



KUSKOKWIM AREA NEWS RELEASE



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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

May 1, 2008

2008 Kuskokwim Area Salmon Fishery News Release #1 2008 Kuskokwim Area salmon outlook and management strategy

Management of the Kuskokwim Area salmon fisheries will follow the Kuskokwim River Salmon Management Plan (5 AAC 07.365) and the District 4 Salmon Management Plan (5 AAC 07.367). The Kuskokwim Area has no formal forecast for salmon returns, but broad expectations are developed based on parent-year escapements and recent year trends.

KUSKOKWIM RIVER

2008 KUSKOKWIM RIVER SALMON OUTLOOK

The 2008 Chinook, chum, and sockeye salmon runs are expected to be similar in abundance to 2007 when there were harvestable surpluses beyond what was needed for escapement and subsistence uses. Anticipated available surpluses for commercial harvest will range from 30,000 to 50,000 Chinook, 20,000 to 40,000 sockeye, 400,000 to 700,000 chum, and 100,000 to 250,000 coho salmon. Markets and processor capacity may limit actual harvest.

2008 KUSKOKWIM RIVER MANAGEMENT STRATEGY

State and federal fishery management staff will continue to follow the guidelines in the Kuskokwim River Salmon Management Plan. Salmon runs will be managed to achieve escapement goals, provide for subsistence use, and to allow commercial fishing on available harvestable surpluses. Based on the 2008 salmon run outlook and action taken by the Alaska Board of Fisheries (BOF) in 2007 to discontinue the stock of concern designations for Kuskokwim River Chinook and chum salmon, the subsistence-fishing schedule will not be in effect during the start of the 2008 season. The subsistence fishing schedule would only be implemented if salmon runs are much lower than expected and action was needed to achieve escapement goals.

It is anticipated that a commercial salmon fishery directed at the harvest of Chinook, sockeye, and chum salmon will be initiated in late June dependent on run timing and availability of harvestable surpluses. A coho salmon directed commercial fishery is anticipated to occur from late July through August.

Subsistence Fishery

Subsistence fishing is anticipated to be open seven days per week with the exception of closures before, during, and after commercial fishing periods. The BOF approved liberalized subsistence fishing regulations in 2004 to provide greater opportunity for subsistence fishers during the commercial fishing season. As in the last four years, when one subdistrict is open to commercial fishing, subsistence fishing will be allowed in the majority of the other subdistrict. During closures, all subsistence harvest gear within the closed area with a mesh size greater than 4-inches must be removed. Subsistence fishing for fish other than salmon will be allowed during closed periods with gillnets not exceeding 60 feet in length with a mesh size of 4-inches or less.

Subsistence fishing with hook and line for any species of salmon will be allowed seven days per week. In 2007, the BOF liberalized subsistence hook and line bag and possession limits in the Aniak River upstream of Doestock creek from 6 fish per day to 10 fish per day. Of those 10 fish, the salmon daily bag and possession limit is 3 salmon, only 2 of which can be Chinook salmon.

Commercial Fishery

As directed by the Kuskokwim River Salmon Management Plan the commercial fishery will be conducted in June and July if it is determined there is a surplus above that necessary to meet escapement goals and subsistence uses. As it is expected this criteria will be met, a Chinook, sockeye, and chum salmon fishery is anticipated in mid- to late June, but may be limited dependent on market conditions and processor capacity. Given adequate market interest and processor capacity, commercial openings would be expected to follow an alternating subdistrict schedule. However, weak chum salmon market conditions and limited processing capacity are anticipated in 2008. As a result, ADF&G is considering subdistrict and scheduling contingencies to allow for commercial fishing opportunity in District 1. Commercial openings may be reduced in time and area, such as reducing fishing time or opening sub-sections of District 1 to commercial fishing. Additionally, commercial openings may be announced when no large scale processors are available to provide opportunity for all permit holders operating as catcher/sellers or catcher/processors. Contact the ADF&G office in Bethel for more information of small scale catcher/seller or catcher/processor operations.

Although the BOF adopted regulations allowing for up to 8-inch mesh gillnet gear in 2007, it is anticipated that all commercial fishing periods will be limited to 6-inch or less gillnet gear. This will allow for harvest of Chinook and sockeye salmon because of their overlapping run timing during the second half of June.

A directed coho salmon fishery is anticipated in late July and August. Most coho salmon commercial fishing periods are expected to occur as alternating subdistrict openings to accommodate processing limitations. As in 2007, there is the potential for opening the Lower Section of Subdistrict 1B two hours earlier than regularly scheduled commercial periods dependent on run abundance and processor capacity

Sport Fishery

Within the management plan, the sport fisheries for Chinook and chum salmon are to be managed based on abundance. There is no expectation of preseason emergency orders further restricting the sport fishery since it is anticipated that Chinook and chum salmon abundance will provide a harvestable surplus.

The Kuskokwim River drainage Chinook salmon sport fishing season will close by regulation on July 26. In 2007, the BOF rescinded the regulation prohibiting retention of chum salmon and

regulations allow for the harvest of sport caught chum salmon in the Aniak River drainage. Existing Chinook salmon sport fishing regulations in the Aniak River drainage remain in effect, including the annual bag limit of two Chinook salmon greater than 20 inches per year. If necessary, additional inseason restrictions may be implemented in response to weaker than anticipated salmon runs.

Inseason Assessment and Research

Inseason indicators of salmon run strength include the Bethel Test Fishery, subsistence catch monitoring reports, and tributary escapement monitoring projects, which are operated by an assortment of partnerships between State, Federal, and Tribal organizations. Staff from Orutsararmiut Native Council will survey Bethel Area subsistence fishers to help gauge salmon run timing and abundance. Salmon escapement will be assessed by weir projects operated in the Kwethluk, Tuluksak, Salmon (Aniak R. drainage), George, Kogrukuk, Tatlawiksuk, and Takotna Rivers, and by a sonar project on the Aniak River. In addition, a coho salmon radio telemetry mark and recapture study will be initiated in 2008 on the main-stem Kuskokwim River near Kalskag. Information from the mark and recapture study will be used in concert with information from tributary weir projects to determine total abundance and distribution of Kuskokwim River coho salmon.

KUSKOKWIM BAY

2008 KUSKOKWIM BAY OUTLOOK

It is anticipated that the harvestable surplus of salmon available for Kuskokwim Bay commercial fisheries will range from 17,000 to 31,000 Chinook, 110,000 to 300,000 sockeye, 80,000 to 130,000 chum, and 33,000 to 52,000 coho salmon. Total harvest may be affected by low participation, weak market conditions, and limited processor capacity in the fisheries.

2008 KUSKOKWIM BAY MANAGEMENT STRATEGY

Subsistence Fishery

ADF&G staff will be in contact with Kuskokwim Bay subsistence fishers to assure subsistence uses are being provided for prior to initiating a commercial fishery. Subsistence fishing will be allowed seven days per week prior to the commercial salmon season. Once the commercial fishing season begins there will be subsistence fishery closures 16 hours before, during, and 6 hours after commercial fishing periods. However, subsistence fishing closures may be reduced in time if additional commercial fishing periods are allowed. Fishers will be informed of subsistence fishing closures through news releases and radio announcement.

Commercial Fishery

ADF&G will work closely with buyers and fishers and manage the Kuskokwim Bay commercial fisheries by timing harvests for fish quality and processor capacity to the extent feasible within biological constraints. The northern boundary of District 4 remains at Weelung Creek based on action take by the BOF in 2004. In addition, the Western boundary of District 5 remains outside the entrance to Goodnews Bay. ADF&G has emergency order authority to increase gillnet length from 50 fathoms to 100 fathoms in both Districts 4 and 5 when fish abundance and processor capacity warrants. In recent years harvest limits have been placed on fishers because of limited processing capacity. Harvest limits are anticipated for the upcoming season dependent on run abundance, fisher participation, and processing capacity limitations.

District 4

The District 4 commercial fishery will be managed in accordance with the District 4 Salmon Management Plan. It is anticipated that the commercial fishing will begin prior to June 15 by regulation and follow a schedule of two 12-hour periods per week. As the abundance of Chinook salmon tapers off and sockeye salmon become more abundant, a commercial fishing schedule of at least three 12-hour periods per week is anticipated given adequate run abundance, market interest, and processor capacity. A directed coho salmon fishery is anticipated for the month of August with two to three 12-hour commercial fishing periods per week given adequate run abundance and processor capacity.

The duration of fishing periods may be reduced if limits imposed by processors result in high grading and the potential for wanton waste. Other contingencies to address waste are being considered including a reduction in the weekly fishing schedule.

District 5

There is the possibility that the District 5 commercial fishery will open earlier in the third week of June compared to historical opening dates given adequate run abundance and processor capacity. ADF&G intends to meet with Goodnews Bay area subsistence and commercial fishers prior to the commercial fishing season to discuss the start of the commercial fishery. The commercial fishing schedule is anticipated to align with the District 4 schedule of two days per week at the onset, then transitioning to at least three 12-hour periods per week from late June through July given adequate run abundance, market interest, and processor capacity. Fishing time may be reduced if such action is necessary to achieve salmon escapement objectives. A directed coho salmon fishery is anticipated to be implemented for the month of August with two to three 12-hour commercial fishing periods per week given adequate run abundance and processor capacity.

As with District 4, the duration of fishing periods may be reduced if limits imposed by processors result in high grading and the potential for wanton waste. Other contingencies to address waste are being considered including a reduction in the weekly fishing schedule.

Sport Fishery

Within the District 4 Salmon Management Plan, sport fisheries are managed based on abundance and commercial fishery performance. If necessary, additional inseason restrictions will be implemented in accordance with District 4 Salmon Management Plan. Sport fishing daily bag and possession limits for Chinook salmon is three per day with only two over 28 inches. The Kuskokwim Bay Chinook salmon sport-fishing season will close by regulation July 26.

Inseason Assessment and Research

Inseason indicators of salmon run strength include weir escapement projects, verbal subsistence catch reports, and commercial harvest statistics. Weirs will be operated on the Kanektok and the Middle Fork Goodnews Rivers to monitor salmon escapements and to gather biological data. It is anticipated that the Kanektok River weir will cease operations in mid-August to address operational concerns over the weir remaining in-river because of high water events common in August and September.

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