

FISHERIES UPDATE FOR THE WEEK OF May 21-31, 2021. Report #1
Compiled by George Pappas - (907) 317-2165, George_Pappas@fws.gov Office of
Subsistence Management, USFWS.

The purpose of the weekly fisheries update is to provide the reader with an overall summary of the status of subsistence related fisheries throughout the state of Alaska. The target audience is the Federal Subsistence Board and its Staff Committee. The report was compiled with the assistance of the Federal in-season managers and OSM staff that provided weekly updated information by the close of business on Friday of the reporting week. My goal is to have the report sent by the close of business the following Monday. Web links have been included to provide additional information. You may obtain additional information on a fishery of particular interest by contacting the in-season manager, provided contacts, follow the provided web links, or contact me.

SOUTHEAST ALASKA

Sitka and Hoonah Area – Justin Koller, Forest Service, Tongass National Forest
Justin Koller, (907)747-4297 jpkoller@fs.fed.us

No Reports Submitted This Week.

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

No Reports Submitted This Week.

Yakutat, Juneau, and Admiralty areas of Northern Southeast Alaska - Jake Musslewhite (907-789-6256; jgmusslewhite@fs.fed.us), Forest Service, Tongass National Forest

No Reports Submitted This Week.

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

No reports this week.

Southeast Alaska Web Links

Tongass National Forest News Room <http://www.fs.usda.gov/news/tongass/news-events>

Federal Subsistence Fisheries Regulations for Southeastern Alaska Area
http://www.doi.gov/subsistence/regulation/fish_shell/upload/Southeast.pdf

ADF&G Sport and Personal Use Fishing News Release and Emergency Order Link
<http://www.adfg.alaska.gov/sf/EONR/index.cfm?ADFG=region.R1>

ADF&G Commercial Fisheries News Release and Emergency Order Link
<http://www.adfg.alaska.gov/index.cfm?adfg=cfnews.main>

Weekly ADF&G Sport Fishing Reports for Southeast Alaska
<http://www.adfg.alaska.gov/sf/FishingReports/index.cfm?ADFG=R1.home>

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

SOUTHCENTRAL ALASKA

PRINCE WILLIAM SOUND – COPPER RIVER

Copper River, 6/1/2021 Update – Dave Sarafin, Wrangell-St. Elias National Park and Preserve (WRST), (907) 822-7281, dave_sarafin@nps.gov

In January of 2021, the Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ADFG) provided preseason forecasts of 37,000 Copper River Chinook Salmon and 1,296,000 wild stock Copper River Sockeye Salmon. Relative to recent 10-year averages, these forecasts are 22% below average for Chinook Salmon and 37% below average for Sockeye Salmon. In early May, Federal and State fisheries managers met to discuss this forecast, anticipated early season management strategies, and plans for maintaining communications with local stakeholders regarding the run strength assessments and management actions throughout the season.

The commercial fishery in the Copper River District has been limited in response to low numbers of returning salmon. Three 12-hour open commercial fishing periods occurred during the month of May. The ADFG has reported the cumulative commercial harvest to be the 4th lowest harvest to date in the last 50 years. Commercial harvest from the most recent 12-hour period was 32,700 Sockeye Salmon and 2,031 Chinook Salmon. The Copper River District is currently closed; the next Advisory Announcement for fishing times may be released on June 1.

The ADFG sonar at Miles Lake (located just downstream of the Million Dollar Bridge in the Copper River) began limited operation of only the North Bank sonar on May 12. Salmon passage was first recorded on May 19. Due to risk of damage to equipment associated with prolonged ice conditions in the lower Copper River, the South Bank sonar was not in operation until May 26. As of May 31, 54,154 salmon have been estimated migrating upstream for the season. This estimate is 41% of the cumulative management objective of 132,531 for this date. A daily estimate of 7,134 salmon migrated by the sonar on May 31.

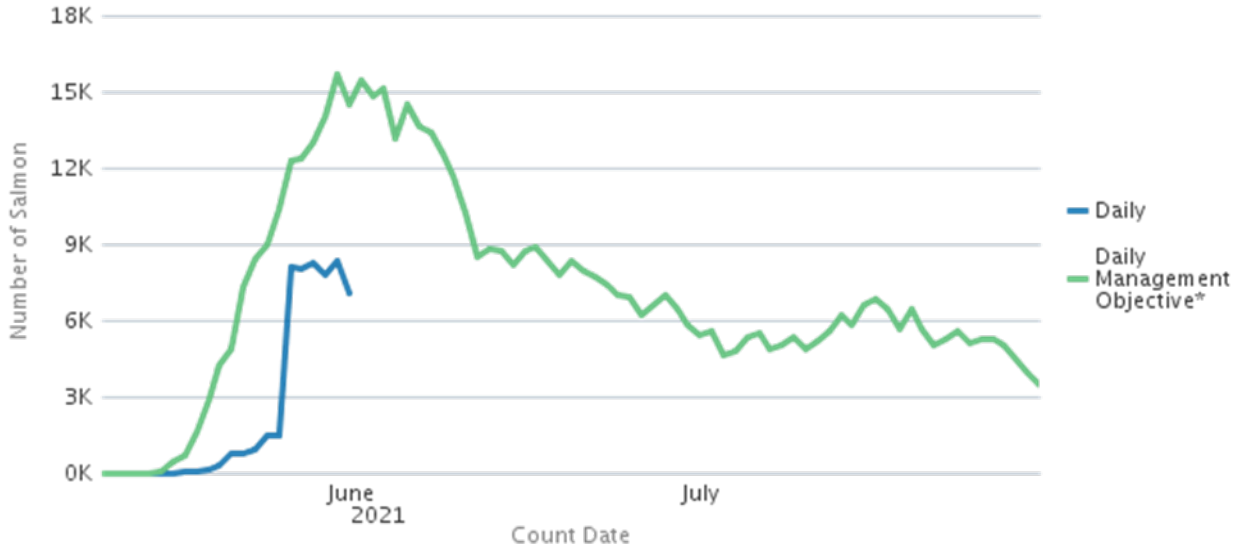
Performance in the commercial fishery and in river sonar salmon passage estimates are the primary early season assessments of the Sockeye Salmon return to the Copper River. Based on long-term average run timing and harvests, both indicators are well below the expected levels for this date of the season. The overall return could be very weak or also delayed in run timing. Federal managers will continue to monitor run strength indices to

evaluate the need for appropriate fisheries management actions in the Copper River Drainage. No Federal Special Actions have been issued by the in-season manager this season.

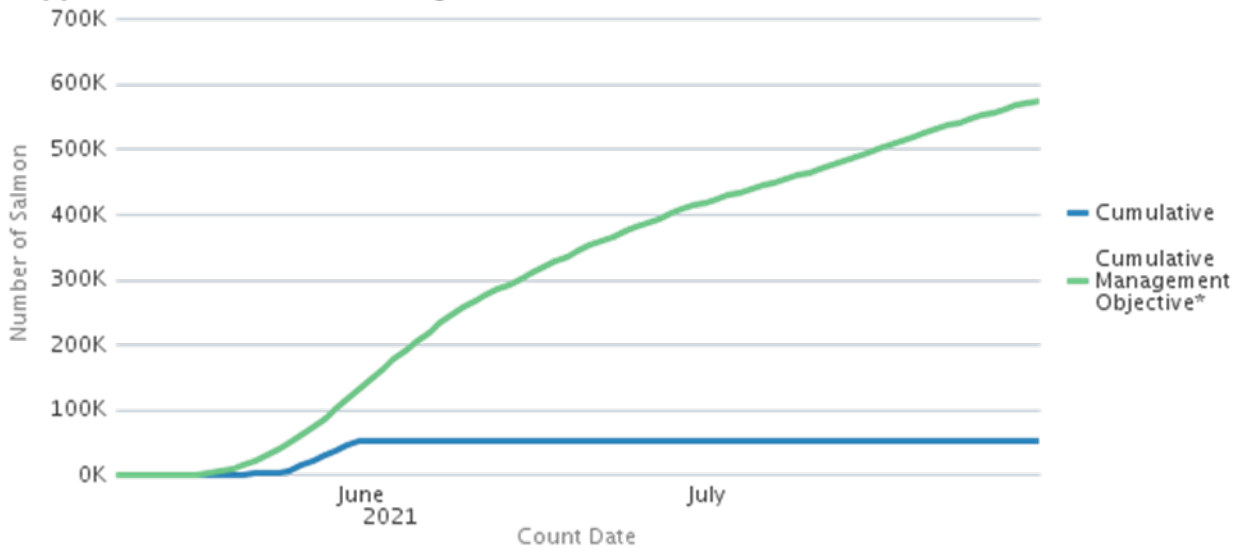
The State subsistence fishery in the Glennallen Subdistrict is scheduled to open June 1. The State personal use fishery in the Chitina Subdistrict is tentatively scheduled to open for a 24-hour fishing period on June 7. However, this initial open period will likely be delayed due to poor early season run assessments. An Emergency Order from ADFG is expected to be announced on June 2.

2021 Upper Copper River Salmon Passage at Miles Lake Sonar through May 31

Copper River Daily Passage



Copper River Cumulative Passage



Source:

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

The Federal subsistence fisheries in the Chitina Subdistrict, the Glennallen Subdistrict, and the Batzulnetas area opened on May 15 and are expected to remain open through September 30. Through the Office of Subsistence Management (OSM) Federal subsistence permit website, eighty (80) Chitina Subdistrict permits, one hundred and thirty-four (134) Glennallen Subdistrict permits, and zero (0) Batzulnetas area permits have been issued to date.

With funding through the Fisheries Resource Monitoring Program (FRMP), WRST was again planning to operate the Tanada Creek salmon weir located at Batzulnetas. However, we were not able to recruit a full crew to operate the project this season. Several recruitment announcements were posted to recruit both locally and outside of the Copper Basin, but we did not receive enough qualified applicants for the positions announced. We were able to recruit one fisheries technician who will assist with repairs of structural components of the weir in preparation for future project operation.

Links:

ADFG Miles Lake daily sonar estimates

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

NVE's Chinook Escapement Monitoring project in the Copper River

<http://eyak.fishscan.com/Summary/DailySummary.aspx>

ADFG Copper River Inseason Commercial Harvest Estimates

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

ADFG Sport Fish Emergency Orders and News Releases

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

**PWS and Copper River Delta – Milo Burcham, Chugach National Forest, Cordova.
6 June 2017.**

(907) 424-4759 mburcham@fs.fed.us

No Report Submitted This Week.

COOK INLET AREA – Ken Gates, Field Supervisor, Kenai Fish and Wildlife Field Office (907) 260-0132 Kenneth_Gates@FWS.GOV

No Report Submitted This Week.

Fish counts at some Alaska Department of Fish and Game-operated assessment projects are available on-line at

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

Kodiak Island Area – Michael Brady, Refuge Manager, - Kodiak NWR
 (907) 487-0226 or michael_brady@fws.gov or Kevin Van Hatten (907) 487-0230
Kevin_VanHatten@fws.gov

No Reports Submitted This Week.

Federal Subsistence Fisheries Regulations for Kodiak Area
<http://alaska.fws.gov/asm/pdf/fishregs13/kodiak.pdf>

FISHERIES UPDATE FOR THE WEEK OF June 1, 2021.

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

These areas support abundant returns of salmon, particularly Sockeye Salmon; as well as some of the largest commercial fisheries for salmon in Alaska. All of the assessments of salmon returns are conducted by the Alaska Department of Fish and Game, and provide the basis for any inseason assessment and management. None of the adjustments in commercial fishing management throughout any of these areas are anticipated to affect subsistence fishing in Federally-managed waters.

Bristol Bay:

The 2021 Bristol Bay Sockeye Salmon run is forecast to be approximately 50 million fish for the nine river systems: Kvichak, Alagnak, Naknek, Egegik, Ugashik, Wood, Igushik, Nushagak, and Togiak. Based on the forecast 36 million fish are available for commercial inshore harvest. The Alaska Department of Fish and Game has strategies in place for all mixed stock districts to address differential run strength should that occur. Gillnets are the primary gear used for most subsistence fishing for salmon. A permit is required for subsistence harvest of salmon.

The commercial salmon season in Bristol Bay opens June 1 by regulation and commercial fishing openings have been announced. Fishing in eastside districts and Togiak will be allowed using a weekly schedule that will vary by district. The schedules are in place to balance fishing opportunity with escapement in the early part of the season, particularly for Chinook Salmon. As each run develops and Sockeye Salmon run characteristics become defined within individual districts, fishing time will be adjusted accordingly. In the Nushagak District, management of the Chinook Salmon fishery will govern fishing time in the early part of the season, followed by directed Sockeye Salmon management as abundance dictates.

The Sockeye Salmon sustainable escapement goals (SEG) for Bristol Bay systems are:

Escapement Goals:

Kvichak SEG = 2,000,000 – 10,000,000

Alagnak	SEG = 320,000 minimum
Naknek	SEG = 800,000 – 2,000,000
Egegik	SEG = 800,000 – 2,000,000
Ugashik	SEG = 500,000 – 1,400,000
Wood River	SEG = 700,000 – 1,800,000
Igushik	SEG = 150,000 – 400,000
Nushagak	SEG = 370,000 – 900,000
Nushagak	SEG = 55,000 – 270,000 Chinook Salmon
Togiak	SEG = 150,000 – 270,000

Chignik:

The 2021 Sockeye Salmon forecasted total-run size for the Chignik River Management Area (CMA) is 875,000 fish with a harvest estimate of 165,000 Sockeye Salmon. The CMA is composed of five fishing districts: Eastern, Central, Chignik Bay, Western, and Perryville. In June, the first commercial fishing period in the Chignik Bay, Central, and Eastern districts and the Inner Castle Cape Subsection of the Western District may occur after approximately 20,000 Sockeye Salmon have escaped or are expected to escape into the Chignik River. The Chignik River Chinook Salmon harvest is dependent upon the amount of commercial fishing time for Sockeye Salmon in July. The commercial harvest 10-year average is approximately 7,000 fish. The ADF&G will host a commercial fishing stakeholder meeting the week of May 31. The Federal inseason manager and OSM will not host in person stakeholder meetings due to the restrictions in place for COVID-19. Meetings will occur via teleconference throughout the fishing season. The first teleconference with Chignik area stakeholders occurred on May 19, 2021 hosted by the Chignik Intertribal Fishing Coalition.

Escapement Goals:

Early Run Sockeye Salmon/ Black Lake	BEG = 350,000 – 450,000
Late Run Sockeye Salmon/ Chignik Lake	SEG = 200,000 – 400,000
-In-river Goal	-10,000 in August and 10,000 in September in addition to minimum escapement objectives
Chinook Salmon	BEG = 1,300 – 2,700
Pink Salmon – Even year	SEG = 170,000 – 280,000
Chum Salmon	SEG = 45,000 – 110,000

Alaska Peninsula:

There are numerous salmon stocks and fisheries throughout the Alaska Peninsula, as well as the Aleutian Islands. The largest fisheries are managed under management plans. Management objectives vary by district and time. Several Sockeye Salmon escapements (mostly on the north peninsula) are monitored with weirs including Nelson, Bear, Sandy, Ilnik, McLees, and Orzinski systems. Preseason forecasts are made only for the Nelson River and late-run (post July 31) Bear Lake stocks. The 2021 Sockeye Salmon run size

projections are 333,000 fish for the Nelson River and 363,000 fish for late-run Bear Lake. A permit is required for subsistence harvest of salmon.

Escapement Goals:

Nelson River BEG = 97,000 – 219,000
Late-run Bear Lake BEG = 117,000 – 195,000

Aleutian Islands.

All fisheries are forecast to meet escapement goals and provide harvest opportunity.

Federal Subsistence Fisheries Regulations for Bristol Bay Area
http://www.doi.gov/subsistence/regulation/fish_shell/upload/Bristol.pdf

Federal Subsistence Fisheries Regulations for Chignik Area
http://www.doi.gov/subsistence/regulation/fish_shell/upload/chignik.pdf

Southcentral Alaska Web Links

Federal Subsistence Management Fisheries News Releases
<http://www.doi.gov/subsistence/news/fishing/index.cfm>

ADF&G Sport and Personal Use Fishing News Release and Emergency Order link
<http://www.adfg.alaska.gov/index.cfm?adfg=fishingSportFishingInfo.R2>

ADF&G Commercial Fisheries News Release and Emergency Order Link
<http://www.adfg.alaska.gov/index.cfm?adfg=cfnews.main>

Weekly ADF&G Sport Fishing Reports for Southcentral Alaska
<http://www.adfg.alaska.gov/sf/FishingReports/index.cfm?ADFG=R2.Home>

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

Yukon River – Gerald Maschmann, Fish Biologist USFWS Fairbanks Office. May 23 – May 29, 2021

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

The USFWS Emmonak Field Office will be **closed** for summer management activities due to COVID-19 concerns. Essential services will be provided to fishermen online and over the phone. ADF&G management staff are expected to begin arriving at their

Emmonak Field Office on June 1 and USFWS will continue to work closely with their management and research staff daily.

Summer Season Outlook and Management Strategies

The 2021 drainage-wide Chinook salmon outlook is for a run size of 102,000 to 189,000 fish. The 2021 run may be as small as 2012 and 2013; despite very restricted fishing in those years, the Canadian Chinook salmon escapement objective was not met. Because of the poor projected run size, front end closures are required until in-season run strength estimates indicate a harvestable surplus beyond escapement needs. This will likely require closures through the midpoint of the run. Beginning June 1, assessment project and management updates will be given on the **YRDFA weekly teleconferences each Tuesday at 1:00 pm at the following number: 1-800-315-6338, Passcode: 98566#**. To hear the fishing schedule and fish counts please call the toll-free hotline: (866) 479-7387; in Fairbanks: (907) 459-7387.

- As Chinook salmon enter the Coastal Area and each district and tributary, subsistence salmon fishing will be closed. This closure may be weeks long until the midpoint of the Chinook salmon run is assessed at Pilot Station sonar (likely around June 23). If in-season assessment indicates a run closer to the lower end of the outlook, subsistence fishing for Chinook salmon will remain closed.
- The sport fishery for Chinook salmon will begin the season closed (effective May 10) throughout the U.S. portion of the Yukon River drainage, excluding the Tanana River drainage. Chinook salmon may not be retained or possessed. Management actions for the Tanana River drainage will be announced in early June.
- Subsistence fishing for summer chum salmon will be opened with selective gear (dip nets, beach seines, fish wheels) once summer chum salmon become more abundant.
- If confidence is high that the Chinook salmon run is near the upper end of the outlook, and escapement goals are likely to be met, some subsistence fishing opportunities (on reduced fishing schedules) with gillnets may be allowed. For most districts and areas, gillnets will be restricted to 6-inch or smaller mesh.
- Fishing for non-salmon species with 4-inch or smaller mesh gill nets will be allowed during salmon fishing closures; however, net length will be reduced to a maximum of 60 feet at the start of the season. If there are indications that salmon are being targeted with this gear, or it is determined that there is no harvestable surplus of Chinook salmon, this gear may be discontinued.
- When the summer chum salmon run is projected to meet the drainage wide escapement goal, commercial fishing for summer chum salmon may begin with selective gear (dip nets and beach seine with all Chinook released alive) Openings in District 1 and 2 will be dependent on processor capacity.

Assessment Information

According to Alaska-Pacific River Forecast Center, ice-out on the lower Yukon River at the village of Emmonak occurred on May 13, earlier than the historical median of May 20. A few subsistence fishermen in the lower Yukon River area have been fishing since ice out and are reporting high water but not too much debris, although fishermen upriver are reporting high debris loads coming down river. The first report of subsistence caught

Chinook and Chum Salmon within the Yukon River was on May 30. The Lower Yukon test fishing (LYTF) project began on May 25 with drift fishing for Chinook and Summer Chum Salmon, however test fishermen are still clearing snags and fine-tuning fishing methods. Set netting is expected to begin by June 3. The Pilot Station sonar is expected to begin full operations on June 1.

The latest up to date escapement and harvest estimates can be found at ADF&G's website at www.adfg.alaska.gov/yukonfishcounts

Management Actions

Until more assessment data becomes available, management decisions will be consistent with the preseason projections. Subsistence salmon fishing in the Yukon River drainage is open 24 hours per day, seven days per week, with 7.5-inch or smaller mesh gillnets. Subsistence salmon fishing in the southern Coastal District and District 1 will be closed effective 8 p.m. Wednesday, June 2. Subsistence salmon fishing in District 2 will close effective 8 p.m. Friday, June 4. This was announced in Advisory Announcement #2 (<http://www.adfg.alaska.gov/static/applications/dcfnewsrelease/1265697609.pdf>) The personal use fishery in Subdistrict 6-C is open on its regulatory schedule of two, 42-hour periods per week restricted to 7.5-inch or less mesh gillnet gear and fish wheels. During subsistence salmon fishing closures, gillnets that have mesh size 4-inches or smaller not exceeding 60 feet in length may be used to target non-Salmon species. The sequential activation of subsistence fishing closures and restrictions will continue in all districts as the Chinook Salmon migrate upstream.

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

Consultation

Extensive public outreach and consultation was performed during the fall of 2020 and spring of 2021 to inform and seek input from Yukon River fishermen and stakeholders. Run outlook and possible management strategies were discussed at Federal RAC meetings and State AC meetings, the Yukon River Panel meeting, the Yukon River Intertribal Fish Commission, and at the annual Yukon River Drainage Fisheries Association (YRDFA) Board meeting. On April 29, a pre-season planning teleconference lead by YRDFA was held that brought together representatives from most Alaskan Yukon River communities to discuss the run outlook and management options. Additionally, the delegated Federal Manager sent consultation letters via email to 55 Yukon River tribal entities on May 25.

Management strategies and recommendations were incorporated into an "salmon" colored information sheet that outlined the preseason outlook and management strategies and was distributed as a cooperative ADF&G and USFWS News Release. Additionally, over 3,000 copies were printed and mailed to Yukon River subsistence and commercial fishing households during the second week of May. Additional press releases and teleconferences will occur throughout the 2021 season.

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

KUSKOKWIM RIVER

In Season Manager – Boyd Blihovde, Refuge Manager, Yukon Delta National Wildlife Refuge Contact Vernon_Born@fws.gov (907) 543-3151 or Aaron Mosses Aaron_Moses@fws.gov (907) 545-3252

The Yukon Delta National Wildlife Refuge Manager determined that Federal management is necessary for the conservation and the continuation of subsistence uses for Chinook salmon within the Kuskokwim River drainage. This action is based on the provisions of Title VIII of the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act (ANILCA) and delegation of authority letter from the Federal Subsistence Board. Plans to manage the salmon fishery are intended to take an adaptive management approach while coordinating with the Kuskokwim River Inter-Tribal Fish Commission (KRITFC), the Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ADF&G), and local interest groups.

Regulation: 50 CFR 100.27(e)(4)(ii) is amended to read:

(A) Unless re-opened by the Yukon Delta National Wildlife Refuge Manager, the following Federal public waters of the Kuskokwim River within and adjacent to the exterior boundaries of the Yukon Delta National Wildlife Refuge are closed to the harvest of all salmon by the using gillnets by all users effective June 01, 2021:

(1) The Kuskokwim River main stem within the boundaries of the Yukon Delta National Wildlife Refuge.

(2) Tributary Details: Additionally, unless re-opened by the Yukon Delta National Wildlife Refuge Manager, the following Federal public waters within and adjacent to the exterior boundaries of the Yukon Delta National Wildlife Refuge are closed to the harvest of Chinook Salmon and the use of all gillnets by all users effective June 01, 2021:

- **The Eek River;**
- **The Kwethluk River drainage beginning at its confluence with Kuskokuak Slough**
- **The Kasigluk and Kisaralik river drainages including Old Kuskokuak Slough to ADF&G regulatory markers at the confluence of Old Kuskokuak Slough and Kuskokuak Slough;**
- **The Tuluksak River drainage including its confluence with the Kuskokwim River and downstream approximately 1-mile to ADF&G regulatory markers;**
- **The Aniak River drainage to ADF&G regulatory markers at its confluence with the Kuskokwim River; and**
- **The Aniak box defined as: The waters of the Kuskokwim River main stem**

from the Yukon Delta NWR boundary at Aniak downstream to a line formed from the northwest corner of the runway (latitude 61° 35' 16" N, longitude 159° 33' 28" W), due north to a point on the southeast corner of the sandbar (latitude 61° 35' 37" N, longitude 159° 33' 16" W).

Fishing from tributaries not listed above is restricted to fishing 100 yards upriver from the mouth of the river (confluence with the main stem Kuskokwim River).

(3) Subsistence fishing in the main stem Kuskokwim River for Salmon with live release of Chinook salmon using dip nets, beach seines, fish wheels with live release wells, and rod and reel will remain open throughout the closure.

(4) Federally Qualified Subsistence Fishing Opportunities

Set gillnet opportunities for Federally qualified subsistence users will be open in Federal public waters of the main stem in the Kuskokwim River during the following dates and times:

- **June 2, 2021 from 06:00 AM to 10:00PM**
- **June 5, 2021 from 06:00 AM to 10:00PM**
- **June 9, 2021 from 06:00 AM to 10:00PM**

During these three opportunities, gillnets are restricted to set gillnets with 6-inch or less mesh, 60 feet or less in length, and may not exceed 45 meshes in depth. Additionally, set gillnets must be attached to the bank, oriented perpendicular to the river and may not be operated more than 100 feet from the ordinary high-water mark. Set gillnets need to be spaced 150 feet apart from another set gillnet. The salmon bearing tributaries listed in section (A)(2) will remain closed to the use of all gillnets for all salmon and all methods and means for Chinook salmon to all users during these periods. During a set gillnet opportunity, Federally qualified subsistence users may retain incidentally caught Chinook salmon.

See Section (A)(2) Tributary Details

After each set gillnet opportunity expires, Kuskokwim waters revert to closed under section A.

(5) Gillnet (set or drift) opportunities for Federally qualified subsistence users will be open in Federal public waters in the main stem of the Kuskokwim River during the following dates and times:

- **June 12, 2021 06:00 AM to 06:00 PM**
- **June 15, 2021 06:00 AM to 06:00 PM**

Gillnets are restricted to 6-inch or less mesh and may not exceed 45 meshes in depth and 50 fathoms (300-feet) in length below the Johnson River and 25 fathoms (150 feet) in

length above the Johnson River. The waters listed in section (A)(2) will remain closed to all gillnets for all salmon and all methods and means for Chinook salmon to all users during these gillnet periods:

See paragraph (A)(2) Tributary Details

(6) After each gillnet opportunity expires, Kuskokwim waters revert to closed under paragraph (A).

Additional opportunities with the use of gillnets by Federally qualified subsistence users may be announced by subsequent special action after assessment of run strength and coordination with the

Kuskokwim River Inter-Tribal Fish Commission (KRITFC), the ADF&G, and other parties identified in the Delegation of Authority provided to the Federal in-season manager by the Federal Subsistence Board.

Yukon-Kuskokwim-Interior Alaska Web Links

Federal Subsistence Management Fisheries News Releases:

<http://www.doi.gov/subsistence/news/fishing/index.cfm>

Federal Subsistence Fisheries Regulations for Yukon–Northern Area

http://www.doi.gov/subsistence/regulation/fish_shell/upload/Yukon.pdf

Federal Subsistence Fisheries Regulations for Kuskokwim Area

http://www.doi.gov/subsistence/regulation/fish_shell/upload/Kusko.pdf

ADF&G Sport and Personal Use Fishing News Release and Emergency Order link:

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

ADF&G Commercial Fisheries News Release and Emergency Order Link:

<http://www.adfg.alaska.gov/index.cfm?adfg=cfnews.main>

Weekly ADF&G Sport Fishing Reports for Interior Alaska:

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

Statewide ADF&G Fish counts:

<http://www.adfg.alaska.gov/sf/FishCounts/>

Northwest Alaska – Ken Adkisson, National Park Service, Nome.

(907) 443-6104 Ken_Adkisson@nps.gov

There is still considerable pack ice north of the Seward Peninsula and Bering Strait, and many of the more northern communities are still engaged in marine mammal hunting (see photos below). However much of the waters south of Bering Strait are rapidly becoming ice free although there are still some areas of pack ice. Many residents are also hoping for a good summer of fishing.



Nome, Ak 05/28/2021

Photo by C, Johnson



Shishmaref, AK 05/27/2021

Photo by Curtis Nayokpuk

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

Since we are so far north, our commercial fishing seasons tend to trail behind those in the more southerly areas so that we currently are seeing very little activity. Therefore, we will begin this year's reports with snapshot summaries of the 2020 season followed by the 2021 season forecasts for a comparative starting point. As the season progresses and activity increases, we will add in new events.

Norton Sound District

2020 Season Summary:

2020 Commercial Salmon Fisheries

Poor runs of chum and coho salmon resulted in the poorest commercial salmon harvests since the record low harvests of the early 2000s. The sockeye salmon commercial harvest, although the sixth highest harvest on record is only a small portion of the overall harvest. The pink salmon run like recent years was again one of the greatest runs with near record escapements to record escapements at counting projects. However, there was little interest from the buyer in purchasing pink salmon. The king salmon run although lower than last year was improved compared to most runs in the 2010s when there were numerous subsistence fishing restrictions.

2020 Subsistence Salmon Fisheries

Subsistence salmon fishers in the Port Clarence District and Subdistricts 1–3 (Nome, Golovin, and Elim) were required to possess a subsistence permit for each household that fished in these locations. The permits identify the type of gear used and the bag limit and are specific to each body of water. On each permit, the permit holder records the catch in numbers of fish and by species for each day fished. If the subsistence fishers have filled their harvest limit in one river, they can fish in another river. This year, because of coronavirus restrictions, department staff did not visit villages to issue permits and subsistence permit applicants could apply online and print their permits, receive one at the Nome office, or call the Nome office to request a permit.

The only places where there are limits on subsistence salmon harvest are in the Nome Subdistrict, and Pilgrim River and Salmon Lake in the Port Clarence District.

Subsistence permits are important to management because they identify users and harvests, but the actual catch information cannot be compiled in most circumstances until well after the season when the permits are returned. In southern Norton Sound, villages are surveyed to estimate the subsistence harvest and likewise this information is not available until well after the season.

A seasonal employee who resides in Unalakleet will conduct surveys in that community while maintaining social distancing protocols. Surveys will be conducted via telephone for other southern Norton Sound communities.

2020 SEASON SUMMARY BY SUBDISTRICT

Nome - Subdistrict 1

This was the eighth consecutive season that commercial fishing was allowed since the mid-90s. There were 12 permit holders that fished in 2020 and that was more than the 7 permit holders that fished the two previous seasons. The salmon runs in Nome Subdistrict are usually much lower in numbers compared to other subdistricts but in 2020 the salmon runs were surprisingly better than elsewhere. The coho salmon

commercial harvest of 6,639 fish (Table 2) was the 3rd highest on record trailing the 2018 record catch of 9,080 fish and last year's catch of 7,832 fish. The sockeye salmon commercial harvest of 692 fish was the second highest on record and just below last year's record catch of 742 fish. The chum salmon commercial harvest of 7,098 fish was the 13th highest in history.

Golovin - Subdistrict 2

The chum salmon commercial harvest of 11,530 was less than one-half of last year and ranked 7th highest since fishing resumed in 2008. The coho salmon commercial harvest of 1,963 fish was 75% of last year and ranked 8th highest since 2008. There were 17 permit holders that fished in 2020, one less than the 18 permit holders that fished the last two years.

The Fish River tower was in operation for the seventh year, but high water obscured fish passage for most the season and less than three weeks of counting occurred. However, that short duration of counting did confirm the huge pink salmon run with two days having record counts of over 500,000 pink salmon daily and an escapement of 2.7 million for the limited counting period, High water prevented an aerial survey of the Niukluk River and Ophir Creek to determine if the coho salmon aerial survey goal had been reached.

Elim - Subdistrict 3

Commercial fishing was very limited compared to recent years. The chum salmon run was much poorer than expected and the coho salmon run was below average compared to the record runs in recent years. The salmon harvest was 3,538 fish (Table 2) and was less than 10% of the recent 5-year average of over 50,000 salmon harvested. The pink salmon run was well above average but there were no participants in the pink salmon directed fishing periods. The chum salmon commercial harvest of 853 fish was lowest in over 10 years and a fraction of the 21,000 fish average harvest of the previous 5-years. The coho salmon commercial harvest of 2,011 fish was less than 15% of the recent 5-year average.

The Kwiniuk River tower, which began in 1965, is the longest running escapement project in Norton Sound. Escapement counts were 408 king salmon, 4,953 chum salmon, 1,747,766 pink salmon, 87 sockeye salmon, and 5,373 coho salmon (Table 4). King salmon passage was above the escapement goal of 250 fish for the first time in 5 years, but the chum salmon passage was below the escapement goal range of 9,100-32,600 fish for the first time since 2016. Pink salmon escapement was the 5th highest in the 56-year project history. The escapement goal for coho salmon is an aerial survey goal of 650–1,300 fish and was likely met based on the tower count, but no survey was flown because of poor weather conditions and aircraft availability.

Norton Bay - Subdistrict 4

Commercial fishing was very limited and catches of chum and coho salmon were poor when fishing did occur. The commercial salmon harvest of 681 fish was the lowest in any year in the 29 years that commercial fishing did occur. The pink salmon run was well above average but there were no participants in the pink salmon directed fishing periods.

A counting tower on the Ungalik River was operated by Norton Sound Economic Development Corporation (NSEDC) for the second year. High water resulted in a late start to counting but the pink count was still nearly 1 million fish (Table 4). The Inglutalik River tower also operated by NSEDC did not begin operations until July 30 and the late start eliminated comparisons of counts in previous years of the 10-year project history.

Shaktoolik and Unalakleet - Subdistricts 5 and 6

Both the Shaktoolik and Unalakleet subdistricts share a common commercial fishing boundary and management actions typically encompass both subdistricts because salmon tend to intermingle and the harvest in one subdistrict affects the movement of fish in the adjacent subdistrict.

The salmon runs to Shaktoolik and Unalakleet subdistricts are usually the largest in Norton Sound and in most years, the Shaktoolik and Unalakleet combined harvest is well over half of the total Norton Sound commercial salmon harvest. However, in 2020 the salmon runs were very poor except for the king salmon run that was above average and the pink salmon run that was well above average. However, there was minimal fishing effort during the one directed pink salmon fishing period. Otherwise commercial fishing was limited to one 24-hour period per week and chum and coho salmon catches were well below average.

The Shaktoolik Subdistrict chum salmon commercial catch of 3, was the lowest since the early 2000s and the coho salmon commercial catch of 1,645 fish was the second lowest in over 40 years. Likewise, the Unalakleet Subdistrict chum salmon commercial catch of 2,642 fish was the lowest since the early 2000s and the coho salmon commercial catch of 2,141 fish was the second lowest in over 40 years. High water prevented the operation of the Unalakleet River floating weir and delayed the start of Shaktoolik and North River counting towers. The chum and coho salmon escapements were well below average and the pink salmon escapement was well above average. The king salmon escapement was average, but the North River king salmon escapement was below the low end of the escapement goal range and the late start to counting likely resulted in the lower king salmon count. No restrictions were taken on subsistence fishing and the normal king salmon fishing schedule occurred for the first time in several years and subsistence fishermen reported very good king salmon catches.

Port Clarence District Port Clarence District is the salmon district immediately to the northwest of the Norton Sound District and it has the largest run of sockeye salmon in

Norton Sound. However, this year the sockeye salmon run was below average compared to recent years. Sockeye salmon return to Salmon Lake via Pilgrim River which is easily accessible by a road from Nome. Permits have been required for subsistence salmon fishing in Pilgrim River since 1964. Each year, the subsistence catch seasonal limit starts at 25 sockeye salmon and often the department will raise the limit because of runs well above escapement needs. In 2020 the department did not raise the limit to 50 sockeye salmon until late in August because of an average run and concerns expressed by subsistence permit holders that had not yet reached the 25-sockeye salmon limit. Most of the subsistence harvest of sockeye salmon in the Pilgrim River has been by seine. The Pilgrim River weir project began operations in 2003 and except for pink salmon all escapement counts were below recent years. Because of a lack of staff, the project was pulled on August 13, the earliest on record. Cumulative escapement counts were 65 king, 5,423 chum, 103,411 pink, 13,578 sockeye and 189 coho salmon. This year's pink escapement was second only to last year's record count of 367,245 pink salmon. Although pink salmon have been the second highest salmon species harvested after sockeye salmon, there is little interest in pink salmon as harvests have only ranged from 10 to 593 fish since 2003.

2021 Salmon Outlook

Salmon outlooks and harvest projections for the 2021 salmon season are based on qualitative assessments of parent-year escapements, sibling relationships, subjective determinations of freshwater overwintering and ocean survival, and in the case of the commercial fishery, the projections of local market conditions. The department expects better coho and chum salmon runs in 2021 than last year if there is an average return of four-year-old fish. However, the runs are expected to be below the recent 5-year averages that had record coho runs and some of the best chum runs in over 35 years. The Chinook salmon run is expected like last year or slightly below average. The regular subsistence fishing schedule from mid-June until mid-July in Shaktoolik and Unalakleet Subdistricts will be in effect for Chinook salmon with no additional subsistence restrictions unless the run comes in poorer than expected. No commercial fishing for Chinook salmon is likely but incidentally caught Chinook salmon in commercial fisheries will be allowed to be sold in the gillnet fishery unless restricted by emergency order. Chinook salmon caught in the commercial purse seine fishery will not be allowed to be sold and the buyer

plans to donate Chinook salmon to the villages in the subdistrict where they are harvested. Chum salmon runs are expected to be below average, and the harvest is expected to be 70,000 to 120,000 fish. The department expects the pink salmon run to be above average for an odd-numbered year, but harvest will depend on buyer interest and could range from 25,000 to 75,000 fish. If there are pink salmon gillnet directed fishing periods and frequent seine fishing openings this year the harvest could increase as much as ten-fold. The department does have the authority to increase fishing net aggregate length from 100 fathoms to 200 fathoms if there were a pink salmon directed fishery. The coho salmon run is expected to be below average based on ocean survival conditions in recent years and the commercial harvest is expected to be 50,000 to 100,000 fish. In the Port Clarence District, the department expects the commercial fishery to remain closed because the in-river goal of 30,000 sockeye salmon at Pilgrim River is not expected to be reached.

Subsistence fishing closures in the Pilgrim River may occur and the department will limit sockeye salmon subsistence harvest to 25 fish initially and will increase or waive the limit if the run is better than expected.

2021 Salmon Fisheries Projections by Subdistrict

NOME SUBDISTRICT 1

The Subdistrict 1 (Nome) salmon run in 2021 is expected to be below average, but commercial fishing time targeting chum and coho salmon is expected. Since Tier II chum salmon subsistence fishing was suspended in 2006, the previous subdistrict-wide escapement goal range of 23,000 to 35,000 fish has been reached or exceeded in all years except in 2009. In the last five years the escapement has ranged from 31,000 to 124,000 chum salmon. Three rivers have chum salmon escapement goal ranges: Eldorado (4,400 to 14,200), Nome (1,600 to 5,300) and Snake (2,000 to 4,200). Last year was the first time the range was not met or exceeded in all three rivers in over five years because the Snake River did not reach the lower end of its escapement goal.

In marine waters, subsistence fishing is allowed 7 days a week prior to June 15 and after August 15. Likewise, in fresh waters, subsistence fishing is open 7 days a week prior to June 15 and after August 31. From June 15 through August 15 the marine waters of Nome Subdistrict, west of Cape Nome, will be open to set gillnet fishing from 6 p.m. Wednesday until 6 p.m. Monday. Marine waters east of Cape Nome will remain open 7 days a week throughout the season. Beginning June 15 through August 31, subsistence set gillnet fishing will be open in fresh waters from 6 p.m. Wednesday until 6 p.m. Monday. The fishing schedule listed above will be in effect unless reduced or closed by emergency order because of weaker than expected salmon runs. Dip nets and cast nets are

legal gear for harvesting salmon in Norton Sound and are allowed during the set gillnet fishing periods. Beach seining is allowed during set gillnet fishing periods from June 15 through August 15.

Stream-specific harvest limits are listed on the subsistence salmon fishing permits. There are no catch limits in marine waters. Permit catch limits for Nome Subdistrict and Port Clarence District streams are listed in Table 2.

The department will use the Eldorado weir counts as the primary indicator of chum salmon run strength in Nome Subdistrict east of Cape Nome. If chum salmon escapement begins to lag compared to historical run timing curves and indicates the escapement goal range will not be met, marine and river fishing periods may be reduced or suspended until the department switches to management to other salmon species. However, the Eldorado River chum salmon escapement is expected to be easily met in 2021 and daily escapement counts from the weir will be used to confirm that the run is tracking as expected. Aerial surveys will also be used to index escapement to the Bonanza, Flambeau and Sinuk rivers.

The department will use the Nome River and Snake River escapement counts as an indicator of chum salmon run strength in the Nome Subdistrict west of Cape Nome. If the Nome River and Snake River weir counts project that the chum salmon escapement goal range will not be reached, marine and freshwater subsistence fishing periods may be

restricted or suspended. However, both rivers are expected to reach the escapement goal ranges. The Cripple and Penny rivers are closed by regulation to subsistence chum salmon fishing. The Sinuk River is expected to reach sockeye salmon escapement goal range at Glacial Lake (800 to 1,600 by aerial survey).

Commercial fishing periods are expected in Nome Subdistrict for chum salmon and possibly pink salmon if there is buyer interest. Commercial fishing for coho salmon in August is also expected. Directed fishing periods for chum and coho salmon will have gear restricted to a maximum mesh size of 6 inches and for pink salmon to a maximum mesh size of 4 ½ inches.

GOLOVIN SUBDISTRICT 2

The chum run is expected to be below average with commercial fishing expected to begin in late June if run strength comes in as expected.

The Niukluk River tower project is no longer operational, but a counting tower project initiated by NSEDC has operated on the Fish River downstream of the confluence of the Niukluk River the last six years. If the Fish River project operates this year the department will use the counts as an index to compare with other salmon run assessments to determine if continued commercial fishing time is warranted.

If the Fish River project is unable to accurately enumerate the salmon run because of high water, then the chum salmon escapement counts in the adjacent Subdistrict 3 will be used as an indicator of the chum salmon run in Subdistrict 2 along with a peak aerial survey count if possible. By comparing Niukluk River tower chum salmon counts (1995-2012) with Kwiniuk River tower chum salmon counts of the same year there has been agreement between both rivers achieving and not achieving their respective escapement goals in 16 of 18 years. The department will also evaluate catch per unit of effort (CPUE), if there is commercial fishing, with historical commercial fishing periods during similar dates to determine if additional fishing time is warranted.

Both the Fish River tower site and the former Niukluk River tower site are much farther upstream than the adjacent Subdistrict 3 counting tower on Kwiniuk River. The department historically has used the counts from Kwiniuk River tower to determine early season chum salmon openings in Subdistrict 2. Further commercial chum salmon fishing opportunity after mid-July will be dependent on chum salmon escapement.

The pink salmon run should allow for commercial fishing periods in July if there is buyer interest and coho salmon commercial fishing periods are expected beginning in late July. Until mid-August coho commercial CPUE will be used to set commercial coho salmon fishing time. By mid-August, if the Fish River counting tower is operational, the department will determine additional fishing time based on coho salmon escapement as estimated by the counting tower. Also, the department plans to survey Niukluk River and Ophir Creek to determine if the aerial survey goal of 750 to 1,600 coho salmon will be reached. Directed fishing periods for chum and coho salmon will have gear restricted

to a maximum mesh size of 6 inches and for pink salmon to a maximum mesh size of 4 ½ inches.

ELIM SUBDISTRICT 3

Except for 2014, when hook and line subsistence fishing for Chinook salmon was closed, there have been no other subsistence restrictions in over 30 years in Subdistrict 3 (Elim). Subsistence permits are required when subsistence salmon fishing in the Elim Subdistrict and other than the possibility of inseason Chinook salmon restrictions no other restrictions are expected. Commercial fishing for chum salmon is expected, but the catch is expected to be below average. The pink salmon run is expected to be above average for an odd-numbered year, but buyer interest in pink salmon directed fishing periods is unknown. Commercial coho salmon openings are likely beginning the end of July and the run strength is expected to be below average. Directed fishing periods for chum and coho salmon will have gear restricted to a maximum mesh size of 6 inches and if a pink salmon directed fishing period occurs maximum mesh size will be restricted at 4 ½ inches.

NORTON BAY SUBDISTRICT 4

In the last decade there were record commercial harvests of pink (2012), chum (2013) and coho (2015) salmon in Subdistrict 4 (Norton Bay), but the second half of the last decade had very poor salmon harvests. Commercial salmon fishing harvests are expected to be below average for chum and coho salmon in 2021 based on recent runs. Since 2011 NSEDC has operated a counting tower on the Inglutalik River and the department plans to use salmon escapement counts from the project as an index to compare with other projects in 2020. If the project proves to be an accurate assessment over several generations of salmon escapement the department would be able to set tower-based escapement goals. NSEDC also plans to have a counting tower on Ungalik River for the third consecutive year.

No restrictions on subsistence fishing are expected this year.

SHAKTOOLIK AND UNALAKLEET SUBDISTRICTS 5 and 6

Subdistricts 5 (Shaktoolik) and 6 (Unalakleet) have been managed as one fishery because past studies have shown salmon bound for these subdistricts intermingle and that harvests in one subdistrict likely will affect the other. No commercial fishing is expected for Chinook salmon, but chum and pink salmon will be targeted commercially depending on market interest and gillnet fishing would likely occur beginning in July to allow more time for Chinook salmon to pass through the subdistricts.

Abundance of the Chinook salmon run will be monitored using passage estimates from the Unalakleet River weir and a counting tower on the North River, an important Chinook salmon spawning tributary in the Unalakleet River drainage. The escapement goal range for the North River is 1,200–2,600 Chinook salmon. However, for a Chinook salmon directed commercial fishery to occur, the department must project an escapement of a minimum of 1,900 Chinook salmon past the North River tower.

To protect Chinook salmon the subsistence fishing schedule in regulation will go into effect on June 15 in Subdistricts 5 and 6. The subsistence fishing schedule in the marine waters of Shaktoolik and Unalakleet Subdistricts is from 6:00 p.m. Monday until 6:00 p.m. Wednesday and from 6:00 p.m. Thursday until 6:00 p.m. Saturday. The schedule in the Unalakleet River is from 8:00 a.m. Monday until 8:00 p.m. Tuesday and from 8:00 a.m. Friday until 8:00 p.m. Saturday. If the Chinook salmon run is falls behind the amount necessary to reach the escapement goal the department may suspend the subsistence fishing schedule. Based on the recent 5-year trend in run performance and sibling relationships, the 2021 Chinook salmon run to southern Norton Sound is expected to be like 2020. If that occurs there is the possibility of reaching Chinook salmon escapement goal without the need for subsistence fishing closures. Regulations allow beach seines with a maximum mesh size of 4 ½ inches to be used from July 1 through August 10 to subsistence harvest salmon other than Chinook salmon seven days a week.

Chum salmon runs are expected to be below average and pink salmon runs are expected to be above average. Chum salmon commercial gillnet fishing periods will have gear restricted to a maximum mesh size of 6 inches and pink salmon directed fishing periods will have gear restricted to a maximum mesh size of 4 ½ inches. Commercial openings for chum and pink salmon will likely begin in July. Both gillnet and seine openings for pink salmon are likely because a new buyer has expressed interest in developing a commercial pink salmon fishery. Coho salmon commercial fishing openings are expected in late July and the run is expected to be below average. Department management for coho salmon season is considered to begin on July 25, or when coho salmon catches exceed chum salmon catches. Coho gear will be restricted to a maximum mesh size of 6 inches and the regular 48-hour periods will be in effect or extended if there are no escapement and buyer capacity concerns.

2021 commercial Herring Season Opened

The 2021 quota is over 5,000 tons of herring and Norton Sound Seafood Products (NSSP) is interested in buying 25 tons of herring bait. Herring have now been spotted in southern Norton Sound and the buyer has requested the department to open the herring fishery to commercial harvest. Because there is no concern with the amount that NSSP intends to buy the department will open the commercial fishing effective at 8 a.m. May 27 through June 30. Leaving the herring bait fishery open continuously allows the buyer to direct the fishing fleet to areas where harvest efficiency can be maximized.

To commercial fish in the herring fishery, permit holders must have a valid 2021 Norton Sound bait or sac roe commercial herring permit and an ADF&G vessel license. Permit holders also must have a valid government picture I.D.

Permit holders will need to check with NSSP at 907-624-3014 before fishing to make sure there is a market for their catch, and they must deliver their catch to the Unalakleet plant.

The ADF&G Unalakleet field office is open and permit holders can contact the ADF&G office at 907-624-3921 or the Nome office at 1-800-560-2271 or 443-5167 for

information needs.

ST. MICHAEL AND STEBBINS

Subsistence fishing is open 7 days per week in southern Norton Sound from Pt. Romanof to Black Point. Regulation does allow for the restriction of gillnet mesh size in the subsistence fisheries throughout Norton Sound if it is necessary to conserve Chinook salmon.

PORT CLARENCE DISTRICT

The sockeye salmon run is not expected to reach the inriver goal of 30,000 fish in Pilgrim River and therefore a commercial fishery targeting sockeye salmon could occur but is not expected because of the lack of a buyer.

Subsistence salmon fishing permits are required for the Port Clarence District, Pilgrim River drainage and Salmon Lake. Salmon Lake will only be opened by emergency order and permits are only available at the Fish and Game office in Nome. Catch limits are listed on subsistence permits and in Table 2.

The department expects the sockeye salmon run in 2021 to be lower than the 2020 run. The department will compare the 2021 sockeye salmon run with historical escapement counts at the Pilgrim River weir after the first week of July and decide if a closure may be necessary to reach the escapement goal range. If the sockeye salmon run comes in much better than expected, then the department would look to increase the subsistence sockeye salmon catch limit. The Pilgrim River escapement goal range is 6,800 to 36,000 sockeye salmon through the weir. No other subsistence fishing closures are expected in Port Clarence District.

KOTZEBUE DISTRICT

The Kotzebue District includes all the waters from Cape prince of Wales to point hope. The district is divided into three subdistricts. Subdistrict 2, located near the mouth of the Noatak River is closed to commercial fishing by regulation. Most commercial fishing occurs in Subdistrict 1 which is subdivided into six statistical areas to help managers determine catch locations. Chum salmon is the most abundant anadromous fish species although king salmon, pink salmon, silver salmon and sockeye salmon occur in lesser numbers as do Dolly Varden and sheefish.

The commercial salmon season was opened July 10 and closed on August 31 by regulation. The last day buyers bought fish was August 28. During July, commercial fishing was allowed six days a week, from 8 a.m. to 6 p.m., with no fishing on Saturday due to the lack of plane availability to ship the catch out on the following day, and to allow a one-day window for fish passage to provide for more opportunity to subsistence users. There were two buyers throughout the season, Copper River Seafoods and E & E Foods doing business as Pacific Star Seafoods.

Below average commercial catches compared to historical data, low catches at the Kobuk River test fish project near Kiana, and concerns expressed by Kobuk River village residents of poor subsistence catches resulted in the department limiting commercial fishing to 8 hours a day every other during the first three weeks of August. Commercial chum salmon daily catches were the highest the second week of August and at Kobuk River test fish project the third week of August. Commercial catches declined the third week of August and the buyers indicated they did not want to continue operations until the regulatory closure date. The department then allowed 8-hour commercial fishing periods for five days during the fourth week of August before the buyers ceased operations.

In the commercial salmon fishery, gear is limited to set nets with an aggregate of no more than 150 fathoms per permit holder. Permit holders generally operate with one end on or near shore and they also set in deeper channels from the mud flats farther out from shore. Most gear used in the district is 5-3/4 inch to 6-inch stretch mesh gillnet.

The commercial harvest of 149,808 chum salmon was the lowest since 2007 (Table 1). Additionally, 3 king salmon and 9 sockeye salmon were sold and 38 Chinook salmon, 71 sockeye salmon, 2 chum salmon, 996 pink salmon, 15 coho salmon, 606 Dolly Varden, 46 sheefish and 2 whitefish in the catch kept for personal use.

There were 68 permit holders that sold fish in 2020, much less than last year when 92 permit holders sold fish; this was the lowest participation since 2013 (Figure 1 and Table 1). The highest daily fishing effort occurred on August 11 when 47 permit holders fished.

Kotzebue Sound Salmon Season Summary October 2, 2020

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Kotzebue District

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2020 Season Summary

The commercial salmon season was opened July 10 and closed on August 31 by regulation. The last day buyers bought fish was August 28. During July, commercial fishing was allowed six days a week, from 8 a.m. to 6 p.m., with no fishing on Saturday due to the lack of plane availability to ship the catch out on the following day, and to allow a one-day window for fish passage to provide for more opportunity to subsistence users. There were two buyers throughout the season, Copper River Seafoods and E & E Foods doing business as Pacific Star Seafoods.

Below average commercial catches compared to historical data, low catches at the Kobuk River test fish project near Kiana, and concerns expressed by Kobuk River village residents of poor subsistence catches resulted in the department limiting commercial fishing to 8 hours a day every other during the first three weeks of August. Commercial chum salmon daily catches were the highest the second week of August and at Kobuk River test fish project the third week of August. Commercial catches declined the third week of August and the buyers indicated they did not want to continue operations until the regulatory closure date. The department then allowed 8-hour commercial fishing periods for five days during the fourth week of August before the buyers ceased operations.

2021 Season Projection

The outlook for the 2021 season is based on the parent-year escapements and returning age classes observed in the commercial fishery and at the Kobuk River test fishery last year. The 5-year-old component of the run is expected to be well below average based on the 4-year-old return in 2020. The 4-year-old component of the run is expected to be average to above average based on the 3-year-old return last year. The 3-year-old and 6-year-old age classes are much smaller components of the run and are expected to be average. The commercial harvest is expected to fall within the range of 200,000 to 300,000 chum salmon. Two major buyers are expected in July and a low volume value added buyer has expressed interest in buying fish in August.

2020 Summary A total of 1,204,780 pounds of chum salmon (average weight 8.0 lbs.) were sold at an average of \$0.45 per pound. This year's average price was higher than last year's price of \$0.39 per pound. The total exvessel value was \$542,308 and was down nearly two-thirds from last year and was first time since 2015 that the exvessel value was below one million dollars. The average historical exvessel value of fishery was \$711,302 without adjusting for inflation (Table 1).

ESCAPEMENT

Primary fishery management objectives are to provide adequate chum salmon escapement throughout the duration of the commercial fishery to ensure sustainability of the fishery and to provide for the subsistence priority. A test fishery conducted on the Kobuk River provides the only inseason escapement index of the Kotzebue Sound District. This year's chum salmon cumulative daily CPUE index at the department test fish project on Kobuk River near Kiana was 692 and was the 3rd lowest in the 28-year project history. No aerial surveys were conducted in 2020.

SUBSISTENCE SALMON FISHERY

No subsistence salmon surveys are scheduled. Subsistence harvesters reported difficulty in fishing this season because of high water conditions and that fishing for chum salmon on the Kobuk River was poor in July and improved in August. Subsistence harvesters on the Noatak River reported that fishing was good.

The commercial salmon season opened on July 10 and closed by regulation after August 31. The last day the buyers bought fish was August 30. Commercial fishing was allowed six days a week with no fishing on Saturday due to the lack of plane availability to ship the catch out on the following day, and to allow a one-day window for fish passage to provide for more opportunity to subsistence users. From July 10 through July 12, fishing was open for 10 hours daily; from July 14 through August 2, fishing was open for 12 hours daily; from August 4 through August 14, fishing was open for 14 hours daily; from August 16 through August 30, fishing was open 12 hours daily. During the season, the earliest fishing opened was at 8 a.m. and the latest fishing closed was at 10 p.m. Commercial fishing periods increased to 14 hours daily once a floating processor vessel arrived and restrictions to fishing time due to air cargo capacity were unnecessary.

In the commercial salmon fishery, gear is limited to set nets with an aggregate of no more than 150 fathoms per permit holder. Permit holders generally operate with one end on or near shore and they also set in deeper channels from the mud flats farther out from shore. Most gear used in the district is 5-3/4 inch to 6-inch stretch mesh gillnet.

There were three buyers during the season, Copper River Seafoods (CRS), Maniilaq dba Arctic Circle Wild Salmon and Pacific Star. CRS and Pacific Star were the buyers throughout the season. Maniilaq bought gilled and gutted chum salmon from July 22 until August 9. The commercial harvest of 493,295 chum salmon was the seventh highest harvest on record. In addition, 16 king salmon and 29 sockeye salmon were sold. No chum salmon were reported kept for personal use, but 151 Chinook salmon, 475 sockeye

salmon, 2,767 pink salmon, 111 coho salmon, 936 Dolly Varden, 191 sheefish, 16 whitefish and 1 pike were reported in the catch and kept for personal use.

The 2019 harvest was the fourth time in the last five years the harvest exceeded 400,000 chum salmon but was only the tenth time in history for a harvest that high. There were 93 permit holders that sold fish in 2019, slightly less than last year when 95 permit holders sold fish (Figure 1 and Table 1) and was the fifth highest permit holder participation in 25 years. The highest daily fishing effort occurred on July 29 when 61 permit holders fished.

A total of 4,004,727 pounds of chum salmon (average weight 8.1 lbs.) was sold at an average of \$0.38 per pound. This year's average price was 5% lower than the 2018 average price of \$0.40 per pound. The total exvessel value was \$1,538,976 and was down nearly one-third from last year but was only the fifth time since 1988 that the value was over one million dollars. The historical average exvessel value of fishery was \$713,912 without adjusting for inflation.

Primary fishery management objectives are to provide adequate chum salmon escapement throughout the duration of the commercial fishery to ensure sustainability of the fishery and to provide for the subsistence priority. A test fishery conducted on the Kobuk River provides the only inseason escapement index of the Kotzebue Sound District. This year's chum salmon cumulative daily CPUE index at the department test fish project on Kobuk River near Kiana was 1,508 and was the 11th highest in the 27-year project history. No aerial surveys were conducted in 2019.

No subsistence salmon surveys are scheduled. Subsistence harvesters reported difficulty in fishing this season because of high water conditions but that there were enough chum salmon in both the Kobuk River and Noatak River for subsistence needs.

2021 Salmon Season Outlook

2021 RUN OUTLOOK

The outlook for the 2021 season is based on the parent-year escapements and returning age classes observed in the commercial fishery and at the Kobuk River test fishery last year. The 5-year-old component of the run is expected to be well below average based on the 4-year-old return in 2020. The 4-year-old component of the run is expected to be average to above average based on the 3-year-old return last year. The 3-year-old and 6-year-old age classes are much smaller components of the run and are expected to be average. The commercial harvest is expected to fall within the range of 200,000 to 300,000 chum salmon. Two major buyers are expected in July and a low volume value added buyer has expressed interest in buying fish in August

Federal Subsistence Fisheries Regulations for the Kotzebue Area

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