9 through July 15, both regular fishing periods were open to State of Alaska waters of Drift Gillnet Area 1 and the Expanded Kenai and Expanded Kasilof (Ex. Ken/Kas) sections (Figure 3). Additional fishing time was opened in the Ex. Ken/Kas Sections on July 9, July 10, July 12, and July 14.

From July 16 through July 31, fishing during the first regular period of each week was limited to State of Alaska waters of Drift Gillnet Area 1, the Ex. Ken/Kas, and Anchor Point sections. The second regular period of each week was restricted to the Ex. Ken/Kas and Anchor Point sections. Additional fishing periods were allowed in the Ex. Ken/Kas and Anchor Point sections on July 16, July 17, July 19, July 20, July 21, July 23, July 24, July 26, July 27, July 28, July 30, and July 31.

Drift gillnet fishing was open in Drift Gillnet Area 1, Drift Gillnet Area 3, the Ex. Ken/Kas, and the Anchor Point sections on August 1 and August 5. The total drift gillnet harvest of sockeye salmon from the August 1 and August 5 periods where each less than 1% of the season total harvest. In compliance with CDDGFMP, all regular periods were then restricted to Drift Gillnet Areas 3 and 4 for the remainder of the season (Figure 3). All UCI commercial drift gillnet fisheries were closed by EO on September 24 for the 2024 season.

From June 19 through August 15, the drift gillnet fleet fished a total of 40 days when harvest was reported as follows: 5 days in the Expanded Kasilof Section only, 4 days in the Ex. Ken/Kas sections only, 14 days in the Ex. Ken/Kas and Anchor Point sections only, 6 days in Drift Gillnet

Area 1 with some or all the expanded sections, and 8 days districtwide in State of Alaska waters. Beginning August 8, all Monday/Thursday regulatory drift gillnet fishing periods were restricted to Drift Gillnet Areas 3 and 4.
The State of Alaska waters drift gillnet fishery in UCI harvested 49 king, 1,359,735 sockeye, 6,709 coho, 31,433 pink, and 40,240 chum salmon for a total harvest of 1,438,166 salmon caught by 353 permits that made deliveries (Table 5).

The Federal waters drift gillnet fishery in UCI harvested 27 king, 325,028 sockeye, 4,437 coho, 6,278 pink, and 28,819 chum salmon for a total harvest of 364,589 salmon caught by 259 permits that made deliveries (Table 5).

The total UCI drift gillnet harvest of 1,684,763 sockeye salmon was above the 20-year average harvest of 1,409,583 fish. In 2024, 362 drift gillnet permits made deliveries for a season average harvest of approximately 4,654 sockeye salmon per permit. Participation was below the 20-year average of 429 drift gillnet permits (Table 5 and 6).

Western and Chinitna Bay Subdistricts Fisheries

The Western Subdistrict (Figures 1 and 2) set gillnet fishery opened for regulatory fishing periods on Monday, June 20. This fishery primarily harvests sockeye salmon returning to the Crescent River. When Crescent River sockeye salmon run indexes warrant additional harvest, an EO would be issued for an extra day and extended daily hours in that portion of the Western Subdistrict south of the latitude of Redoubt Point. In 2024, catch per unit effort in the Western Subdistrict warranted additional hours to regular periods from July 4 through August 3. The Chinitna Bay Subdistrict harvest is confidential due to the number of participants and processors. Approximately 40,942 sockeye salmon were harvested with set gillnet gear in the Western and Chinitna Bay Subdistricts. This was 2% below the average annual harvest of 41,991 fish during the most recent 20 years. Participation was near the 20-year average with 22 set gillnet permits making deliveries (Table 5 and 6).

Kustatan Subdistrict Fishery

The Kustatan Subdistrict includes those waters from the Drift River oil terminal to the Northern District boundary near the West Foreland (Figures 1 and 2). A portion of the Kustatan Subdistrict was open from June 3–24, allowing harvest for the Big River sockeye salmon fishery, which is an early season fishery limited to one net per permit holder and open 3 days per week. By regulation, the remaining Kustatan Subdistrict opened June 27. Approximately 8,242 sockeye salmon were harvested in the Kustatan Subdistrict in 2024, of which 1,798 sockeye salmon were harvested during the Big River fishery from June 1 through June 24. The 2024 sockeye salmon harvest for the Kustatan Subdistrict was 66% greater than recent 20-year average harvest of 4,965 fish. Participation was near the 20-year average with 11 set gillnet permits making deliveries (Table 5 and 6).

Kalgin Island Subdistrict Fishery

The Kalgin Island Subdistrict (Figures 1 and 2) opened for regulatory Monday and Thursday fishing periods beginning June 27, except for the west side of Kalgin Island which was open for commercial fishing on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays from June 3–24 as part of the Big River sockeye salmon fishery. In 2024, a total of 44,554 sockeye salmon were harvested from the Kalgin Island Subdistrict, with 4,711 of those fish taken during the Big River sockeye salmon fishery. The 2024 Kalgin Island Subdistrict harvest was 20% below the recent 20-year average harvest 55,987 fish. Participation was near the 20-year average with 26 set gillnet permits making

deliveries (Table 5 and 6).

The Packers Creek SEG (15,000–30,000). was achieved with an escapement of 15,429 fish (Table 4).

Northern District Fishery

The Northern District (Figure 4) opened for sockeye salmon on July 4, after the directed king salmon fishery and additional closed periods for king salmon conservation. The last day of fishing was on August 8, after which the fishery was closed for coho salmon conservation. Commercial fishing was reduced from 12 hours to 8 hours on the July 4 period. From July 8 through July 18, commercial periods were open under the regulatory 7:00 am to 7:00 pm on Monday and Thursday periods. From July 22 through August 5, net restrictions were implemented during regulatory periods. In response to weak coho salmon abundance indicators, the commercial period on August 8 was reduced from 12-hours to 6-hours. Commercial salmon fishing with set gillnets in the Northern District was closed effective 7:00 a.m. Monday, August 12, 2024. In 2024, a total of 42,050 sockeye salmon were harvested in the Northern District. This harvest was 1% above the recent 20-year average harvest of 41,438 sockeye salmon. Participation was below the 20- year average with 69 set gillnet permits making deliveries (Table 5 and 6).

COHO SALMON

2024 Run and Fishery Summary

The 2024 commercial harvest estimate of 24,750 coho salmon in UCI was 86% below the recent 20-year average of 178,018 fish (Table 2). The 2024 drift gillnet harvest of 11,146 coho salmon was 89% below the recent 20-year average of 102,571 fish. The Northern District set gillnet fishery harvested 8,725 coho salmon, which was 77% below the recent 20-year average of 37,899 fish (Table 5 and 6).

Based on an average price per pound of $0.54, the estimated exvessel value of the 2024 commercial coho salmon fishery was $69,022 or 0.4% of the total exvessel value of all species in Upper Cook Inlet (Table 3). This was 90% below the recent 20-year average exvessel value of $745,761 for coho salmon in UCI.

In UCI, there are four coho salmon systems with escapement goals. Fish Creek, the Little Susitna, and Deshka Rivers are monitored by weirs, while McRoberts Creek was assessed with foot surveys.

The Little Susitna weir was inundated by flood waters on August 8 and did not begin counting fish again until August 26. The weir count of 964 fish is considered incomplete; however, it is likely the SEG of 9,200–17,700 was missed in 2024.

Flooding prevented counting fish at the Deshka River weir during the season for six days beginning August 9, and the weir sustained major damage ending the weir project on August 16 after counting about 70% of the run based on historical run timing. The count of 642 coho salmon is considered incomplete, but it is unlikely the SEG of 10,200–24,100 fish would have been achieved.

Fish Creek weir operated for the full coho salmon season. The SEG of 1,200–6,000 fish was not attained with a final count of 235 fish.

The SEG for Jim Creek of 250–700 coho salmon is assessed postseason by a foot survey of McRoberts Creek, a small spawning tributary within the Jim Creek system. A survey conducted

on September 23 counted 376 coho salmon, which was within the goal range.

KING SALMON

2024 Run and Fishery Summary

The 2024 UCI commercial king salmon harvest of 169 fish was 98% below the recent 20-year average of 9,555 fish (Table 2). In UCI, there are two commercial fisheries where most king salmon are harvested. These include the set gillnet fisheries in the Northern District, and the ESSN fishery of the Central District. The king salmon harvests of the Northern District were managed under the *Northern District King Salmon Management Plan* (NDKSMP; 5 AAC 21.366), and king salmon harvest of the ESSN fishery was guided by the KRLKSSOC. King salmon returns were expected to be below average across Southcentral Alaska for the 2024 season. As predicted, the 2024 king salmon runs across UCI were below average, leading to both preseason and inseason conservation-based management actions and closures in multiple river systems and fisheries. Using the average price of $4.14 per pound for king salmon, the estimated exvessel value of the 2024 harvest was $7,978, or >1% of the total exvessel value of all salmon in UCI (Table 3).

In the Central District of UCI there are four monitored king salmon systems with escapement goals. The Kenai River is monitored with sonar, the Anchor River is monitored with a combination of sonar and weirs, and the Ninilchik River and Crooked Creek are monitored with weirs.

The total Kenai River large late-run king salmon passage through August 19, 2024, at the river mile 14 sonar was 6,630 large king salmon. ADF&G applies harvest and catch-and-release mortality estimates and spawning downstream of the sonar estimates to generate a preliminary spawning escapement estimate of 6,959 large fish. The midpoint of the run occurred on July 29 which is two day later than the mean historical midpoint. The OEG of 15,000–30,000 large fish and SEG of 13,500–27,000 large fish were not achieved in 2024. The SEG has been achieved in one of the last seven years and the OEG has not been achieved since it was created in 2020. Additionally, Kenai River late-run king salmon were designated a Stock of Concern at the Alaska Board of Fisheries March 2024 meeting. The action plan developed to recover Kenai River late-run king salmon includes a recovery goal of 14,250–30,000 large king salmon that is the department's management objective until the stock recovers. The recovery goal was not achieved in 2024.

The SEG (700–1,400) for wild run king salmon in Crooked Creek was not achieved in 2024 with a final weir count of 550 fish.

Of the three southern Kenai Peninsula king salmon systems, the SEG was achieved on one system and not achieved on one system and not assessed in the third. The Anchor River preliminary escapement estimate was 3,331 fish (SEG 3,200–6,400) and Ninilchik River naturally produced count was 676 fish (SEG 900–1,600). The Deep Creek king salmon run was not assessed due to lack of funding.

The Northern District of UCI there are two systems with escapement goals monitored for king salmon inseason using weirs and multiple streams from the westside of Cook Inlet and the Susitna River Drainage are evaluated by aerial surveys.

The final escapement estimate of king salmon in the Deshka River was 3,440 fish, which did not achieve the BEG of 9,000–18,000 fish. The Little Susitna River king salmon SEG of 2,100–4,300 was likely not achieved in 2024 with the final weir count of 1,013 king salmon being

considered incomplete due to missed passage and poor counting conditions. Aerial goals of the various other Susitna drainage king salmon systems pending analysis to determine whether aggregate goals have been achieved.

Northern District King Salmon Fishery

Northern District king salmon are primarily harvested during the directed fishery in late May and June. The 2024 preseason run forecast for Deshka River king salmon of 6,671 fish, suggested harvest must be limited to achieve the BEG. The Deshka River king salmon fishery started the 2024 season closed, as did fisheries within the Talkeetna, Yentna, Little Susitna, and Eastside Susitna areas. Due to the low forecasted abundance of king salmon and closure of the Deshka River king salmon sport fishery, the commercial fishery was closed, per provisions in the NDKSMP. The commercial fishery remained closed through the end of the directed king salmon fishing season on June 24. King salmon conservation measures were further implemented through July 4 by reducing commercial fishing time and closure of periods in the general commercial salmon season.

The 2024 total Northern District commercial king salmon harvest was 4 fish and 99% below the previous 20-year average harvest of 1,936 fish (Table 5 and 6).

ESSN King Salmon Fishery

The 2024 preseason forecast was for a total run of 13,639 large Kenai River late-run king salmon. Based on low preseason forecast, the late-run king salmon sport fishery was closed preseason and remained closed for the 2024 season. Subsequently, the ESSN commercial fishery did not open and remained closed for set gillnet fishing through the end of the season on August 15, in compliance with the KRLKSSOC. One 4-pound king salmon was harvested in the dip net commercial fishery that occurred in the ESSN area (Table 5 and 6).

PINK SALMON

Pink salmon runs in UCI are even-year dominant, with odd-year average harvests typically less than even-year harvests. The 2024 UCI commercial pink salmon harvest was 41,679 fish (Table 2), which was 91% below the average annual harvest of 439,989 fish from the most recent 20 years of even-year harvest (Table 5 and 6). Using an average price of $0.20 per pound, the exvessel value for the 2024 pink salmon harvest was $31,853 or 0.2% of the total exvessel value of salmon in UCI (Table 3).

CHUM SALMON

The 2024 harvest of 73,905 chum salmon was 43% below the recent 20-year average annual harvest of 129,486 fish (Table 5 and 6). Using the average price of $0.68 per pound the exvessel value of the 2024 UCI commercial chum salmon harvest was $351,508 or 1.8% of the total exvessel value of all salmon in UCI (Table 3). An aerial survey of Chinitna River/Clearwater Creek produced an estimate of 860 chum salmon within these streams, which was below the SEG range of 3,500– 8,000 fish.

Table 1.–Upper Cook Inlet sockeye salmon forecast and preliminary total run, by river system, 2024.

System	Forecast	Actual	% Change
Kenai River	3,380	3,724	10.18%
Kasilof River	1,115	1,787	60.27%
Susitna River	303	248	-18.15%
Fish Creek	87	47	-45.98%
Minor Systems	831	757	-8.90%
Overall Total	5,716	6,563	14.82%

Table 2.–Upper Cook Inlet commercial salmon harvest by species, 2004–2024.

Year	King	Sockeye	Coho	Pink	Chum	Total
2004	26,922	4,927,084	311,058	357,939	146,165	5,769,168
2005	27,667	5,238,699	224,657	48,419	69,740	5,609,182
2006	18,029	2,192,730	177,853	404,111	64,033	2,856,756
2007	17,625	3,316,779	177,339	147,020	77,240	3,736,003
2008	13,333	2,380,135	171,869	169,368	50,315	2,785,020
2009	8,750	2,045,794	153,210	214,321	82,808	2,504,883
2010	9,900	2,828,342	207,350	292,706	228,863	3,567,161
2011	11,248	5,277,995	95,291	34,123	129,407	5,548,064
2012	2,527	3,133,839	106,775	469,598	269,733	3,982,472
2013	5,398	2,683,224	260,963	48,275	139,365	3,137,225
2014	4,660	2,344,034	137,419	642,986	116,127	3,245,226
2015	10,798	2,649,667	216,032	48,004	275,960	3,200,461
2016	10,027	2,396,943	147,495	382,468	123,679	3,060,612
2017	7,660	1,849,243	303,642	167,842	243,600	2,571,987
2018	3,405	817,879	232,290	126,923	115,366	1,295,863
2019	3,149	1,720,559	163,863	70,827	129,176	2,087,574
2020	3,008	695,754	139,240	345,072	29,217	1,212,291
2021	3,973	1,410,854	147,607	81,360	70,243	1,714,037
2022	2,278	1,126,280	102,666	100,964	99,494	1,431,682
2023	734	1,574,157	83,736	66,197	126,465	1,851,289
2024[a]	169	1,870,044	24,750	41,679	73,905	2,010,547
2004-2023 Avg	9,555	2,530,500	178,018	210,926	129,350	3,058,348
2014-2023 Avg	4,969	1,658,537	167,399	203,264	132,933	2,167,102

[a] preliminary data

Table 3.– Approximate exvessel value and percentage of Upper Cook Inlet commercial salmon harvest by species, 2004–2024.

Year	King	%	Sockeye	%	Coho	%	Pink	%	Chum	%	Total
2004	$ 673,088	3.3%	$ 19,416,259	93.8%	$ 416,071	2.0%	$ 65,884	0.3%	$ 129,791	0.6%	$ 20,701,093
2005	$ 688,993	2.2%	$ 30,165,827	95.2%	$ 708,620	2.2%	$ 12,796	0.0%	$ 101,106	0.3%	$ 31,677,341
2006	$ 617,278	4.4%	$ 12,311,850	88.5%	$ 679,463	4.9%	$ 174,522	1.3%	$ 121,265	0.9%	$ 13,904,377
2007	$ 629,643	2.7%	$ 21,916,852	93.6%	$ 682,747	2.9%	$ 53,029	0.2%	$ 141,097	0.6%	$ 23,423,367
2008	$ 544,042	3.3%	$ 15,530,144	93.0%	$ 482,298	2.9%	$ 64,466	0.4%	$ 75,766	0.5%	$ 16,696,717
2009	$ 266,548	1.8%	$ 13,720,051	94.1%	$ 399,704	2.7%	$ 71,582	0.5%	$ 115,969	0.8%	$ 14,573,854
2010	$ 359,184	1.1%	$ 30,556,535	92.1%	$ 1,090,191	3.3%	$ 311,199	0.9%	$ 851,004	2.6%	$ 33,168,113
2011	$ 634,836	1.2%	$ 51,363,720	96.7%	$ 406,726	0.8%	$ 27,548	0.1%	$ 688,878	1.3%	$ 53,121,708
2012	$ 121,626	0.3%	$ 32,008,304	91.6%	$ 480,119	1.4%	$ 622,809	1.8%	$ 1,723,098	4.9%	$ 34,955,955
2013	$ 210,638	0.5%	$ 37,787,069	93.9%	$ 1,362,395	3.4%	$ 53,754	0.1%	$ 828,113	2.1%	$ 40,241,970
2014	$ 206,119	0.6%	$ 32,819,090	93.6%	$ 778,672	2.2%	$ 588,409	1.7%	$ 687,214	2.0%	$ 35,079,504
2015	$ 359,903	1.5%	$ 22,285,338	92.2%	$ 753,078	3.1%	$ 39,197	0.2%	$ 726,696	3.0%	$ 24,164,211
2016	$ 491,323	2.2%	$ 20,853,404	92.3%	$ 557,531	2.5%	$ 328,922	1.5%	$ 351,248	1.6%	$ 22,582,429
2017	$ 634,666	2.7%	$ 19,711,471	82.7%	$ 2,168,036	9.1%	$ 89,448	0.4%	$ 1,234,825	5.2%	$ 23,838,446
2018	$ 207,901	1.7%	$ 10,139,195	81.8%	$ 1,367,047	11.0%	$ 115,431	0.9%	$ 569,659	4.6%	$ 12,399,234
2019	$ 172,899	0.9%	$ 17,131,030	93.3%	$ 684,442	3.7%	$ 45,667	0.2%	$ 321,909	1.8%	$ 18,355,947
2020	$ 69,730	1.4%	$ 4,008,623	79.1%	$ 591,193	11.7%	$ 300,689	5.9%	$ 96,539	1.9%	$ 5,066,774
2021	$ 124,439	0.9%	$ 12,665,469	91.3%	$ 684,272	4.9%	$ 63,900	0.5%	$ 327,161	2.4%	$ 13,865,241
2022	$ 93,634	0.7%	$ 12,064,999	92.1%	$ 368,873	2.8%	$ 110,691	0.8%	$ 461,507	3.5%	$ 13,099,704
2023	$ 40,434	0.3%	$ 13,655,095	94.8%	$ 253,751	1.8%	$ 46,846	0.3%	$ 412,463	2.9%	$ 14,408,588
2024[a]	$ 7,978	0.0%	$ 18,703,631	97.6%	$ 69,022	0.4%	$ 31,853	0.2%	$ 351,508	1.8%	$ 19,163,992
2004-2023 average	$ 373,269	1.6%	$ 21,436,557	92.4%	$ 745,761	3.2%	$ 268,302	1.2%	$ 482,631	2.1%	$ 23,189,565

[a] Preliminary data

Table 4.–Upper Cook Inlet sockeye salmon goals and passage (or counts), 2024.

System	2024 Estimate	Goal type	Lower bound	Upper bound
Kenai River	1,926,350	IRG	1,100,000	1,400,000
		SEG	750,000	1,300,000
Kasilof River	1,048,092	BEG	140,000	320,000
		OEG	140,000	370,000
Larson Lake	16,133	SEG	15,000	35,000
Judd Lake	ND	SEG	15,000	40,000
Fish Creek	37,943	SEG	15,000	45,000
Packers Creek	15,429	SEG	15,000	30,000

*Note: BEG= Biological Escapement Goal, SEG=Sustainable Escapement Goal, OEG=Optimum Escapement Goal, and IRG = Inriver Goal, ND = No Data, TBD = To Be Determined

Table 5. –Preliminary Upper Cook Inlet commercial salmon harvest by district and species, 2024.

Gear	District	Subdistrict	Permits[a]	King	Sockeye	Coho	Pink	Chum	Total
Drift	Central	State of Alaska	353	49	1,359,735	6,709	31,433	40,240	1,438,166
		Federal Waters (EEZ)	259	27	325,028	4,437	6,278	28,819	364,589
Total UCI Drift Gillnet Harvest			362	76	1,684,763	11,146	37,711	69,059	1,802,755
Setnet	Central	Upper	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
		Kalgin Island	27	50	44,554	3,154	1,004	983	49,745
		Western & Chinitna Bay	22	8	40,942	736	27	1,178	42,891
		Kustatan	13	30	8,242	947	63	59	9,341
Total Central District Set Harvest			62	88	93,738	4,837	1,094	2,220	101,977
Dip Net	Central	Upper	101	1	27,730	21	134	21	27,907
Beach Seine [b]	Central	Upper	2	0	21,763	21	410	0	22,194
Setnet	Northern	General	37	4	17,437	6,696	798	1,996	26,931
		Eastern	32	0	24,613	2,029	1,532	609	28,783
Total Northern District Set Harvest			69	4	42,050	8,725	2,330	2,605	55,714
Total UCI Harvest			596	169	1,870,044	24,750	41,679	73,905	2,010,547

[a] Permit totals may not equal the sum of individual stat areas if the same permit was fished in multiple stat areas.

[b] Beach seine gear was prosecuted under Commissioner's Permits; confidentiality was waived.

Table 6. Upper Cook Inlet commercial salmon harvest by district and species, 20-year average (2004–2023).

Gear	District	Subdistrict	Permits[a]	King	Sockeye	Coho	Pink[b]	Chum	Total
Drift	Central		429	664	1,409,583	102,571	246,580	120,447	1,879,844
Setnet	Central	Upper	330	6,290	976,654	13,183	164,154	722	1,060,618
		Kalgin Island	26	378	55,987	15,628	5,060	1,582	77,167
		Western & Chinitna Bay	23	161	41,991	6,922	1,286	2,965	53,223
		Kustatan	11	126	4,965	1,620	354	24	6,822
Total Central District Set Harvest			391	6,954	1,079,606	37,608	170,866	5,659	1,300,693
Setnet	Northern	General	31	343	20,824	13,813	6,455	422	41,857
		Eastern	47	1,594	20,615	24,086	16,088	2,958	65,341
Total Northern District Set Harvest			78	1,936	41,438	37,899	22,543	3,380	107,198
Total UCI Harvest			897	9,554	2,530,627	178,078	439,989	129,486	3,287,735

[a] Permit totals may be less than the sum of individual stat areas if the same permit was fished in multiple stat areas.

[b] Pink salmon 20-year average is for even years only.

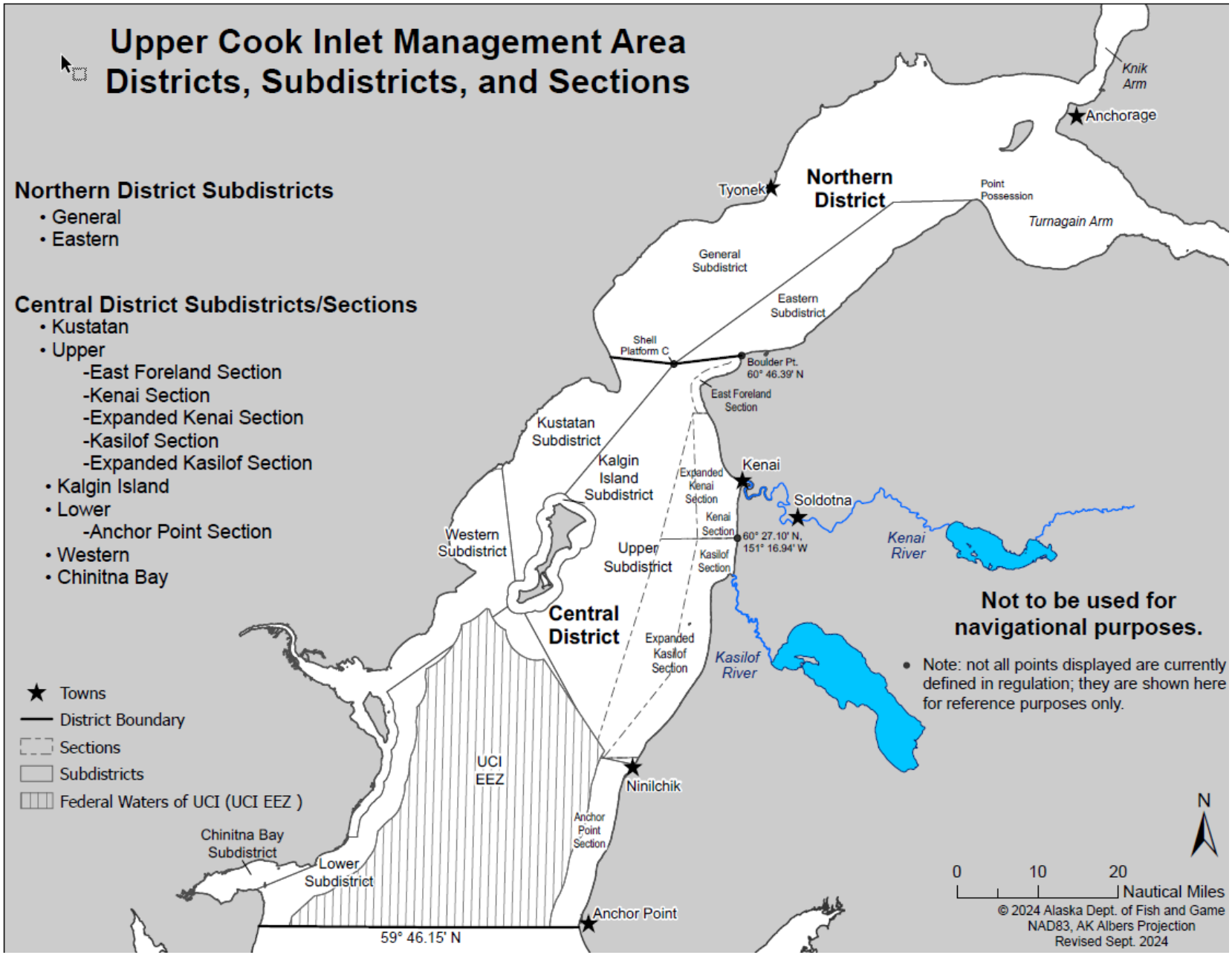


Figure 1.– Upper Cook Inlet commercial fisheries districts, subdistricts, and sections fishing boundaries.

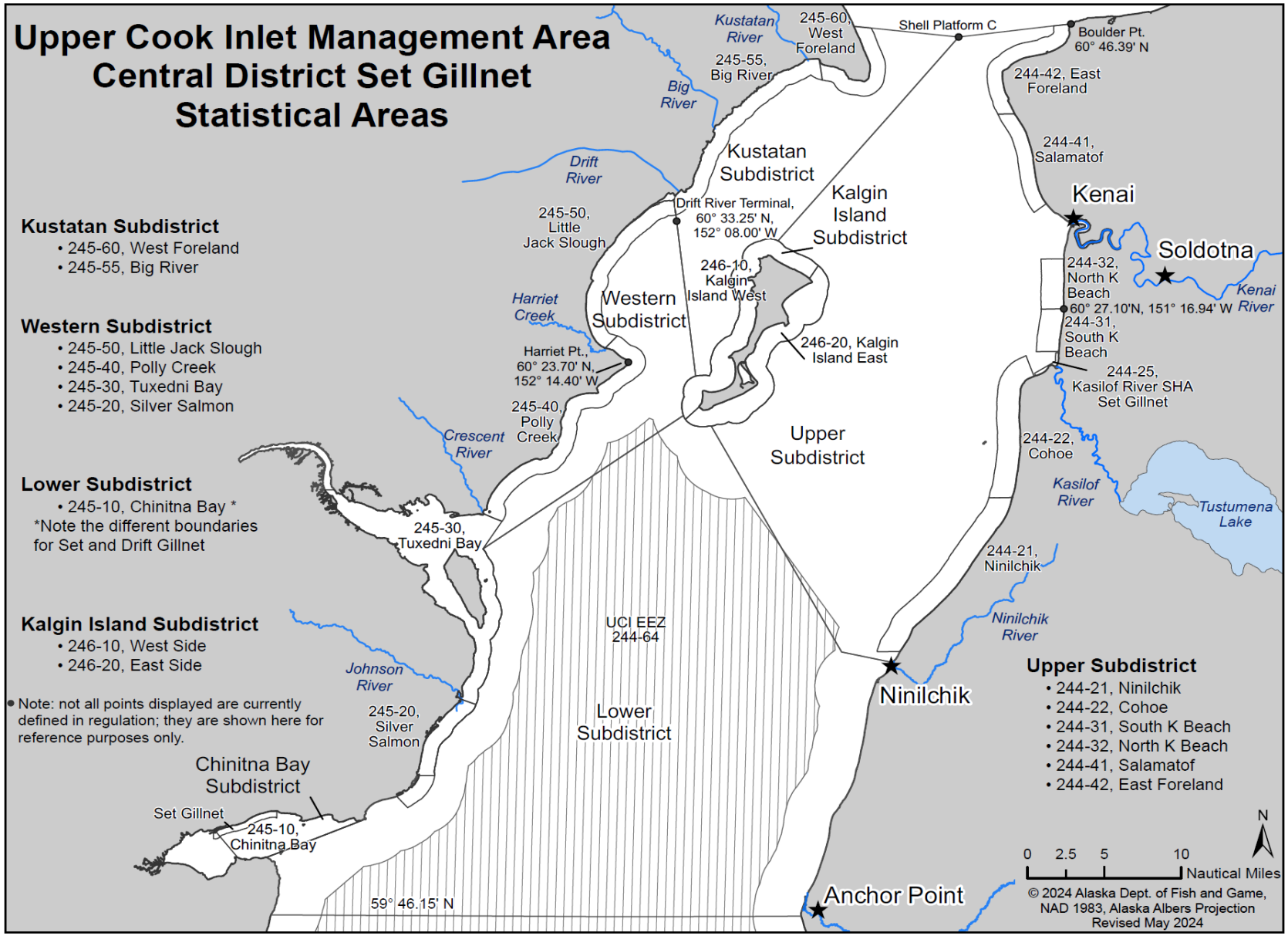


Figure 2.– UCI Central District commercial set gillnet statistical areas.

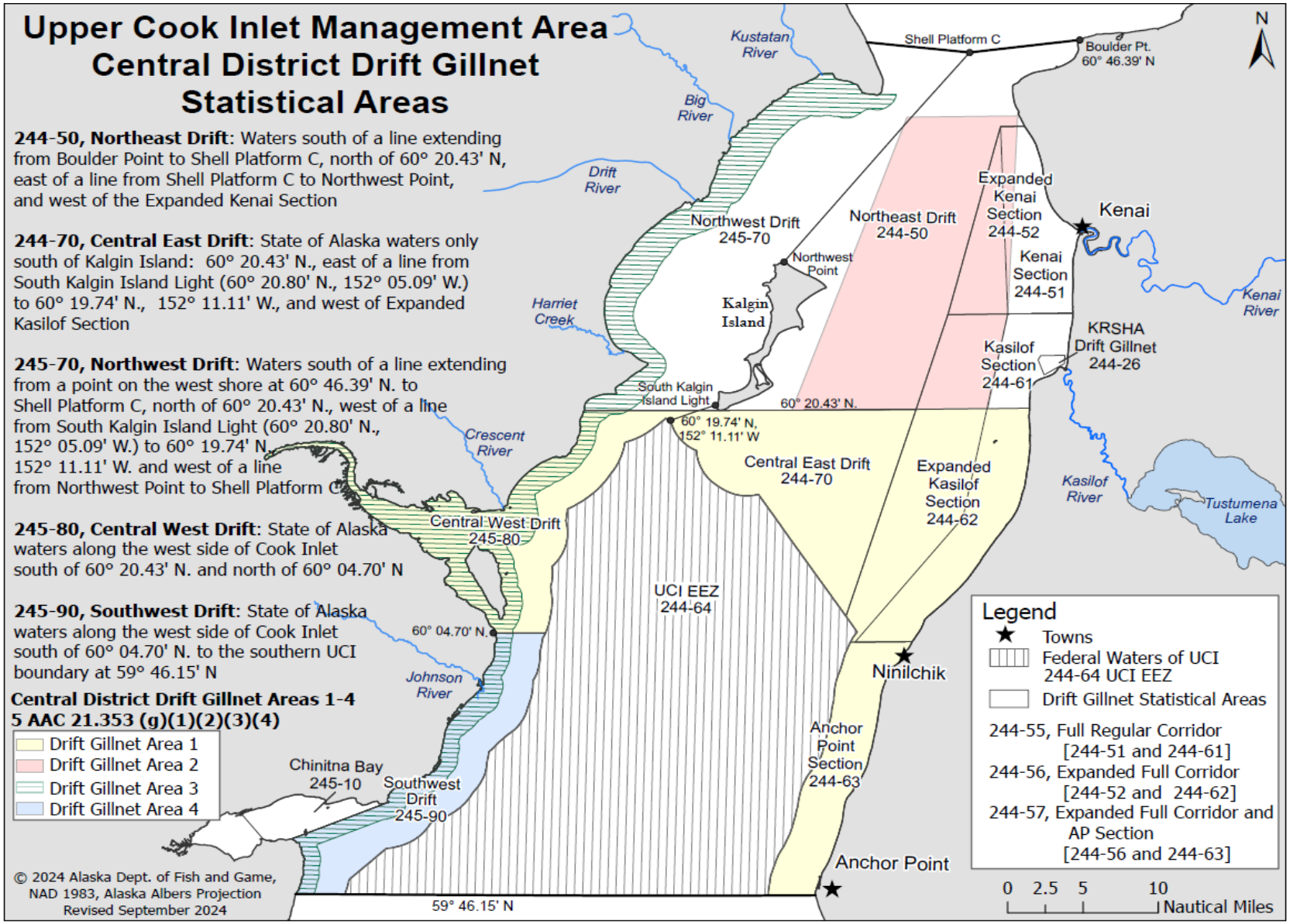


Figure 3.– Map of Upper Cook Inlet Drift Gillnet Statistical Areas, Drift Areas 1-4, and the Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ).

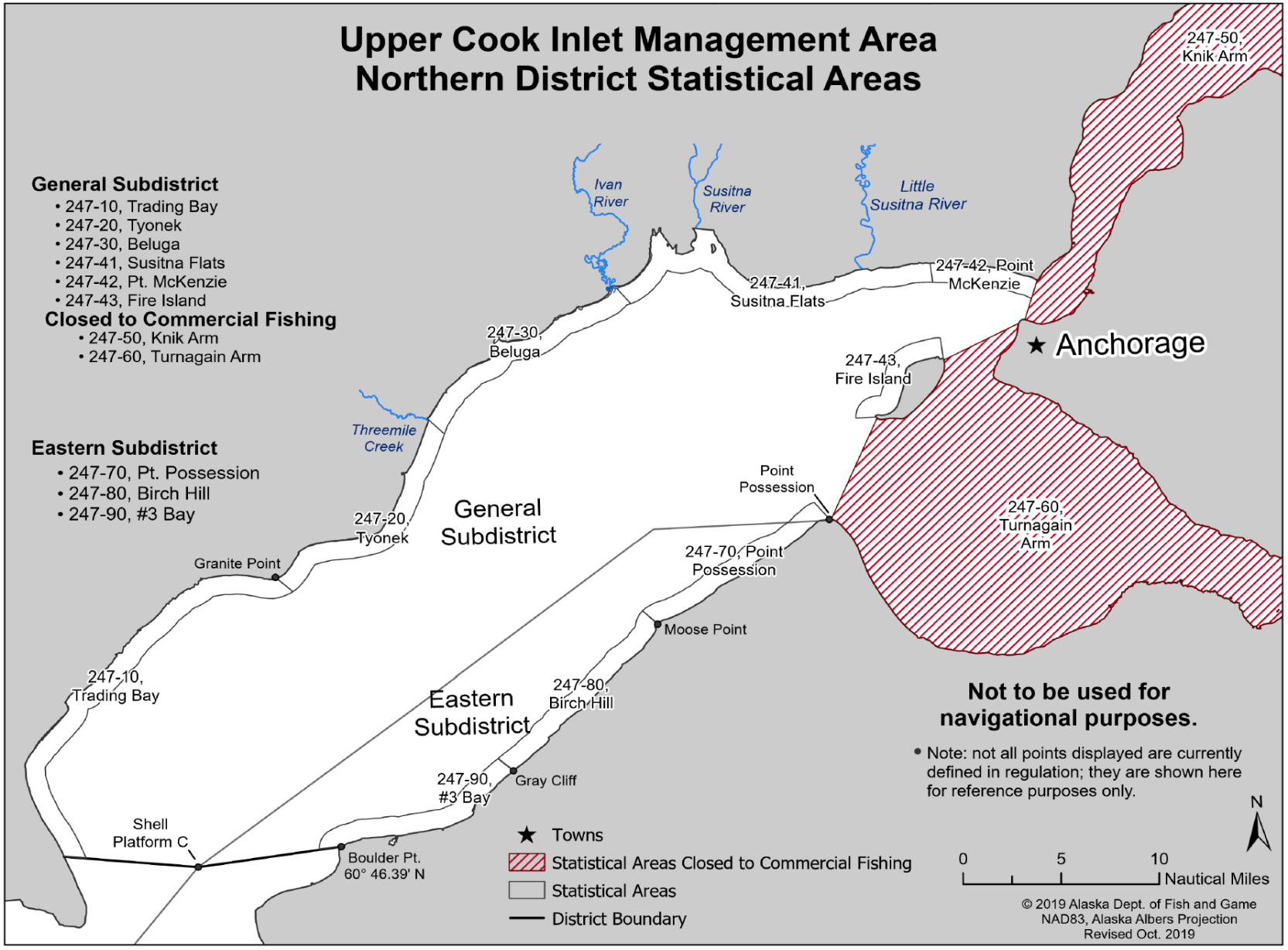


Figure 4.– UCI Northern District commercial set gillnet statistical areas.

2024 Summary

COOK INLET SPORT FISH MANAGEMENT AREAS

Northern Cook Inlet, Northern Kenai Peninsula, and Lower Cook Inlet

Northern Cook Inlet Management Area

Greater Susitna River/ Knik Arm Area

Below average escapements since 2012 have resulted in preseason and inseason restrictions and closures on the Susitna and Little Susitna River drainages. This year marks the fifth year of king salmon management under the four stock-based goals set for the Susitna River drainage (Deshka, Yentna, Eastside, and Talkeetna). The preseason forecast of total run for Deshka River king salmon was 6,671 fish. Given this forecast was below the low end of the BEG and that the escapement goal was missed in 2023, the Deshka king salmon fishery started the 2024 season closed, as did fisheries within the Talkeetna, Yentna, Little Susitna, and Eastside Susitna areas. King salmon escapement goals for all systems were missed in 2024.

Westside Susitna Tributaries

The BEG for the Deshka River of 9,000–18,000 king salmon was not achieved in 2024 despite the sport fishery remaining closed throughout the season. The final weir count was 3,440 king salmon. The age composition of the Deshka king salmon run and forecast for the 2024 season is pending analysis of age data collected at the Deshka River weir. A complete sonar count was conducted for Lake Creek and aerial escapement surveys were flown in late July on five streams contributing to the Yentna king salmon stock: Talachulitna River, Red Creek, Canyon Creek, Dickerson Creek, and Red Salmon Creek. Assessment of whether the Yentna OEG of 16,000–22,000 king salmon was achieved is pending data analysis; however, aerial counts were well below average, and the Lake Creek sonar count was similar to 2023.

Management Actions

- A preseason emergency order effective May 1, 2024, closed king salmon fishing in the Susitna River drainage. Gear was restricted to only one unbaited, single hook, with a gap between the point and shank of the hook of one-half inch or less when fishing in Units 1–6 of the Susitna River drainage.

Eastside Susitna and Talkeetna Tributaries

Assessment of Eastside Susitna streams (Units 2, 3, 5, and 6) comes from postseason aerial surveys over eight streams that are used to estimate run size and escapement of the Eastside (Unit 2 streams along the Parks Highway) king salmon stock and the Talkeetna River stock, which are two of the four Susitna River drainage stock goals in place since 2020. Counts were successfully conducted on Willow, North Fork, Kashwitna, and Montana Creeks, which collectively contribute to the Eastside king stock, and Clear and Prairie Creeks, which contribute to the Talkeetna stock. Assessment of the Eastside and Talkeetna stock goals is pending data analysis; however, counts on these systems were some of the lowest on record. A survey count of 272 on the Chulitna River was well below the SEG of 1,200–2,900 fish.

Management Actions

- A preseason emergency order effective May 1, 2024, closed king salmon fishing on Eastside Susitna (Unit 2), the Talkeetna River (Unit 5), and the Chulitna River (Unit 6). Gear was restricted to only one unbaited, single-hook, artificial lure with a gap between the point and shank of the hook of one-half inch or less.

Knik Arm

The SEG for the Little Susitna River is 2,100–4,300 king salmon as assessed by weir and 700–1,500 fish as assessed by postseason aerial survey. This weir-based goal is the primary goal used for assessing escapement unless flooding or some other event results in an incomplete weir count. Use of video at this site has enabled fish to be counted even during periods of high spring runoff when water clarity is poor, which was the case throughout most of the 2024 season. Cold water temperatures likely impeded upstream migration of king salmon followed by flooding that occurred for 6 days mid-June, which made assessment of run strength using weir counts difficult. However, daily counts after recovery of the weir following the flooding were below past years in which the goal was achieved. The sport fishery was closed by preseason emergency order. The final weir count of 1,013 is considered incomplete.

Management Actions

- A preseason emergency order effective May 1, 2024, closed king salmon fishing in the Little Susitna River drainage. In addition, only one unbaited, single-hook, artificial lure with a gap between the point and shank of the hook of one-half inch or less in the waters normally open to king salmon fishing.

West Cook Inlet

Sport fisheries on the Chuitna, Theodore, Lewis, and the Beluga River drainages are closed by regulation. An aerial survey was conducted on the Chuitna River in which 402 king salmon were counted, well below the SEG of 1,000–1,500 fish. The 2024 surveys of the Theodore River and Coal Creek counted only 33 and 38 king salmon, respectively.

Management Actions

- A preseason emergency order effective May 1, 2024, closed king salmon fishing on all West Cook Inlet streams not already closed by regulation.

Susitna Tributaries

A weir was operated to count sockeye salmon escapement into Larson Lake, which drains into the Talkeetna River via Larson Creek (Susitna River drainage). Weirs on Chelatna Lake (Lake Creek) and Judd Lake (Talachulitna River) were not operated this year due to budget reductions. On Larson Creek, the sport fishery, which occurs at the confluence of Larsen Creek and the Talkeetna River, is relatively close to the weir, allowing for timely inseason management of the fishery. Water levels were favorable toward consistent daily fish passage and fishing success throughout the season. The Larson Creek SEG of 15,000–35,000 sockeye salmon was achieved with a final count of 16,133 fish within the SEG range.

A Susitna River personal use dip net fishery was implemented by the Board of Fisheries in 2020 to take place on the lower Susitna River from a point located approximately one mile below the old Susitna Station, downstream to the Alexander Creek turnoff/tip of Bell Island. This fishery is remote and only accessible by boat or short field performance aircraft capable of landing on gravel bars. The fishery is part of the Upper Cook Inlet Personal Use Salmon Fishery management plan and occurs each Saturday and Wednesday between 6:00 a.m. and 11:00 p.m. from July 10 through July 31. This was the fourth year of this fishery. Fishing effort mostly mirrored last season with relatively low participation. Fishing success was reported as poor each period through the end of July.

Management Actions

- No management actions were implemented during the 2024 season.

Knik Arm

A weir is operated on Fish Creek to assess escapement and as a tool to manage the personal use dip net fishery. The SEG for the Fish Creek is 15,000–45,000 sockeye salmon. By management plan, a personal use dip net fishery may be opened by emergency order between July 15 and July 31, if the escapement is projected to be above 35,000 fish. The dip net fishery was opened on July 20 for 11 days. Positive dipnetting reports combined with a strong run suggests the harvest estimate may be average to above average for 2024 (5-year mean harvest of 22,500 sockeye salmon). The weir was successfully operated throughout the run and 37,793 sockeye salmon were counted. Sport fishing was open for 7 days a week beginning this season, a change made at the last Board of Fisheries meeting.

Management Actions

- On July 20, the Fish Creek Personal Use Dip Net Fishery was opened for all salmon species, except king salmon through July 31.

Susitna Tributaries

Flooding prevented counting fish at the Deshka River weir during the season for six days beginning August 9, and the weir sustained major damage ending the weir project on August 16 after counting about 70% of the run based on historical run timing. The count of 642 coho salmon is considered incomplete, but it is unlikely the

SEG of 10,200–24,100 fish would have been achieved. An emergency order was issued in August to close the Deshka River to the retention of coho salmon and prohibit the use of bait in all other waters of the Susitna River drainage.

Management Actions

- On August 6, the bag limit for coho salmon was reduced to one fish and bait was prohibited in the Susitna River drainage.
- On August 15, the Susitna drainage was closed to fishing for coho salmon.

Knik Arm

The Little Susitna weir was inundated by flood waters at the beginning of the season from spring snow melt. However, when the weir became functional again starting June 22, it is unlikely any coho salmon were missed. Initially, weir counts were favorable and produced an upward trending projection; however counts drastically trailed off by the first quartile of the run on August 6. At this time, an emergency order was issued prohibiting the use of bait, followed by closure of the sport fishery to the retention of coho salmon. Beginning August 8, heavy rainfall led to high water events and a lost weir counts for eighteen days. Also, . The weir count of 964 fish is considered incomplete; however, it is likely the SEG of 9,200–17,700 was missed in 2024.

Fish Creek weir operated for the full coho salmon season. The SEG of 1,200–6,000 fish was not attained with a final count of 235 fish. This count was complete.

Jim Creek weir was funded to operate this season. A weak showing of coho salmon prompted closing the sport fishery to coho salmon fishing by mid-August at about the quarter point of the historical run timing for coho salmon. In addition to Jim Creek, Cottonwood, Fish and Wasilla Creeks were all closed to sport fishing for coho on August 15. Weir counts up to this point were tracking well below years when the weir was operated and the goal was achieved and similar to the count by this time during 2016 when the SEG was missed. The SEG for Jim Creek of 250–700 coho salmon is assessed postseason by a foot survey of McRoberts Creek, a small spawning tributary within the Jim Creek system. A survey conducted on September 23 counted 376 coho salmon, which was within the goal range.

Management Actions

- On August 6, bait use was prohibited on the Little Susitna River and Jim Creek drainage.
- On August 6, the bag and possession limit was reduced to one coho salmon on the Little Susitna River, and Jim Creek.
- On August 15, the Little Susitna River was closed to coho salmon fishing.
- On August 15, Jim Creek, Cottonwood Creek, Wasilla Creek and Fish Creeks were closed to coho fishing.

West Cook Inlet

Coho salmon escapement is not monitored on West Cook Inlet (WCI) area streams and ADF&G must rely on trends in harvest and angler effort taken from the Statewide Harvest Survey and reports from anglers and guides when assessing these stocks. Sport fishing success was reportedly poor for the 2024 season.

- On August 24, West Cook Inlet streams were restricted to two per day and four in possession for coho salmon.

Northern Kenai Peninsula Management Area

Kenai River - Early Run

The 2024 outlook for early-run Kenai River king salmon was below average, with a large fish (>75 cm mid eye to tail fork length or greater than about 34 inches in total length) forecast of 2,630 fish. The 2024 forecasted total run was less than the optimal escapement goal (OEG) of 3,900–6,600 large fish, which resulted in preseason closures to the sport fishery. The total estimated passage through June 30, 2024, at the river mile 14 sonar was 1,365 large king salmon, and because of the fishery closure, preliminary spawning escapement and total run estimates are both 1,365 large early-run king salmon. The run exhibited generally low abundance across all age classes and is the second lowest run in the historical data set. The mid-point of the run occurred on June 14, which is two days late when compared to the historical mid-point.

Preliminary age composition estimates from length groups show a noticeably low presence of ocean-age-four fish but overall, there was a low abundance of all age classes.

Neither the OEG of 3,900–6,600 large fish nor the sustainable escapement goal (SEG) of 2,800–5,600 large fish were achieved in 2024. However, the SEG has been achieved or exceeded in four of the last seven years, and the OEG has been achieved or exceeded in three of the last seven years.

Management Actions

- A preseason emergency order effective May 1, 2024, closed king salmon fishing from the Kenai River mouth upstream to the outlet of Skilak Lake until June 30.

- River mile 8.6 netting assessment (preliminary)
  - Approximately 34% were large fish or ≧75 cm in total length.
  - Sex ratio of large fish ≧75 cm was 26% male and 74% female.
  - Sampled king salmon of all sizes were predominately ocean-age 2 fish (49%), followed by ocean-age 3 fish (31%), ocean-age 1 (14%), and ocean-age 4 fish (6%).

Kenai River - Late Run

The outlook for late-run Kenai River king salmon in 2024 was well below average, with a large king salmon (>75 cm mid eye to tail fork length) forecast of approximately 13,639 fish. The 2024 forecasted total run was less than the optimal escapement goal (OEG) of 15,000–30,000 fish so the fishery started closed. The total estimated passage through August 19, 2024, at the river mile 14 sonar was 6,984 large king salmon, and the preliminary escapement is 6,959 large fish (accounts for spawning downriver of the sonar). The mid-point of the run occurred on July 29, which is two days later than the mean historical mid-point.

The predominate age class for all sizes of Kenai River late-run king salmon are ocean-age 2 (39.5%), followed by ocean-age 3 (29.8%), ocean-age 4 fish (20.2%), and ocean-age 1 (10.5%). The low abundance

of large fish age classes (ocean ages 3 and 4) indicates poor production from the 2017, 2018, and 2019 parent years and corresponds with the overall low abundance of the 2024 return.

The OEG of 15,000–30,000 large fish and SEG of 13,500–27,000 large fish were not achieved in 2024. The SEG has been achieved in one of the last seven years and the OEG has not been achieved since it was created in 2020. Additionally, Kenai River late-run king salmon were designated a Stock of Concern at the Alaska Board of Fisheries March 2024 meeting. The action plan developed to recover Kenai River late-run king salmon includes a recovery goal of 14,250–30,000 large king salmon that is the department's management objective until the stock recovers. The recovery goal was not achieved in 2024.

Management Actions

- A preseason emergency order effective July 1, 2024, closed king salmon fishing from the Kenai River mouth upstream to the outlet of Skilak Lake.
- On August 12, 2024 multiple hooks were prohibited from the mouth of the Kenai River upstream to the Moose River confluence to reduce incidental catches of king salmon while fishing for other species.
- River mile 8.6 netting assessment (preliminary)
    - Approximately 46% of king salmon were ≥75 cm in total length.
    - Sex ratios for large fish >75 cm was 77% male and 23% female.

Table 1. Summary of preliminary catch, harvest, and escapement, Kenai River late-run king salmon (≥75 cm) fishery, 2024.

Escapement goal range	15,000–30,000 large king salmon (≥75 cm)
Total catch[a]	0
Total inriver harvest[a]	Below sonar = 0; Above sonar = 0; Total = 0
Inriver sonar estimate	6,630
Preliminary escapement[b]	Approximately 6,959

[a] Lower River (below Soldotna Bridge).
[b] Includes estimate of king salmon that spawn downstream of sonar.

Kasilof River

In June 2024, approximately 98,436 king salmon smolt were stocked into Crooked Creek to enhance recreational sport fishing opportunity in the Kasilof River. The naturally-produced (non-adipose finclipped) component of the Crooked Creek early-run king salmon run is managed to achieve a SEG of 700–1,400 king salmon. The estimated escapement of naturally-produced king salmon was 550 fish for the 2024 season. The egg take goal for future stocking of Crooked Creek was 25 pairs of naturally-produced king salmon of which 20 pairs were spawned in 2024.

Management Actions

- A preseason emergency order effective May 1, 2024, prohibited the retention of naturally-produced king salmon and the use of multiple hooks.
- A pre-season emergency order effective May 1, 2024, restricted the use of bait until May 16, 2024.

- June 19, 2024, an emergency order was issued to restrict gear to single hook, artificial lure, or fly from the Kasilof River's mouth to the outlet of Tustumena Lake. The emergency order also reduced the bag limit of hatchery-produced king salmon to one from July 1, 2024 to July 31, 2024.
- July 11, 2024, an emergency order was issued to close the king salmon fishery on the Kasilof River downstream of the Sterling Highway bridge effective July 15, 2024.
- July, 31, 2024, an emergency order was issued prohibiting the use of bait and restricting to single-hook, artificial lure or fly from the river's mouth to the outlet of Tustumena lake.

Kenai River

The 2024 Upper Cook Inlet (UCI) sockeye salmon forecast projected a total run of 5.72 million fish: 3.38 million fish to the Kenai River, 1.12 million fish to the Kasilof River, with the remaining fish comprising stocks from Susitna River, Fish Creek, and unmonitored systems. Based on the preseason forecast, the sockeye salmon run was managed on the middle tier for runs of 2.3–4.6 million Kenai River sockeye salmon, with an inriver goal of 1.1–1.4 million sockeye salmon. On July 27, 2024, ADF&G projected the total Kenai River sockeye salmon run to be 2.96 million fish and the department continued to manage for the middle tier with an inriver goal of 1.1–1.4 million sockeye salmon. The preliminary inriver sonar passage estimate was 1,926,350 sockeye salmon. Subtracting the recent 10-year average harvest upstream of the sonar (387,757 fish) produces a preliminary escapement estimate of 1,538,593 sockeye salmon, which exceeds the sockeye salmon SEG 750,000–1.30 million fish. Final estimates will be available when the 2024 Statewide Harvest Survey is completed in the fall of 2025.

Management Actions

- General regulations adopted a bag limit of 6 fish per day, 12 fish in possession for sockeye salmon from June 20 to August 15, 2024.

Russian River - Early Run

The escapement goal for Russian River early-run sockeye salmon is a biological escapement goal (BEG) of 22,000–42,000 fish. The weir count on July 14, 2024, was 34,697 sockeye salmon.

Management Actions

- On June 1, 2024, the Russian River Sanctuary Area opened early for sport fishing.

Russian River - Late Run

The escapement goal for Russian River late-run sockeye salmon is an SEG of 44,000–85,000 fish. The final Russian River weir count on September 3, 2024, was 70,009 sockeye salmon.

Management Actions

- No in season management actions were taken during the Russian River sockeye salmon late run 2024.

Kasilof River

The forecast for Kasilof River sockeye salmon was 1,115,161 fish. Kasilof River sockeye salmon are managed to achieve an OEG of 140,000–370,000 fish. The sockeye salmon sonar enumerated salmon passage through August 22, 2024, with a preliminary estimate of 1,048,092 fish.

Management Actions

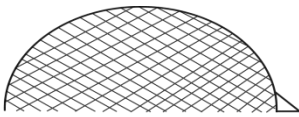
- On June 25, 2024, sockeye salmon limits were increased in all portions of the Kasilof River open to salmon fishing to six per day, twelve in possession.

Kenai River

Kenai River coho salmon are not monitored for abundance in season and are managed through angler reporting, observations, and conservative general regulation. Angler reports indicated that coho salmon were entering the river in the beginning of August but the abundance seemed poor based on success rates. September reports indicated a mix of angler success but generally, the abundance seemed to remain low in the Kenai River.

Management Actions

- On August 21, 2024, an emergency order was issued to reduce the limit for coho salmon in the Kenai River to a bag and possession limit of one fish, effective Saturday, August 24, through Saturday, August 31, 2024; and a bag and possession limit of two coho salmon Sunday, September 1 through Saturday, November 30, 2024.
- On September 17, 2024, an emergency order was issued to reduce the bag and possession limit for coho salmon 16 inches or greater in length in the Kenai River to one fish; and restrict gear to one unbaited, single hook, artificial lure in the Kenai River from its mouth upstream to the regulatory marker at the outlet of Skilak Lake.



Personal Use Dip Net Fisheries

Kasilof River and Kenai River

Harvest and participation information for the 2024 season are currently being compiled and will be available this coming winter. The Kasilof River set gill net personal use fishery was delayed by emergency order to reduce mortality of Kenai River bound king salmon from June 11, 2024 to June 19, 2024. The Kasilof River dipnet fishery was open by regulation from June 25 through August 7, 2024. The area open to dipnetting was expanded for the Kasilof fishery on June 25. The Kenai River dipnet fishery opened by regulation on July 10 through July 31, with no retention of king salmon allowed by regulation.

Harvest Reports

- Beginning in 2024 harvest reporting was required to be submitted online by August 31, 2024

Management Actions

- On June 11, 2024, the Kasilof River personal use set gillnet fishery was closed until June 19, 2024.
- On June 25, 2024, the Kasilof River personal use dipnetting area was expanded. Dipnetting from shore was allowed from ADF&G markers located on Cook Inlet beaches upstream to ADF&G markers at approximately river mile four of the Kasilof River.
- On July 16, 2024, The Kenai River Personal Use Dip Net fishery was opened 24 hours per day until the season closure.

Lower Cook Inlet Management Area

Anchor River

The Anchor River king salmon sustainable escapement goal (SEG) was updated to 3,200–6,400 fish starting in 2024. Additionally, the Alaska Board of Fisheries (BOF) adopted a management plan for the king salmon sport fisheries in the lower Kenai Peninsula roadside streams. This plan outlines preseason and inseason management actions for the Anchor River based on the preseason forecast and inseason projections.

The 2024 preseason inriver forecast of 2,349 king salmon was below the SEG. With this forecast, the inriver sport fishery was closed preseason based on the management plan. King salmon escapement monitoring transitioned to a new location approximately one mile upstream of the river mouth. This location is just above the intertidal section of the stream and provides for more timely monitoring. Based on inseason projections, it was anticipated that the king salmon run was going to achieve the SEG and the sport fishery was opened on June 15 to catch-and-release fishing for the last four days of the season. The preliminary escapement estimate was 3,331 fish, which met the SEG. The mid-point (June 20) was 14 days early compared to the recent 3-year average mid-point of July 3. The Anchor River king salmon run has met its SEG in two (2021 and 2024) of the last five years.

Management Actions

- A preseason emergency order closed the Anchor River and Deep Creek to all sport fishing through July 15.
- An inseason emergency order opened the Anchor River to catch and release king salmon fishing on June 15 for the remaining four days of the season. Gear was restricted to single-hook artificial lure.

Ninilchik River

The Ninilchik River king salmon sustainable escapement goal (SEG) was updated to 900–1,600 wild (naturally-produced) fish starting in 2024 based on counts at the lower (river mile 2) weir. Additionally, the Ninilchik River king salmon run is supplemented with hatchery fish. In 2023, the BOF adopted a management plan for the king salmon sport fisheries in the lower Kenai Peninsula roadside streams. This plan outlines preseason management actions for the Ninilchik River, based on the Anchor River forecast, and inseason management actions, based on the Ninilchik River wild and hatchery inseason projections. The BOF also restructured the king salmon sport fishery to be hatchery only by closing the harvest of wild king salmon in regulation, increasing the hatchery bag limit from 1 to 2 fish 20 inches or greater, and restricting gear to single hook with bait or single hook lures. Additionally, the area for the youth-only king salmon fishery was expanded to include an additional mile of stream upstream of the Sterling Highway bridge.

No preseason forecast was estimated for the 2024 wild Ninilchik River king salmon run. The three 3-day weekend fishery occurred as outlined in the management plan. Effort and success generally increased over the weekends. The youth-only fishery was well attended and many youth anglers caught king salmon. At the start of the continuous fishery on June 16, the catch rates declined, which corresponded with a reduction in the daily passage of king salmon at the lower weir. With this, an emergency order was issued on June 19 to restrict the

use of bait for the remainder of king salmon season. Effort tapered off through the remainder of June and success was poor to fair.

The 2024 Ninilchik River wild king salmon escapement was 676 (after broodstock removals), which was below the lower end of the SEG and was the third consecutive year that the run did not achieve the SEG. The hatchery king salmon count upstream of the sport fishery was 1,298 fish, and after removals for broodstock, the hatchery escapement was 896 fish.

Broodstock collection at the Ninilchik River fell short of both the naturally-produced and hatchery-reared collection goals. Enough naturally-produced fish were collected to continue stocking the Ninilchik River in 2025 at a reduced level. The hatchery-reared collections also fell short at the other broodstock collection locations in Cook Inlet, so reduced numbers of smolt will be available for stocking at locations like Seldovia and the Homer Spit in 2025.

Management Actions

- A preseason emergency order restricted the harvest of wild fish and increased the bag and possession limits of hatchery king salmon, 20 inches or greater in length, from one to two fish. The use of multiple hooks and treble hooks was also prohibited.
- An inseason emergency order was issued to restrict the use of bait in the continuous fishery from June 19 through July 15.

Deep Creek

The sport fishery was closed with preseason restrictions based on management actions outlined in the management plan based on the Anchor River management actions. Deep Creek has a SEG of 350 king salmon and is assessed postseason via a single aerial survey. No survey was conducted in 2024 due to a lack of funding.

Management Actions

- A preseason emergency order closed the Anchor River and Deep Creek to all sport fishing through July 15.

Marine Fisheries

Sport fishing for king salmon in Cook Inlet is structured into the Winter (September 1–March 31) and the Summer (April 1–August 31) Fisheries. The Summer Fishery is separated into two fisheries with the Lower Cook Inlet fishery occurring south of the Bluff Point latitude (lat 59°40.00′ N) and the Upper Cook Inlet (UCI) fishery occurring north. The BOF added some preseason and inseason management actions to the Upper Cook Inlet Summer Fishery management plan based on forecasts and inseason projections for early-run stocks (Deshka, Kenai, and Anchor Rivers). For early-run stocks, the effective dates for the management actions are May 1 through July 15. The BOF also included this fishery into the Kenai River Late Run King Salmon Recovery Plan. In the recovery plan, the Upper Cook Inlet Summer Fishery is closed in regulation from June 20 through August 15. With these changes and the restrictions and closures to freshwater sport fisheries throughout Cook Inlet drainages, sport fishing for king salmon was closed in UCI from May 1 through August 15. For the Lower Cook Inlet (LCI) Summer Fishery, the BOF adopted a management plan and established a Guideline Harvest Level (GHL) of 8,500 fish. No management actions were outlined in the plan. The bag limit was reduced from two to one king salmon any size in LCI from May through August 15, based on the closure in UCI and freshwater restrictions.

The performance of these fisheries is only assessed postseason with the Statewide Harvest Survey and charter logbook data, and harvest estimates for 2024 will not be available until 2025. For 2023, the SWHS estimates of

king salmon harvest for the Summer and Winter Fisheries were all below their respective averages for the past three years. The winter fishery harvest was 3,936 king salmon, which was below the guideline harvest level for the first time since 2013. In 2024, during the winter fishery, anglers found good success in January, but fishing success was lower in February and March. The summer fisheries had poor success from April through mid-May but improved in June and remained fair to good for the remainder of the summer. Anglers consistently found success in the Bluff Point area. At the start of the winter fishery season in September, anglers had good catches throughout Kachemak Bay.

Management Actions

- A preseason emergency order effective May 1 closed king salmon fishing in the Cook Inlet salt waters north of the latitude of Bluff Point (lat 59°40.00′ N) through August 15.
- A preseason emergency order effective May 1 reduced the king salmon bag and possession limits from two to one fish any size in the Cook Inlet salt waters south of the latitude of Bluff Point (lat 59°40.00′ N) through July 31.

Freshwater Fisheries

There are no preseason forecasts and no escapement goals for any coho salmon stocks in the lower Kenai Peninsula roadside streams (Anchor and Ninilchik Rivers, Deep and Stariski Creeks). A video weir was operated on the Anchor River to enumerate coho salmon escapement. The preliminary escapement count was 2,100 fish, which was well below the historical average. Based on below-average inseason counts and fishery performance indicators, most freshwater sport fisheries on the Kenai Peninsula and West Cook Inlet area were restricted. For the lower Kenai Peninsula roadside streams, the coho salmon bag limit was reduced from two to one fish and the use of bait and treble hooks was prohibited starting August 24 and continuing for the remainder of the season.

Sport fishing effort was low throughout August on all lower Kenai Peninsula roadside streams and was further reduced towards the end of August with the emergency order restrictions. The Statewide Harvest Survey estimates of harvest for these fisheries will not be available until 2025.

Marine Fisheries

Sport fishing for coho salmon in Cook Inlet was poor, and anglers struggled to find concentrations of coho salmon. Most charters reported king salmon were more prevalent than coho salmon throughout July and August. Based on these fisheries performance indicators and the below average coho salmon run to the Anchor River, the coho salmon bag limit was restricted from three to one fish on August 24 through the remainder of the season for Cook Inlet salt waters, excluding the Nick Dudiak Fishing Lagoon. The Statewide Harvest Survey estimates for this fishery will not be available until 2025.

Management Actions

- Coho salmon bag and possession limits were reduced by emergency order in Kenai Peninsula fresh waters, West Cook Inlet fresh waters, and Cook Inlet salt waters. Additionally, the use of bait and treble hooks was prohibited in Kenai Peninsula fresh waters. The effective date for these restrictions was from August 24 through the remainder of the season.

Terminal Stocked Salmon Fisheries

Nick Dudiak Fishing Lagoon

In 2024, the stocking goals were met for Nick Dudiak Fishing Lagoon (NDFL) on the Homer Spit with approximately 315,000 king salmon smolt and 120,000 coho salmon smolt. The Statewide Harvest Survey estimates harvest for these fisheries will not be available until 2025. Overall, the king and coho salmon fisheries were likely below recent average harvests in 2024. Snagging was not opened for either species in 2024 because there was not a sufficient buildup of fish at the end of the run.

Management Actions

- No management actions occurred in 2024.

Seldovia Slough and Lagoon

The BOF made a couple of regulation changes for the Seldovia king salmon terminal fishery starting in 2024. The waters of the fishery were defined in regulation and were closed to snagging and spear fishing from January 1 through June 23. Generally, the king salmon fishing success in Seldovia was similar to the NDFL and below the recent year's average performance.

Management Actions

- No management actions occurred in 2024.

Personal Use Dip Net Fisheries

China Poot Creek

The BOF extended the season dates to start June 15 and continue through August 15 in the China Poot Creek personal use dip net fishery. This fishery does not require a permit for participation; harvest data are now available from the SWHS starting in 2022. The annual harvest estimates ranged from 11,000 fish in 2023 to 25,000 fish in 2022. The harvest estimate for 2024 is not yet available. The Division of Commercial Fisheries conducts weekly foot surveys to count sockeye and pink salmon. Success was fair at the start of the season and water conditions were high in the creek. Success was good for the remainder of the season with most participants easily obtaining limits. The success in this fishery is most likely attributed to changes in commercial fishing and cost recovery operations associated with the stocking.

Management Actions

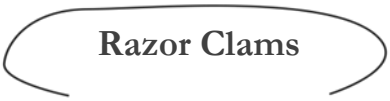
- No management actions occurred in 2024.

Marine Fisheries

The harvest of rockfish has increased steadily since 2013, and sustainable levels of rockfish harvest are currently unknown. The sport fishery is monitored with harvest data from the SWHS and Charter Logbook program, and biological data is monitored from the port sampling program in the Homer Harbor. Preliminary stock assessment work was reviewed in spring 2023 and changes in the biological data along with the increased harvest are indicators of a possible change in the population structure of rockfish in this area. Based on these conditions, the BOF reduced the rockfish bag and possession limits to 3 per day and 6 in possession starting in 2024. No harvest has been estimated for 2024 yet. The 2023 rockfish harvest was just over 41,000 fish, which was a 35% reduction from 2022. This reduction was attributed to the emergency order to reduce the bag limit from 5 to 3 fish.

Management Actions

- No management actions occurred in 2024.



East

All East Cook Inlet beaches remained closed to sport and personal use clamming for the start of 2024 until abundance surveys could be conducted in the spring. Surveys were conducted in April and May at both Clam Gulch and Ninilchik area beaches. Abundances of adult-sized razor clams at both beaches were below the threshold outlined in the management plan to open the fishery. Additionally, the abundance of juvenile clams at both beaches was below average and not sufficient to improve adult abundances over the next couple of seasons.

Management Actions

- No management actions occurred in 2024.

West

The West Cook Inlet beaches remained open to sport and personal use clamming in 2024. Harvest estimates for the sport fishery are not available yet, but clammers report good success at Polly Creek and Crescent River Bar areas, with larger clams found at Crescent River Bar. Based on department hand dug samples, the percentage of large size clams in the harvest is continuing to improve in West Cook Inlet.

Management Actions

- No management actions occurred in 2024.

Tanner Crab

Cook Inlet Tanner Crab

No trawl surveys were conducted in 2023 or 2024, so the limited fishery was implemented for both seasons. Just over 2,100 permits were issued for the 2023–2024 season. Of these, 78% reported participating in the fishery and approximately 6% failed to report and will be denied a permit for the 2024–2025 season. For the 2023–2024 season, the harvest was 6,437 male Tanner crabs, which was slightly below the recent year's average. Permits are only available through ADF&G's online store for the 2024–2025 season.

Management Actions

- No management actions were implemented for the 2023–2024 fishery season.

Table 1 – Select Southcentral Region Salmon Escapement Goals and Escapements for king salmon, 2015 to 2024 (preliminary).

	2024 Goal Range			Initial										Preliminary
System	**Lower**	**Upper**	**Type**	**Year**	**2015**	**2016**	**2017**	**2018**	**2019**	**2020**	**2021**	**2022**	**2023**	**2024**
KING SALMON														
Bristol Bay														
Nushagak River	55,000	120,000	SEG	2013	98,019	125,368	56,961	97,239	47,882	43,032	55,222	44,434	31,499	41,893
Alagnak River	2,700		LB SEG	2007	917	1,283	435	NC	NC	NC	NC	NC	NC	NC
Kodiak/Alaska Peninsula														
Karluk River	3,000	6,000	BEG	2011	2,777	3,434	2,600	3,155	3,898	3,344	2,796	2,629	378	76
Ayakulik River	4,800	8,400	BEG	2017	2,392	4,594	3,712	2,149	1,948	2,402	2,961	2,845	590	394
Chignik River	1,300	2,700	BEG	2002	2,041	1,843	1,137	825	1,517	1,278	1,072	661	267	1,166
Nelson River	2,400	5,000	BEG	2019	2,440	4,618	1,502	5,022	11,653	2,298	4,539	3,785	4,078	3,542
Upper Cook Inlet														
Alexander Creek	1,900	3,700	SEG	2020	1,117	754	170	296	1,297	596	288	NC	NC	51
Campbell Creek	380		LB SEG	2011	654	544	475	287	393	154	339	423	171	160
Chuitna River	1,000	1,500	SEG	2002	1,965	1,372	235	939	2,115	869	806	NC	372	402
Chulitna River	1,200	2,900	SEG	2020	3,137	1,151	NC	1125	2,765	845	1,535	NC	494	272
Clear (Chunilna) Creek	eliminated (see Talkeetna Stock)			2020	1,205	NS	780	940	1,511					461
Crooked Creek	700	1,400	SEG	2002	1,456	1,747	911	714	1,444	830	594	735	500	550
Deshka River	eliminated (see Deshka Stock)			2020	24,316	22,874	11,383	8,544	9,711					
Deshka Stock	9,000	18,000	BEG	2020						10,638	18,674	5,440	3,741	3,440[d]
Eastside Susitna Stock	13,000	25,000	SEG	2020						14,995	15,208	7,654	4,003	Pending
Goose Creek	eliminated (see Eastside Susitna Stock)			2020	NC	NC	148	90	NC					
Kenai River - Early Run (all fish)	eliminated[a]			2017	6,190	9,177								
Kenai River - Early Run (large fish)	2,800	5,600	SEG	2017										
	3,900	6,600	OEG	2017			6,726	2,910	4,128	2,439	4,045	2,047	1,975	1,365
Kenai River - Late Run (all fish)	eliminated[a]			2017	22,642	18,790								
Kenai River - Late Run (large fish)	13,500	27,000	SEG	2017			20,615	17,289	11,638					
	15,000	30,000	OEG	2020						11,909	12,176	13,952	14,502[e]	6,959
Lake Creek	eliminated (see Yetna Stock)			2020	4,686	3,588	1,601	1,767	2,692					
Lewis River	eliminated			2020	5[b]	0	0[b]	0	0[b]					
Little Susitna River (Aerial)[c]	700	1,500	SEG	2020	1,507	1,622	1,192	530	NC	NC	889	NC	NC	NC
Little Susitna River (weir)	2,100	4,300	SEG	2017			2,531	549[d]	3,666	2,445[d]	3,121	2,288	799[d]	964[d]
Little Willow Creek	eliminated (see Eastside Susitna Stock)			2020	788	675	840	280	631					
Montana Creek	eliminated (see Eastside Susitna Stock)			2020	1,416	692	603	473	789					
Peters Creek	eliminated (see Yetna Stock)			2020	1,514	1,122	307	1674	1,209					
Prairie Creek	eliminated (see Talkeetna Stock)			2020	3,290	1,853	1,930	1194	2,371					
Sheep Creek	eliminated (see Eastside Susitna Stock)			2020	NC	NC	NC	334	NC					
Talachulitna River	eliminated (see Yetna Stock)			2020	2,582	4,295	1,087	1483	3,225					
Talkeetna Stock	9,000	17,500	SEG	2020						7,283	9,107	4,288	2,216	Pending
Theodore River	500	1,000	SEG	2020	426	68	21	18	201	111	38	NC	NC	33
Willow Creek	eliminated (see Eastside Susitna Stock)			2020	2,046	1,814	1,329	411	897					
Yentna Stock	16,000	22,000	OEG	2020						14,850	18,890	16,583	8,294	Pending
Lower Cook Inlet														
Anchor River	3,800	7,600	SEG	2017	10,241	7,146	5,796	3,162	5,691	3,558	4,300	3,147	23,338	3,331
Deep Creek	350		LB SEG	2017	535	NS	753	182	751	327	NC	NC	NC	NC
Ninilchik River	750	1,300	SEG	2017	874	572	855	979	1,185	833	772	687	330	676

Note : NA = data not available; NC = no count; LB SEG = lower-bound SEG.

[a] Kenai River king salmon all fish SEG's were eliminated and large fish goals were instituted

[b] Lewis River mouth naturally obstructed.

[c] Little Susitna River king salmon aerial survey goal is only used to assess escapement if weir count is not available.

[d] Incomplete count because weir was pulled before end of run due to flood/fire evacuation, etc

[e] Sonar assessment extended seven days, count August 20 was 13,257 large king salmon

Table 2 – Select Southcentral Region Salmon Escapement Goals and Escapements for sockeye and coho salmon, 2015 to 2024 (preliminary).

	2024 Goal Range			Initial										Preliminary
System	Lower	Upper	Type	Year	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
COHO SALMON														
Kodiak/Alaska Peninsula														
Buskin River	4,700	9,600	BEG	2014	3,363	2,513	5,559	1,066	5,537	630[a]	7,919	2,526	NC	NA
Olds River	500		LB SEG	2019	1,357	1,634	10,54	1,000	NS	794	923	1,129	857	NA
American River	400		LB SEG	2011	530	500	410	300	NS	279	297	360	434	NA
Pasagshak River	1,200		LB SEG	2011	1,790	667	701	1,200	488	2,031	4,721	618	2,297	NA
Upper Cook Inlet														
Fish Creek (Knik)	1,200	6,000	SEG	2020	7,912	2,484[a]	8,966	5,022	3,025	4,555[a]	6,424[a]	NC[a]	1,534	235
Jim Creek	250	700	SEG	2020	571	106	5,646	758	162	735	1,499	1,899	378	376
Little Susitna River	9,200	17,700	SEG	2020	11,554[a]	9,096	17,600	6,423[a]	3,552	10,229	2,816[a]	3,562[a]	703[ab]	703[ab]
Deshka River	10,200	24,100	SEG	2017			36,869	12,962	10,445	5,368[a]	3,431[a]	3,137[a]	1,817[a]	642[a]
SOCKEYE SALMON														
Bristol Bay														
Kvichak River[c]	2,000,000	10,000,000	SEG	2010	7,341,612	4,462,728	3,163,404	4,398,708	2,371,242	4,030,968	4,703,520	4,224,882	3,751,686	6,644,490
Alagnak River (Tower)[d]	210,000		LB SEG	2018	5,770,650	NA	2,041,825	1,581,426	820,458	2,386,518	3,236,904	1,668,222	1,099,050	2,356,560
Alagnak River (Aerial)[e]	125,000		LB SEG	2016		696,400	629,200							
Naknek River	800,000	2,000,000	SEG[f]	2015	1,920,954	1,691,910	1,899,972	2,221,152	2,911,470	4,112,160	2,796,534	1,921,296	1,156,206	926,112
Egegik River	800,000	2,000,000	SEG	2015	2,160,792	1,837,260	2,600,982	1,608,354	2,340,210	2,389,728	1,832,196	1,786,152	1,562,700	1,114,008
Ugashik River	500,000	1,400,000	SEG	2015	1,564,638	1,635,270	1,186,446	1,167,792	1,547,748	1,745,940	2,859,930	1,436,784	1,128,896	1,759,776
Wood River	700,000	1,800,000	SEG	2015	1,941,474	1,309,707	4,274,224	7,507,254	2,073,276	2,243,886	4,410,156	3,747,612	2,648,616	4,404,654
Igushik River	150,000	400,000	SEG	2015	651,172	469,230	578,700	1,581,426	256,074	323,814	878,952	378,768	542,496	692,616
Nushagak River	370,000	900,000	SEG	2015	796,684	680,513	2,852,308	1,164,701	709,349	1,228,059	4,697,299	3,455,272	1,914,555	1,708,693
Kodiak/Alaska Peninsula														
Buskin River	5,000	8,000	SEG	2011	8,719	11,584	7,214	4,281	12,297	7,739	2,230	8,117	1,755	9,704
Afognak River	20,000	50,000	BEG	2005	38,151	33,167	22,151	17,601	26,817	24,284	31,997	29,509	35,559	32,218
Saltery River	15,000	35,000	BEG	2011	42,468	57,867	39,315	22,845	22,183	24,987	64,602	25,615	47,936	66,110
Pasagshak River	3,000		LB SEG	2011	2,077	7,053	11,021	2,019	4,537	3,522	8,551	4,377	4,345	7,641
Karluk River Early Run	150,000	250,000	BEG	2014	260,097	164,760	242,599	205,054	186,510	157,441	128,373	175,336	182,172	67,743
Ayakulik River Early Run	140,000	280,000	SEG	2011	218,178	182,589	204,497	266,333	279,639	220,935	265,756	251,690	200,143	221,701
Fraser River	75,000	170,000	BEG	2008	219,093	122,585	129,227	201,161	169,627	137,570	186,632	118,509	100,477	78,504
Upper Cook Inlet														
Fish Creek (Knik)	15,000	45,000	SEG	2017	102,309	46,202	63,882	72,157	76,264	64,408	99,324[a]	58,333[a]	44,960	37,920
Kasilof River	140,000	370,000	OEG	2020	470,679	239,981	358,724	394,309	378,416	545,654	521,859	971,604	932,896	1,048,092
	140,000	320,000	BEG	2020										
Kenai River[g]	OEG eliminated			2017	1,400,047	1,119,988								
	750,000	1,300,000	SEG	2017			1,071,064	886,761	1,457,031	1,505,940	2,148,955	1,263,170	2,046,439	1,384,836
	varies based on tier		Inriver				1,308,498	1,035,761	1,849,054	1,714,565	2,441,825	1,567,750	2,351,020	1,538,593
Russian River - Early Run	22,000	42,000	BEG	2011	50,226	38,739	37,123	44,110	125,942	27,103	46,976	61,098	66,818	34,697
Russian River - Late Run	44,000	85,000	SEG	2020	46,223	37,837	45,012	71,052	64,585[a]	78,832	123,950	124,561	160,430	70,009
Chelatna Lake	20,000	45,000	SEG	2017	69,750	60,792	26,986	20,438	26,303[h]	NC	NC	NC	NC	NC
Judd Lake	15,000	40,000	SEG	2017	47,684	NA	35,731	30,844	44,145	31,220	49,250	38,442	NC	NC
Larson Lake	15,000	35,000	SEG	2017	23,214	14,333	31,866	23,444	9,699	12,018	21,987	17,436	38,069	16,133
Lower Cook Inlet														
English Bay	6,000	13,500	SEG	2002	6,290	7,673	20,751	18,083	24,044	31,486	6,328	11,425	23,661	19,529
Delight Lake	5,100	10,600	SEG	2017	3,220	5,110	5,380	13,428	17,410	12,299	7,525	22,717	6,901	8,410
Desire Lake	4,800	11,900	SEG	2017	2,830	6,740	9,450	9,840	9,040	2,260	3,323	20,460	14,700	12,250
Bear Lake	700	8,300	SEG	2002	9,560	9,011	9,207	10,568	9,185	8,212	11,318	9,962	7,975	11,721

Note : NA = data not available; NC = no count; LB SEG = lower-bound SEG.

[a] Incomplete count because weir was pulled before end of run due to flood/fire evacuation, etc

[b] Preliminary escapement estimate uses weir count minus five year average harvest above the weir.

[c] Prior to 2010 Kvichak River had a pre-peak/peak-cycle escapement goal of 6-10 million sockeye and an off-peak escapement goal of 2-10 million fish.

[d] 2009 to 2015 Alagnak River sockeye salmon escapements for Alagnak River (Tower) escapement goal are expanded aerial surveys.

[e] Alagnek River sockeye salmon aerial survey-based escapement goal will be used in years that the Alagnak River tower is not operated.

[f] Naknek River has an OEG of 800,000-2,000,000 sockeye salmon when the Naknek River Special Harvest Area is open to fishing.

[g] Kenai River sockeye salmon uses the best estimate of sport harvest upstream of sonar.

[h] Weir not operational

MATANUSKA-SUSITNA BOROUGH

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To: Alaska Department of Fish & Game

From: Matanuska-Susitna Borough Fish & Wildlife Commission

Date: October 25, 2024

Re: Approved Questions for 12/5/24 MSB Fish & Wildlife Commission/ADF&G Fishing Season Summary Meeting

At the October 24th meeting of the Matanuska-Susitna Borough (MSB) Fish & Wildlife Commission (FWC), the FWC approved questions to send to the Alaska Department of Fish & Game (ADF&G) in preparation for the Fishing Season Summary Meeting. The meeting has been scheduled for **Thursday, December 5, 2024, at 5:00 pm**. The meeting will be held in the MSB Assembly Chambers and online via Teams. The FWC is requesting written responses to the included questions by Friday, November 22 to allow adequate time for review and inclusion in the posted meeting packet.

Approved Questions from the MSB FWC:

1. To date, ADF&G has done an exemplary job of identifying the degree of infestation of Northern Pike in Upper Cook Inlet waters. However, the efforts to date in removing this very destructive invasive species does not seem to be getting the attention and effort needed to provide the positive results necessary to eradicate this predator. Recognizing the fact that Northern Pike have a very detrimental impact on salmonid species, especially coho and chinook what are ADF&G's plans to address this very challenging issue?

   To be frank, it is not practical nor possible to completely eradicate northern pike from NCI waters. We will need to think collectively about how we will live with the reality of invasive pike in our waterbodies while minimizing the impact they have on our wild fish, notably salmon.

   ADF&G has been working on controlling and removing invasive northern pike from Upper Cook Inlet waters since 2008, which is when the first northern pike eradication projects occurred. Since then, all known northern pike populations have been eradicated from the Kenai Peninsula, which involved removing northern pike from over 25 waterbodies. In the Mat-Su, the issue is much more complex, where only three eradication projects have been completed to date: Anderson Lake, Kings Lake, and Kashwitna Pit. Additionally, ADF&G has been performing northern pike suppression in Alexander Creek since 2011, the Deshka River since 2012, and Nancy Lake since 2020. Our survey and monitoring program began in 2020 which has resulted in extensive sampling and removal of

northern pike from many additional Mat-Su waterbodies. This program has helped us refine the known distribution of northern pike, determine the level of impacts occurring, and prioritize future removal/eradication efforts.

ADF&G's plans for dealing with this issue falls in several different categories including prevention, early detection, suppression, eradication, and research. Additionally, ADF&G is working with a variety of federal, tribal, university, non-profit, and private entities to deal with this issue. A management plan was drafted in cooperation with all of these partners to guide our collective efforts through 2030 (2022_invasive_pike_management_plan.pdf). We suggest reviewing this plan to learn what we, along with partners, are doing to address this challenging issue.

2. Has ADF&G researched the effects of river otters on Northern Pike in lakes and tributaries? If so, could you elaborate on the pros and cons of utilizing a more robust population of river otters to suppress pike in lakes or tributaries with little to no salmon left?

   No, the department has not conducted research to explore the possibility of increasing river otter populations to suppress pike. Otters are known to prey on a variety of fish species so inflating otter populations in areas where juvenile salmon rear may have undesired effects on already struggling salmon stocks.

3. Aside from reducing sport or commercial fishing pressure, what is ADF&G's number one priority in rebuilding Southcentral Alaska's king salmon?

   With an issue as complex as the decline in Cook Inlet king salmon productivity, there is no one priority for the department. We will continue to address the decline of this valuable resource by using the best science available and taking any necessary management actions to get more king salmon upriver to spawn. We are committed to monitoring king salmon escapement throughout the Inlet and look to improve and refine those projects to ensure we are collecting the best data to inform those discussions. Additionally, we are collecting biological data from our annual runs, reviewing the trends within those data to better understand any potential implications. King salmon escapement goals for every stock or aggregate are reviewed every three years in conjunction with the Board of Fisheries (BOF) cycle associated with the stock. Through our BOF process, we will continue to identify stocks that are not consistently making their escapement goals and make recommendations for those to be listed as stocks of concern.

   It is important to recognize the department's ability to rebuild stocks in periods of low abundance is limited to our authority in state freshwater and nearshore marine fisheries. Unfortunately, far more significant impacts that detrimentally impact king salmon stocks are likely occurring in the ocean where salmon grow and mature. The department will continue to work with the board and use emergency order authority to reduce mortality of king salmon and share the burden of conservation. Every user group in Cook Inlet has been impacted by these recent restrictions and closures. Department proposals passed by the board at the recent BOF meeting tied regulations in the Upper Cook Inlet saltwater fishery to preseason and inseason management actions for the Deshka River and created Guideline Harvest Levels for king salmon harvest in Lower Cook Inlet marine fisheries.

   Some additional actions the department has done over the last decade to help rebuild king salmon in southcentral Alaska has been implementing an invasive northern pike program and partnering

with other organizations to improve fish passage. These have reduced mortality of juvenile king salmon by attempting to eliminate or reduce populations of introduced northern pike that prey on young salmon and elodea that impact salmon rearing habitat. Our partnerships have improved salmon passage by replacing old culverts and advocating that new construction does not impact fish from utilizing the full extent of stream habitat. We have worked with the public and organizations to identify shoreline habitat negatively impacted by human activity and developed projects to restore and improve shorelines and provide Alaskans habitat-friendly access.

Although king salmon harvest opportunities are limited an important priority for the department is to ensure that access to other fisheries are available for Alaskan anglers. The department has encouraged anglers to do what harvesters have always done in times of low abundance and that is harvest other species to fill their freezers and provide food security. Environmental conditions that are impacting king salmon returns throughout the Alaska have been producing strong sockeye salmon returns. The department has used its emergency order authority and has been working with the BOF to increase opportunity to harvest sockeye salmon where possible. Personal use dipnet fisheries for sockeye salmon are popular in the Susitna, Beluga, Kenai, and Kasilof Rivers. Bag limit increases for sockeye salmon have been implemented when sockeye salmon abundance warrants it.

Additionally, the department has continued to invest heavily in our hatchery enhancement program providing opportunity on hatchery-reared king salmon in stocked lakes and terminal fisheries like Eklutna Tailrace, Ship Creek and Nick Dudiak Lagoon. While these stocked fisheries provide limited opportunity for anglers to harvest king salmon, hatchery-reared salmon are impacted by the same ocean conditions that impact wild stocks resulting in reduced numbers of adults per released smolt and weak returns. While hatchery enhancement can provide limited opportunity for anglers, it is not a realistic expectation that we can produce enough hatchery fish to stock our way out of an ocean productivity issue.

The department has established a Bycatch Advisory Council to advise the department on ways to implement the recommendations contained within the final report of the Alaska Bycatch Review Task Force. This Group has met 9 times across Alaska and their reports can be found at Alaska Bycatch Advisory Council and Alaska Bycatch Review Task Force (ABRT) Overview, Alaska Department of Fish and Game. In addition, the North Pacific Fishery Management Council is considering actions both in the Bering Sea and the Gulf of Alaska to reduce king salmon bycatch and improve observer coverage.

Finally, the department will continue to conduct and partner in research to bring the best science to the table as we try to identify the causes of king salmon declines throughout Alaksa. The department is currently planning a Gulf of Alaska king salmon genetics study that involves multiple management areas and staff from the divisions of commercial and sport fish to sample king salmon around the Gulf and genetically determine their origins. Inseason information on salmon passage enumerated by department assessment projects is posted on the ADF&G website. Several recent reports describing our understanding of the king salmon decline can be found online:

Murphy et al (2022).
Coastal Surveys in Alaska and Their Application to Salmon Run-Size and Harvest Forecasts, *North Pacific Anadromous Fish Commission Technical Report No. 18: 140–146, 2022*

Howard, K. G., & von Biela, V. (2023).
Adult spawners: A critical period for subarctic Chinook salmon in a changing climate. *Global Change Biology*, *29*, 1759–1773. https://doi.org/10.1111/gcb.16610

Oke, K.B. et al (2020).
Recent declines in salmon body size impact ecosystems and fisheries | Nature Communications

4. Does ADF&G plan to gather more data on the Lake Louise and Susitna Lake systems to ensure its trophy-class fishing opportunities are not overfished? The lake trout and Burbot that make the area so popular for Ice fishing are becoming increasingly fished and harvested, which has caused concern for the long-term sustainability of the fishery.

   For Lake Louise burbot, we recently assessed the population and found that it had recovered from the overfishing that occurred back in the 1990's. In 2021, we found a 50% increase in abundance and that the average size of the fish was 4 inches larger compared to 1999. Moreover, anglers have stated that they are catching nice fish and fishing is good. Having larger, older fish being caught is one indicator of a healthy population.

   Lake Louise and Susitna Lake are currently our highest priority lakes for assessing lake trout populations within the Northern Region. Our lake trout biologists are finishing a study on Tangles Lakes and will be moving onto Lake Louise next. We are also seeing and hearing of nice sized lake trout being caught.

   We monitor the statewide harvest survey and the overall trend shows that effort has dropped quite a bit since the 1990's, and more importantly, far less fish are being harvested. There has been a real shift to catch-and-release fishing that has benefited the population. However, the survey is only one tool and we recognize its limitations. Because of the popularity of these fisheries, area managers are regularly in contact with the users and enforcement, and any observations from the public are always appreciated. Lastly, the current regulations compared to other area waters are conservative, which has helped to recover and sustain these fisheries.

5. Recognizing the dramatic reduction of coho and chinook salmon returns to Upper Cook Inlet waters, what are the conservative management practices ADF&G will implement in 2025 and beyond to enhance and provide protection for these stocks?

   Given the expectations for the 2025 Deshka king salmon forecast to be similar or lower than the 2024 forecast, and all king salmon stocks failing to achieve escapement goals within Northern and Western Cook Inlet, per 5 AAC 61.165 Susitna River and Little Susitna River King Salmon Management Plan (g) If king salmon escapement is projected to be below the applicable escapement goal for that stock, king salmon sport fishing will be closed. Hook restrictions further protecting king salmon stocks may be implemented as an enforceable measure. Actions restricting king salmon harvest will most likely be implemented for West Cook Inlet streams in addition to Northern Cook Inlet and Knik Arm management areas. The Northern District commercial set gillnet fishery will follow the king salmon management plan and be closed for the directed king salmon season. The department has in recent years restricted and closed the fishery past dates described in the management plan to provide more time for the tail end of the king salmon runs to past through the district during these years of low abundance. We will also implement the Kenai River Late-Run King Salmon Action Plan to rebuild these stocks. We will also restrict or close marine sport fisheries that harvest UCI king salmon stocks for which we have conservation

concerns and take inriver actions to conserve Kenai Peninsula king salmon stocks. Finally, we are also examining subsistence fisheries and examining whether we can restrict them in a manner that does not impact reasonable opportunity met subsistence needs.

The department will continue to be conservative and watch coho salmon escapements closely using all indices possible, similar to the 2024 season where fisheries restrictions and closures were implemented. Per 5 AAC 61.110 (2) (A) the commissioner may, by emergency order, increase or decrease the bag and possession limit for coho salmon based on abundance indices. We will continue to employ the conservation corridor as prescribed in the UCI drift management plan.

Sport fish indices for NCI / WCI include weir counts on the Little Su, Deshka River, Jim Creek, and Fish Creek. Sport fishing and guided effort reports as well as staff surveys on the ground. Given the past two years of poor coho salmon escapement, additional measure of conservation may be implemented such as a one fish bag limit preseason to closely monitor these fisheries as the run builds but providing opportunities to anglers on a limited basis.

NCI coho salmon conservation measures within the UCI commercial fisheries are outlined in the management plans that guide the Central District drift gillnet fishery and the Northern District set gillnet fishery. These include time and area restrictions that are designed to reduce harvest and pass more fish into NCI and into spawning streams. The department monitors various inseason run strength indicators including commercial catch rates and escapement monitoring projects to gauge the current years overall abundance. In recent years when abundance is estimated to be low, the department has implemented additional restrictions on commercial fishing periods in the Northern District and emergency order season closures in early August for coho salmon conservation.

Chum and pink salmon were also low in productivity. Although we don't have escapement goals for chum and pink salmon in NCI, effort will be made to monitor chum salmon escapements with our weir programs, particularly the Little Su where chum salmon are the target species after king salmon season and before coho salmon season, particularly in guided effort.

6. Would you please provide sockeye salmon genetic survey data from Upper Cook Inlet fish harvested in the commercial fisheries by period / week for your most thorough analysis considering 2022, 2023 and 2024 harvests, if available?

At the time of responding to this request the 2024 data is not available. The 2022 and 2023 data harvest been published and are available at https://www.adfg.alaska.gov/FedAidPDFs/RIR.5J.2024.02.pdf. *The current UCI sampling program is not able to provide estimates by period week. The level of resolution requested would require an expanded sampling program. Below are figures from that provide an overview of the UCI commercial sockeye salmon harvest for 2022 and 2023. For further details about specific fisheries harvest please view the report.*

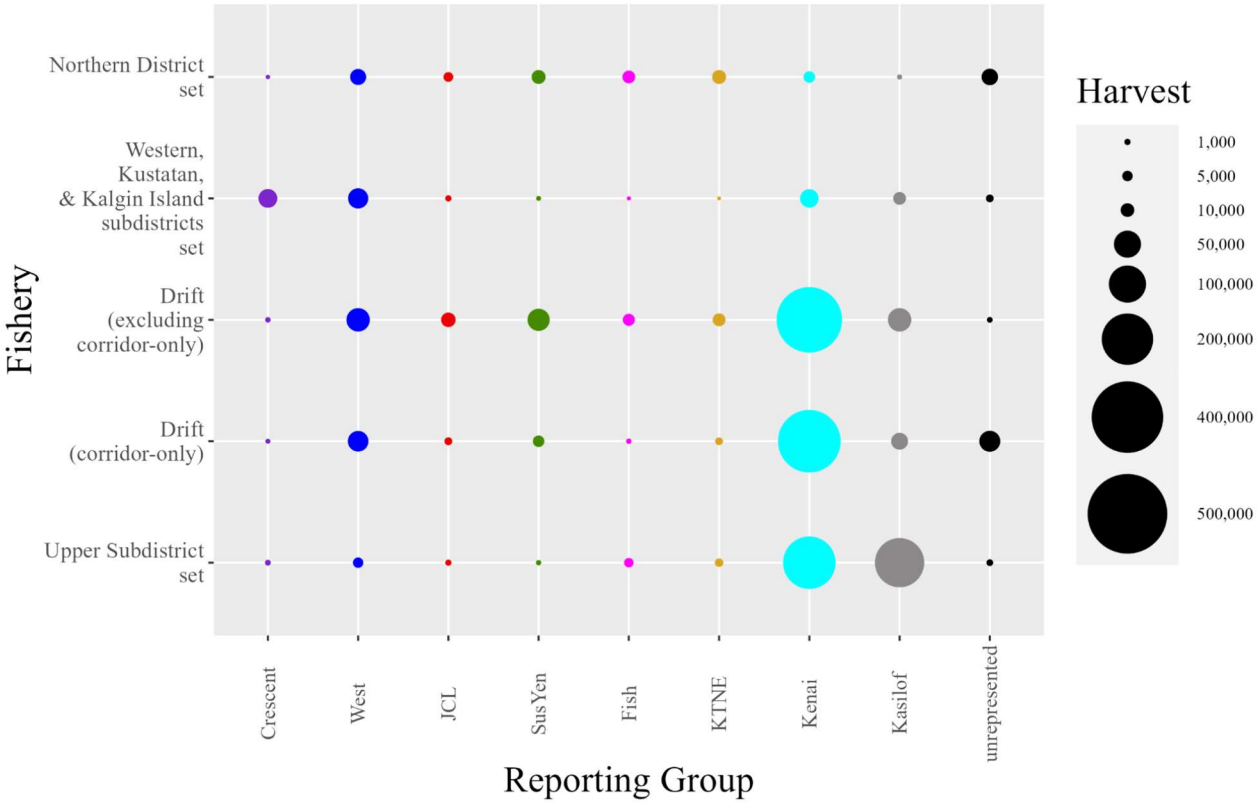

Figure 5.–Upper Cook Inlet commercial sockeye salmon harvest estimates and harvest not included in the analysis (unrepresented) by stock (reporting group) fishery, 2022. Black circles indicate the portion of the total harvest from each fishery not included in the analysis (unrepresented). Note: The scale on this figure may differ from the scale used for previously reported years.

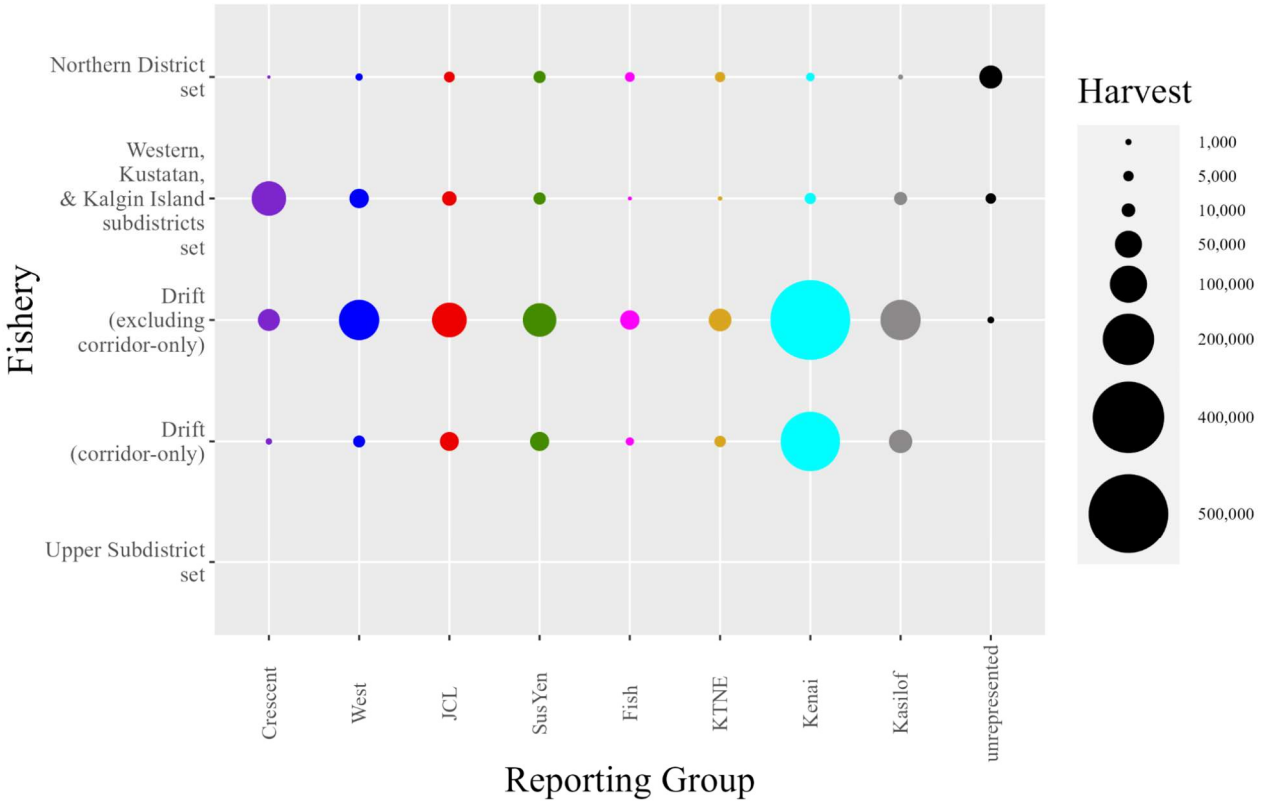

Figure 6.–Upper Cook Inlet commercial sockeye salmon harvest estimates and harvest not included in the analysis (unrepresented) by stock (reporting group) fishery, 2023. Black circles indicate the portion of the total harvest from each fishery not included

7. Do you anticipate any changes in how ADF&G might manage fisheries harvesting MSB / Northern Cook Inlet coho salmon stocks in 2025? If so, what are you considering?

The Department will continue to manage NCI coho salmon stocks in a conservative manner in compliance with management plans derived through the BOF process. This process incorporates inseason management using the best available science and applicable inseason information to guide management decisions to achieve escapement goals.. We will also examine the use of Area 1 and Area 2 state water fisheries in July openers. Please see response for question 5 for additional details about inseason management actions the department has utilized in recent years

8. The Fish Map App allows people to collect and send data to nominate fish species and life stages to the Anadromous Waters Catalogue. Are there other citizen data collection efforts that ADF&G finds useful, or areas where ADF&G can envision the public providing useful information?

The Wildlife Division has an Alaskan Citizen Science program: Threatened, Endangered, and Diversity Program - Citizen Science, Alaska Department of Fish and Game.

9. What are the most critical unfunded research needs for ADF&G in the MSB?

- *Developing a weir design that can maintain its integrity and pass fish at much higher stream flows than current designs allow*

- *Improve Little Susitna king and coho salmon assessment in times of high-water events. May be resolved by moving the weir upriver or transitioning from a weir to a sonar-based platform.*
- *Reinstate the OTF project*
- *Operate the full JCL compliment of weirs and lower Susitna River mark/recapture for sockeye salmon*

10. The legislature recently funded an Upper Cook Inlet coho salmon genetic study. Please provide a brief description of this project. For example, what are the studies goals or expectations? When will the study start and what is the projects duration? Identify sampling locations and frequencies of collections. When will program results be available to the public?

    ADF&G has yet to determine the scope of this new study. The specifics of project operations are in the process of being established. This study will provide ADF&G stock specific harvest estimates for coho salmon taken in the UCI drift gillnet and set gillnet commercial fisheries. Sampling locations, frequencies, and priorities have yet to be determined and an operational plan with study objectives has yet to be developed. The study is expected to operate starting in 2025 and proceed annually for an unknown number of years contingent on funding. Seasonal operational periods are tentatively mid-July through the end of August. Results of the project will likely be summarized post season after analysis and review is completed. A timeline for this process is not possible to estimate at the time of this response.

11. In 2024, for the first time in decades, the Upper Cook Inlet offshore test fishery was not operational. Will this project be functional next year or is it no longer an important management tool?

    The OTF project is not currently funded in existing budgets. Unless funding is provided the project will not operate in 2025. The OTF provided timely inseason information about UCI sockeye salmon that, if funded and conducted, would be utilized again for inseason management of UCI commercial fisheries.

12. How closely do the feds and ADF&G meet and work together on the management of the Cook Inlet salmon fishery? The two divisions of ADF&G meet at least weekly, if not daily, to review and plan management strategies of the salmon fishery during the season. Does ADF&G meet with the federal managers weekly, if not daily, and how well is the coordination in developing management practices inseason? How well has the current system worked and what improvements can be made?

    ADF&G area management staff do not meet with federal fisheries managers inseason as federal management is based on a prescribed preseason management plan. ADF&G manages fisheries within State of Alaska waters only and utilizes escapement-based management to provide sustainable fisheries.

If you have any questions regarding the meeting or included questions, please contact MSB Planning Staff Support, Maija DiSalvo, at 907-861-7865 or maija.disalvo@matsugov.us. Thank you!

November 26, 2024

Matanuska-Susitna Borough Fish and Wildlife Commission
Planning and Land Use Department Planning Division
350 East Dahlia Avenue
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Dear Commission Members:

Thank you for inviting the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) to participate in the 14th meeting of the Matanuska-Susitna Borough's Fish and Wildlife Commission on December 5, 2024. Please see the following initial responses to the written questions that the MSB-FWC sent to us on November 15, 2024. We may have additional responses during the meeting.

NMFS Responses to Questions from the MSB FWC

1. *How important is it for federal management of the Cook Inlet EEZ fishery to have a test fishery line similar to the Anchor Point line used previously by the State of Alaska?*

   NMFS response: While NMFS does not require the Offshore Test Fishery (OTF) data to successfully manage the Cook Inlet exclusive economic zone (EEZ) salmon fishery, if such data were available, it could provide an index of incoming salmon run strength to assist Federal fisheries managers in predicting harvests in upcoming fishery openers. In particular, such indices could inform the inseason management of sockeye and coho salmon.

2. *Is there a better location for an inlet cross section test fishery line?*

   NMFS response: The State's OTF that ran westward from Anchor Point is a long-term dataset that extends to the 1970s. As such, the historical OTF survey includes data from a diverse range of abundances and environmental conditions that could be more easily compared to contemporary data collection than if a new location were developed. In other words, harvest and abundance indices from a new survey line might not be easily comparable to those developed using the historical OTF location. But, NMFS would also like to hear opinions from the Alaska Department of Fish & Game (ADF&G) on this topic.

3. *How will NOAA manage the EEZ fishery differently during 2025 to better ensure adequate Northern Cook Inlet coho salmon spawning escapements and a more reasonable salmon harvest opportunities for Northern Cook Inlet users?*

   NMFS response: For 2025, NMFS will follow a very similar process to that we used in 2024. Working through the North Pacific Fishery Management Council process, we will use the harvest specifications methods and process outlined in the Salmon FMP to set the overfishing limit (OFL), acceptable biological catch (ABC), and total allowable catch (TAC) for the Aggregate coho salmon stock complex and other salmon stocks harvested in the Cook Inlet EEZ salmon fishery. The methods and processes in the Salmon FMP were developed following the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act and the National Standard 1 Guidelines at 50 CFR 600.310.

   NMFS is currently in the process of drafting the stock assessment and fishery evaluation (SAFE) report that includes an assessment and stock status update for coho and other stocks that are managed by NMFS in the Cook Inlet EEZ. The SAFE report and associated recommendations within it will be presented to the Council's Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC), Advisory Panel, and Council during the upcoming Council meeting from February 3 - 9, 2025, in Anchorage. The SAFE report will be available to the public on the eAgenda in January 2025 (see https://www.npfmc.org/).

   At the February Council meeting, the SSC will provide its recommendations to the Council, including for ABC (which accounts for scientific uncertainty in ensuring that the OFL is not exceeded). The Council will consider the SSC recommendation and then recommend reductions from the ABC (to account for management uncertainty) in setting the 2025 TACs for coho and other stocks. Please note that public testimony is encouraged at all Council meetings. Upon receiving recommendations from the Council for TACs, NMFS will write a proposed rule containing these specifications, accept public comments, and then, after considering public comments, publish a final rule that implements the 2025 harvest specifications.

   Additionally, as per the Salmon FMP and implementing regulations at 50 CFR 679.118(e)(2), commercial drift gillnet fishing is reduced to 1 day per week from July 16 to July 31 (0700 - 1900 hours on Thursdays). The reduction in drift gillnet fishing during this time is intended to facilitate the passage of coho salmon through the Cook Inlet EEZ.

4. *Discuss the first season of NOAA/NMFS management of commercial salmon fisheries in the Cook Inlet EEZ. Some questions that could be addressed are:*
   a. *What went smoothly?*

      NMFS response: Many things went smoothly during the Federal Cook Inlet EEZ fishery in 2024, including: compliance assistance and patrols by the NOAA Office of Law Enforcement (OLE), timely reporting of fish tickets, and correcting fish ticket errors by working with processors.

b. *Are there additional resources NOAA/NMFS would like to have?*

NMFS response: NMFS received no new resources to implement Federal management of the Cook Inlet EEZ salmon fishery, so we have had to absorb the associated costs from our other fishery management activities. No Federal funding has been allocated to support a test fishery (e.g., the continuation of ADF&G's OTS), which could provide an index of the relative run strength for coho, sockeye and other salmon. There is also no Federal funding to support escapement monitoring or the collection of genetics or age, sex, length data for Cook Inlet EEZ harvests (or test fish harvests). As such, NMFS is currently reliant on the ADF&G for much of the data needed for the Federal stock assessment.

c. *In what ways could the public engage to improve management?*

NMFS response: NMFS encourages continued public participation at Council meetings in order to provide testimony on meaningful ways that NMFS could improve user group opportunity or on the reporting/record keeping requirements. The next Council meet during which public testimony may be heard on the Federal Cook Inlet EEZ is the February Council meeting in Anchorage. Members of the public are also welcome to submit public comments on the proposed harvest specifications.

5. *In 2016, NOAA completed a Recovery Plan for the Cook Inlet Beluga Whale (https://repository.library.noaa.gov/view/noaa/15979) and in 2021 they developed a Priority Action Plan (https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/resource/document/species-spotlight-priority-actions-2021-2025-cook-inlet-beluga-whale). Please discuss research and management progress since this report. Some questions that could be addressed are:*

   a. *What actions from the Recovery Plan have been implemented and during what years?*

   NMFS Response: A total of 38 of the 64 actions in the recovery plan have been implemented to date. Information on recovery plan action implementation, including action start dates can be found at: https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/resource/data/recovery-action-database

   b. *What are impediments to implementing the Recovery Plan and Priority Actions?*

   NMFS Response: Funding and subject matter expert/researcher capacity are the two major impediments.

   c. *Are there impacts from activities related to commercial fishing (vessel strikes, gear entanglement, reduction in prey, etc.)?*

NMFS Response: Vessel strikes and entanglements are known threats to Cook Inlet beluga whales; however, these are most often documented as scarring via photo imaging, and we are not able to ascertain whether those impacts are due to commercial fishing vs. other sources.

Reduction in prey is identified in the 2016 Cook Inlet beluga whale recovery plan as a threat to the population's recovery. At this time, it is not possible to quantify the impact that removal of prey via fishing may have to beluga recovery due to data gaps, e.g., prey abundance trends. NMFS and partners continue to conduct research to better understand the extent to which changes in availability of different prey species may be affecting the beluga population.

d. *Both beluga and upper Cook Inlet Chinook populations are struggling. Is there a connection?*

NMFS Response: We don't know. Because many years of research have not identified a single definitive cause for the beluga's lack of recovery, it is reasonable to assume at this point that the impact of multiple threats when combined (a.k.a. cumulative effects) is at fault. As discussed briefly above, prey availability is an identified threat that may be impacting Cook inlet beluga recovery. At this time, there is no proven link between declines in Chinook and lack of recovery of Cook Inlet belugas, however, potential impacts to the belugas from changes in prey availability continue to be a focus of research efforts.

e. *Acoustic monitoring by NOAA has confirmed knowledge from the Native Village of Eklutna that beluga spend time in Knik Arm. What was learned? Do you anticipate continued funding of this project?*

NMFS Response: Due to staff availability, we're not able to provide an update on this project in time for inclusion in this letter; however, we hope to provide a verbal update at the meeting on December 5, 2024.

f. *A 2021-2025 Priority Action is to reduce threats from anthropogenic noise. At no point is reducing shipping speed mentioned as a method to reduce noise. Why is that?*

NMFS Response: NMFS's Species in the Spotlight initiative highlights those species or populations that the agency considers at greatest risk of extinction. As part of that effort, the agency produces 5-year priority action plans for each species/distinct population segment, which identify discrete topics/issues of near term priority and briefly summarize ongoing/planned/recommended efforts to address those issues. The plans are not intended to provide comprehensive lists of all potential actions that could be implemented to address the priority issues. Omission of a specific action that addresses a priority issue should not be interpreted as NMFS considering that action to be of low conservation value.

g. *NOAA considers both the Northern Right Whale and the Cook Inlet beluga to be "Recovery Priority #1C" species. On the East Coast, bioacoustics methods are being used to share the locations of Northern Right Whale with ship captains, triggering speed limits of less than 10 mph in a Special Management Area. This appears to have greatly reduced vessel strikes.*

   i. *Has this technique of bioacoustics triggering speed limits been used in Cook Inlet?*

      NMFS Response: (Note: NMFS reclassified Northern right whales into two species, North Atlantic right whales and North Pacific right whales, and each species now has its own recovery plan. The North Pacific right whale plan was most recently revised in 2013.) Bioacoustics has not been used to inform vessel speed limits in Cook Inlet.

   ii. *Could it be?*

      NMFS Response: Possibly. Any such program would need to be tailored to the unique conditions of Cook Inlet, such as extreme tidal fluctuations and sea ice.

   iii. *Would a requirement to slow ships when beluga are in the area reduce impacts to the beluga from noise as well as from direct vessel strikes?*

      NMFS Response: Speed restrictions are commonly recommended to reduce underwater noise generated by vessels and to reduce the risk of vessel strike.

Sincerely,

Jonathan M. Kurland
Regional Administrator