



Fishing for Mat-Su Valley Coho Salmon

Coho Salmon in the Mat-Su Valley Area

Coho or silver salmon are found throughout the Cook Inlet and Matanuska-Susitna (Mat-Su) Valley areas. Excellent eating and well known for their fighting ability, coho salmon promise great sport fishing fun for anglers of all ages and experiences.

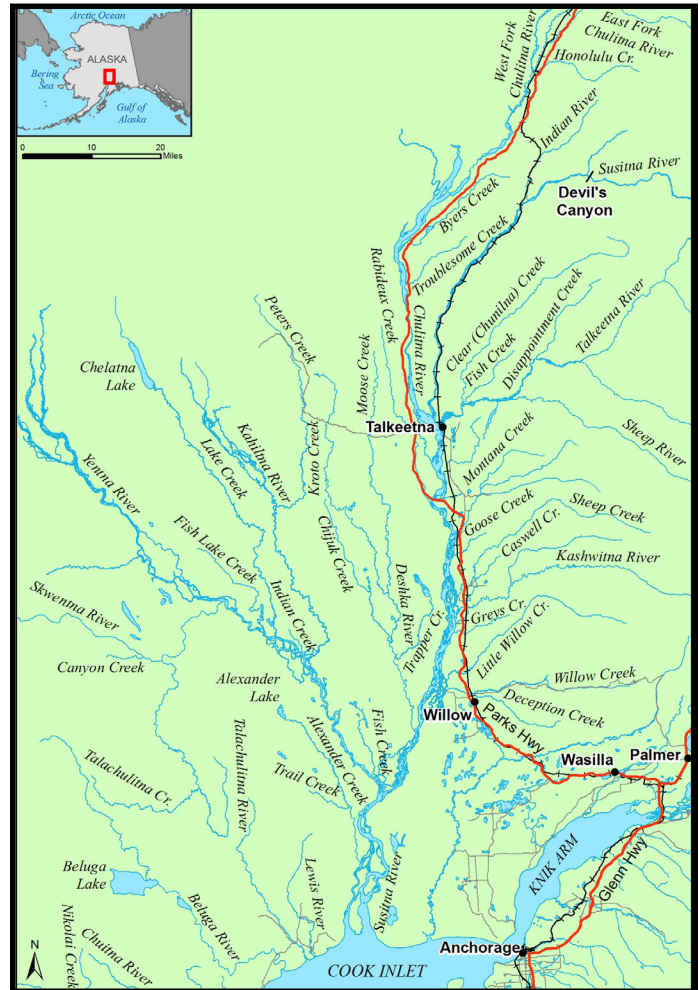
Coho salmon abundance varies widely from year to year. During years of plenty, up to a million coho salmon return to Cook Inlet streams. To measure run strength, the Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ADF&G) relies partly on catch numbers in sport and commercial fisheries. A few weirs are also in place to count escapements.

Immediately after entering freshwaters, coho salmon are very sensitive to hooking and handling, particularly when bait is used. A study conducted on the Little Susitna River concluded that 70 percent of 'ocean bright' coho salmon hooked and released when bait was used did not live to spawn. In part because of the results of this research, many waters have special regulations for retention and release of coho salmon. Please review the regulations in the current Southcentral Alaska Sport Fishing Regulations Summary booklet carefully before you head out fishing.



Managing Alaska's Fisheries

Every year ADF&G releases four sport fishing regulations booklets for the Northern, Southcentral, Southeast, and Southwest areas. Sport fishing regulations specific to the Knik Arm & Susitna area such as bag and possession



limits, seasons, or tackle restrictions can be found in the current Southcentral Alaska Sport Fishing Regulations Summary booklet.

Before you cast out your line, make sure you read all the regulations for the waters you are fishing. These booklets are free of charge and are available at ADF&G offices, wherever sport fishing licenses are sold, the ADF&G Mobile App, and online at www.adfg.alaska.gov under the Regulations tab. Don't forget to check for advisory announcements and emergency orders on the ADF&G website under the sport fishing tab. Select the Fishing Information link and then the Emergency Orders and Advisory Announcements tab. Once there anglers can





select the region and management area they intend to fish. ADF&G may issue an advisory announcement and emergency order to open, liberalize, close, or restrict any fishery at any time due to biological needs. In the event an advisory announcement and emergency order are issued, ADF&G attempts to release the documents a minimum of 24 to 48 hours before they become effective.

During the summer ADF&G posts weekly in-season fishing reports online. Anglers can find these under the Fishing Reports tab under the Fishing Information tab. ADF&G staff records these in-season fishing reports on the Palmer sport fishing hotline at (907) 746-6300. Anglers can also subscribe to receive the notifications via their email. Updates are also posted on the ADF&G - Sport Fishing Southcentral Alaska Facebook page. If you have any questions, please contact the Palmer ADF&G office at (907) 746-6300.



Sport Fishing Guides

Many charter services are available for the Mat-Su area. Some services are based out of Anchorage but the majority are located in Wasilla, Palmer, Willow, and Talkeetna. Charter services include everything from drop-off day trips to full-service lodging and guiding trips. Please contact the Mat-Su Visitor's Bureau at (907) 746-5000 for a list of local guides, charters, and lodges.

Run Timing

In northern Cook Inlet, coho salmon run from mid-July through October. Runs typically peak the last week of July through the end of August, depending on the location. In the Susitna River drainages, a few coho salmon enter after early September. After runs peak, coho salmon are spread throughout the Susitna and Knik River drainages. Anglers fishing later can usually catch dime bright coho salmon from less crowded fishing spots.

Methods and Strategies

What type of gear do you need to catch these acrobatic fighters? Many anglers use a medium weight spinning or bait-casting rod loaded with a 10-14 pound test high quality monofilament line. Slightly heavier line as high as 20 pound is suggested if you plan to fish in fast current.

Fly fishing anglers use a 7 or 8-weight rod about 9 feet in length. Fly fishing line should be a weight-forward, rapid-sinking line, which will get the fly quickly down to



the fish. A 6-foot leader made of 10 to 14 pound test monofilament will do. Where legal, many coho salmon anglers prefer bait, consisting of quarter-sized chunks of cured salmon eggs. Regulations concerning the use of bait vary from stream to stream. In some streams or sections of streams, unbaited, artificial lures or single-hook artificial lures are required year-round.

Under the right water and light conditions, brightly colored spoons and spinners can out-fish bait. Although many types of lures will catch a feisty coho salmon, pay special attention to the size and color of the lure. Many novice coho salmon anglers use lures intended for Chinook salmon, which are generally too large for coho

salmon. Stick with size 3 through 5 spinners and 1/2-ounce spoons. Red is more visible in silty water or near the surface, while greens and blues are more visible in clearer water and at greater depths. Small diving plugs intended for steelhead will also attract coho salmon.



The best bait hooks are size 1 - 1/0 single hooks. Most people simply attach a 1/2-ounce sinker about 24 to 36 inches above a quarter-sized chunk of cured salmon eggs, and let it rest on the bottom. The idea is that coho salmon will pick up the scent trail of the eggs and follow it to the baited hook. Some anglers also drift the eggs through fishing holes. Another highly productive method of bait fishing includes using a slip-bobber, which can present your bait to fish at different depths.

Coho salmon also strike flies. Black or purple Egg-sucking Leech patterns are hard to beat, especially those that include some sparkly material. Most of the top fly patterns for coho are dark with a bright attractor, but egg patterns can also be effective. The top five coho patterns are Electric Egg-Sucking Leech (black & purple with pink head); the Marabou Popsicle (black, purple & brown); Bunny Leech (black or purple with pink head); Dr. Bill's Spin Tail (dark colors); and the Hairball Leech (dark colors).

Knik Arm Drainages

There are several coho salmon streams throughout the Knik Arm drainage, with the Little Susitna River being the most popular destination. These streams are easily accessible on foot and without a boat or airplane; however, many anglers still choose to use boats to escape crowds along the streambanks and to fish in more remote areas. A majority of the fishing takes place in the Palmer



Hayflats State Game Refuge, a 45-mile complex of forest, wetlands, tidal sloughs, lakes, and tide flats encompassing the mouths of the Knik and Matanuska rivers.

Each year, anglers spend more than 4,500 angler-days fishing for coho and sockeye salmon on Cottonwood Creek, Wasilla Creek, and Rabbit Slough. There are three main access points to these locations. Off the Glenn Highway, boats can be launched at the Knik River bridge. There is boat and foot access at Rabbit Slough, a tributary of Wasilla Creek. Access to Cottonwood Creek is located off Hayfield Road at the southwest end of Fairview Loop Road and provides for canoe, foot, and limited off-road vehicle access. Visitors to the refuge should be aware that there are seasonal restrictions regarding off-road use of motorized vehicles, boats, and airplanes. For additional information, please contact the Palmer ADF&G office.

Coho Salmon in the Knik Arm Drainages

Coho salmon generally arrive by late July, and continue their run through September. There are lots of smaller fishing areas within the Knik Arm drainages; in fact, just about any place where clear waters mixes with the Knik or Matanuska rivers you will find a few coho salmon, generally during August. The average weight of Knik Arm coho salmon, excluding those of Little Susitna River origin, is just under six pounds.

Eklutna Tailrace

The Eklutna Tailrace is approximately 34 miles north of Anchorage, near mile 3.5 of the Old Glenn Highway. The sport fishery is confined to the 1/2-mile long Tailrace, which extends from the Old Glenn Highway down to the Knik River, to all waters within a 1/2-mile radius of its confluence with the Knik River, and to an ADF&G marker located 2 miles downstream of the confluence, fishing for coho salmon is open year-round.

The Eklutna Tailrace is an enhanced or terminal fishery meaning it is supported by coho salmon smolt reared and released by the William Jack Hernandez Sport Fish

Hatchery. A few native coho salmon from the Knik or Matanuska rivers stocks may also be found at the tailrace. The Eklutna Tailrace is not tidally influenced. Chinook, sockeye, and chum salmon can also be found in the Eklutna Tailrace waters.

Eklutna Tailrace Youth-Only Coho Salmon Fishery



On the third Saturday in August, from 6:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. a section of the Eklutna Tailrace is the site of a Youth-Only Fishery for coho salmon. During the Youth-Only Fishery, only anglers 15 years old and younger may fish for coho salmon from the confluence with the Knik River upstream to the pedestrian bridge. Sections dedicated to this Youth-Only Fishery are closed to anglers aged 16 years and up during this time including catch and release, but the remainder of the Tailrace will be open to fishing for anglers of all ages.

The bag limit for the coho Youth-Only Fishery is three coho salmon per day, and three in possession. Bait and multiple hooks are allowed. Snagging is not allowed. People age 16 and older are encouraged to help the young anglers but remember these are Youth-Only Fisheries for anglers under 16 years old, and they must set the hook.

Eklutna Tailrace Access

From Anchorage drive north on the Glenn Highway and take the Old Glenn Highway exit. Turn right at the stop sign and follow the winding road. The Eklutna Tailrace is located at mile 3.5 of the Old Glenn Highway on the left. The recently-improved access site includes a paved parking lot, wheelchair-accessible paved trails, paved foot trails, a foot bridge, public use toilets, and dumpsters.

Wasilla Creek/Rabbit Slough

Access is located at mile 35 of the Glenn Highway, just north of the Alaska Railroad crossing. Follow the signs along the frontage road to the public access road leading to the slough. There are seasonal restrictions on motorboat use at this location. Salmon fishing is only allowed from the mouth of Wasilla Creek/Rabbit Slough upstream to the Alaska Railroad bridge. Please review the Wasilla Creek regulations under the Knik Arm area in the current Southcentral Alaska Sport Fishing Regulations Summary booklet.

Cottonwood Creek

Public access is off the Fairview Loop Road a few miles from its intersection with the Knik-Goose Bay Road. Look for a gravel road on the right side of the road at a sharp 90-degree corner; this is Hayfield Road. Turn right and watch for a brown sign directing you to a dirt road on the left. This road leads to a parking area on the Palmer Hayflats State Game Refuge near the mouth of Cottonwood Creek.

Most anglers fish this intertidal section about one to two hours before high tide. This section has special fishing regulations, be sure to consult the regulations before fishing here.

Fish Creek

Fish Creek is located at mile 14 of the Knik-Goose Bay Road from Wasilla. The best fishing is where the clear creek and the muddy Cook Inlet waters meet. Again, most anglers fish the incoming tide. Be careful when fishing near the mouth of Fish Creek. The Knik Arm tide comes in swiftly and it is possible to be trapped by sticky mud and rising water. Fish Creek has special regulations including when the creek is open and closed to fishing, and a later season start date.



Fish Creek Youth-Only Coho Salmon Fishery

On the first Saturday and Sunday in August, from 5:00 a.m. to 10:00 p.m. a section of Fish Creek is the site of a Youth-Only Fishery for salmon. During the Youth-Only Fishery, only anglers 15 years old and younger may fish for salmon, other than king salmon, from the mouth of Fish Creek upstream to an ADF&G marker ¼ mile upstream from the Knik-Goose Bay Road. The section dedicated to this Youth-Only Fishery are closed to anglers 16 years and up during this time, including catch-and-release.

The bag limit for the Youth-Only Fishery is three salmon per day, and three in possession of which only two salmon per day, two in possession may be coho salmon. Chinook salmon may not be targeted or retained. Bait and multiple hooks are allowed. Snagging is not allowed. People age 16 and older are encouraged to help the young anglers, but remember that these are Youth-Only Fisheries for anglers under 16 years-old, and they must set the hook.

Jim Creek

Located near Palmer, Jim Creek drains a wetland of shallow lakes then enters the Knik River about 10 miles upstream from the saltwaters. These waters provide the latest fishable run of coho salmon in the Mat-Su Valley, with coho salmon available from late July through freeze-up in late October to November. Sockeye salmon and a few chum salmon are also present in Jim Creek. Anglers can reach Jim Creek by taking the Old Glenn Highway to Plumley Road, which is near Bodenbergt Butte. Follow Plumley Road to Caudill Road and take a right. Drive down Caudill Road for a mile to a large parking area on the left. From here, follow a gravel road for about two miles to the mouth of Jim Creek. A word of caution, on warm days the nearby Knik Glacier melts rapidly and swells the shallow Knik River to flood stage. It is possible to become marooned on a temporary island or return to find your vehicle underwater. When the water is high, the fishing success for coho salmon declines drastically.

Coho Salmon in Little Susitna River

The Little Susitna River produces a large population of coho salmon in Alaska. The 'Little Su,' as it is locally known, has 70 river miles of prime coho salmon fishing from its mouth upstream to the Parks Highway bridge at mile 58 in Houston.

Little Susitna River Access

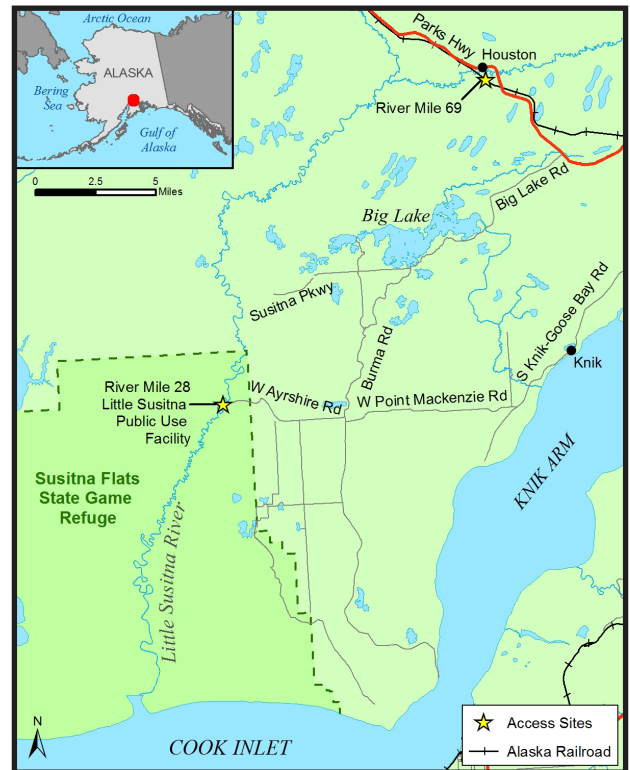
The Little Susitna wanders through part of the Susitna Flats State Game Refuge, over 300,000 acres of prime waterfowl, moose, coyote, wolf, and bear habitat. Access to the refuge is managed by ADF&G for the protection of fish and wildlife, their habitats, and public use of the area. There are three primary ways to access the Little Su. Experienced boaters can access the intertidal reaches of the Little Susitna River by launching from the Port of Anchorage and crossing Cook Inlet. Boaters are warned to be cautious of this access point as Northern Cook Inlet can have up to 30-foot tides and strong winds. If you are experienced and have a properly-equipped 20-foot or longer boat, or have a saltwater-capable inflatable, crossing the inlet is an efficient way to reach the mouth of the Little Susitna River.

Remember to enter and exit the river's mouth during the hours of high tide. When reading the tide book make certain that you adjust for the difference in time that the high tide arrives at Anchorage and then at the mouth of the Little Su. If the river is running high, power boats

can sometimes travel from the mouth up to the Parks Highway bridge. During low water, however, most power boats travel up only as far as river mile 28.

The second access site, the Little Susitna Public Use Facility boat launch and campground, is the most popular site for boat anglers, as well as those who don't have a boat or don't want to risk the strong tides of Cook Inlet. To reach the facility, drive to Wasilla, then turn southwest on Knik-Goose Bay Road. After about 18 miles, turn right onto Point Mackenzie Road. Turn right at the 'T' and follow the blue boat launch signs.

The third access site is at mile 58 of the Parks Highway, near the community of Houston. Many anglers streambank fish here and anglers also launch rafts and canoes at the bridge and then take out at the Little Susitna



Public Use Facility. The scenic 42-mile float trip to the facility takes two to three days. There are charters and guides that operate out of Wasilla, Willow, and Houston. The Houston area also has a large private campground and other services.

Coho Fishing in the Little Susitna River

Productive fishing for coho salmon usually begins mid-July through September. ADF&G tagging studies indicate that coho salmon migrate slowly up the Little Su and remain available to the fishery for about four weeks. Fishing is generally good in the lower river during the run's first few weeks. Anglers can also fish from shore in the Houston area downstream of the Parks Highway bridge. Remember coho salmon fishing is closed upstream of the bridge. Typically coho salmon arrive in the Houston area by mid-August and remain plentiful through mid-September.

Eastside Drainages

Eastside Susitna River drainages include Willow Creek, Little Willow Creek, Grey's Creek, Kashwitna River, Caswell Creek, Sheep Creek, Goose Creek, Montana Creek, Sunshine Creek, Rabideux Creek, Talkeetna River, Fish Creek, Clear Creek, and Chulitna River. Coho salmon typically show up in late July and fishing is good through late August.

Access to the Eastside Fisheries - Road Accessible

If you don't have a boat, Eastside Susitna waters that cross the Parks Highway or the Talkeetna Spur Road offer the best opportunity for shore based anglers. If you're in good hiking condition, the Alaska Railroad 'whistle stop' service provides relatively inexpensive access to the Susitna River coho salmon fisheries north of Talkeetna. You can find the whistle stop schedule on the Alaska Railroad webpage www.alaskarailroad.com.



If you have a boat or a raft, you have your choice of four access sites along the Parks Highway to access these waters. You can access via Dshka Landing, Susitna Landing at the mouth of the Kashwitna River, the bridge crossing the Susitna River at mile 104 of the Parks Highway, and Talkeetna Landing in Talkeetna. Aside from the Parks Highway bridge, there are fees charged to launch your boat or raft from the other three access sites.

If you operate a jet boat or have a larger boat, Susitna Landing, Dshka Landing, and Talkeetna Landing are your best bets; not only because of the excellent launching facilities available for larger boats but also because you can access the main channel of the Susitna River directly from these sites.

Dshka Landing is located off the Willow Creek Parkway at Parks Highway mile 71.3. Susitna Landing is located at Parks Highway mile 79. There is also bank fishing and handicapped access. Talkeetna Landing is close to downtown Talkeetna, near the confluence of the Talkeetna, Chulitna, and Susitna rivers. The launch site was initially developed by the community of Talkeetna for public use, and has been upgraded with federal aid from Sport Fish Restoration funds.

The Parks Highway mile 104 'boat launch' is basically an unmaintained gravel bar with a road approach. The access road starts from the small state campground on the southeast side of the bridge, then continues through private land to the river. It can be extremely hazardous at high water levels.

Willow Creek

Located at mile 71.3 of the Parks Highway, Willow Creek offers access at the state campground at its mouth. Many anglers fish the mouth, though coho salmon are found throughout the river as far as Deception Creek. The best time to fish Willow Creek is late July through early August.

Kashwitna River

This river crosses at mile 83.1 of the Parks Highway. This is a glacial system, and is cloudy in midsummer and during rains. Glacial melt slows in fall, water levels drop and clarity improves, as does coho salmon fishing. Susitna Landing offers a boat launch with camping facilities and excellent handicap access at the mouth of the Kashwitna River. Many fishing guides and charters also use Susitna Landing as their launch site.

Sheep Creek

The mouth of Sheep Creek is reached by driving west on Resolute Avenue located at mile 86.3 of the Parks Highway. A short unpaved trail from the parking area leads to the confluence of Sheep Creek and Susitna River. Coho salmon can arrive as early as late July, but fishing improves in early August.

Montana Creek

Located at mile 96.5 of the Parks Highway, Montana Creek is a popular coho salmon fishing spot. Coho salmon provide good action here by early August. Camping and RV parking is available in both privately-operated and State Park campgrounds at the highway bridge.



Rabideux Creek

Access to the mouth of Rabideux is just north of where the Parks Highway crosses the Susitna River at mile 105. When the Susitna River is running high, water often floods the road to Rabideux Creek. When this happens,

an alternative route located at mile 105.4 of the Parks Highway from a turnout may be used. Rabideux Creek crosses the Parks Highway at mile 105.5. A large hole located downstream of the culverts, within the road right-of-way, typically provides fair coho salmon fishing. Fishable numbers of coho salmon may be in the creek even after the Labor Day weekend.

Sunshine Creek

Access to the mouth of Sunshine Creek is by a gravel road located at mile 102.5 of the Parks Highway. The Mat-Su Borough maintains a parking area near the mouth of the creek. Typically coho salmon arrive at this creek by mid-August.

Access to the Eastside Fisheries - Boat

Little Willow Creek

Access is located at mile 74.8 of the Parks Highway immediately adjacent to the Parks Highway bridge. There are no facilities at Little Willow Creek, and the property outside the road right-of-way along that stream is privately-owned. Typically coho salmon arrive at the Parks Highway bridge by mid-August.

Grey's Creek

Grey's Creek crosses the Parks Highway at mile 81.8. Outside the road's right-of-way, the shoreline is private property, and there is no public shoreline access to the mouth from the Parks Highway bridge. Access to the mouth is by boat only and you can launch a boat from one of the previous described facilities. The mouth of Grey's Creek can provide good coho salmon fishing in August.

Caswell Creek

The mouth of Caswell Creek can provide an excellent coho salmon fishing spot. A large gravel turnout at mile 84 begins the 1/2-mile gravel access road to the mouth and a primitive campground with limited public restrooms and trash service.



Upriver on the Big Susitna River

Roughly 54 miles of Susitna River separates Talkeetna from the dangerous waters of Devil's Canyon. These 54 miles offer the skilled river boater some exciting water and great fishing. This reach of river requires a moderately powerful jet boat and the experience to operate in 10-mile-per-hour currents and three to five-foot waves. These skills will allow you to access the mouths of Portage Creek and Indian River. It is not advised that anglers travel beyond Portage Creek. Indian River and Portage Creek typically offer fair coho salmon fishing in mid- to late-August.

Chulitna River

Continuing north on the Parks Highway anglers will find Troublesome Creek, Byers Creek, Honolulu Creek, and the east and middle forks of the Chulitna River. There are several highway pullouts to access these little-fished streams. After swimming upriver for over 100 miles, coho salmon typically arrive in these waters between mid-August to September.

Talkeetna River

A boat is recommended for coho salmon fishing on the Talkeetna River. The boat launch located at mile 14 of the Talkeetna Spur Road is a popular jumping off spot for both guided and non-guided anglers. Although not as large or swift as the Susitna River, the Talkeetna River also requires caution when navigating its many snags, boulders, and shoals. Typically coho salmon fishing is good from mid-August through early September.

It's about a 15-minute boat ride upstream from the boat launch to Clear Creek, probably the most popular and easily reached Talkeetna River tributary. Lower Fish Creek also provides some angling opportunity. Fish Creek has special fishing regulations, including no bait and one single-hook allowed. Fishing is typically best in mid- to late August.

Coho Salmon Fishing in Westside Tributaries

Westside Susitna River drainages that support coho salmon are Deshka River, Alexander Creek, Lake Creek, Talachulitna River, and a myriad of small streams where clear water mixes with the Susitna, Yentna, or Skwentna rivers. These coho salmon are early-run stocks and

typically peak in the first week of August. The migration into the Yentna River drainage normally peaks the last week of July. Generally, the closer the drainage is to saltwater, the earlier coho salmon arrive. The average size of Deshka River coho salmon is about 22 inches long.

Access to the Westside Fisheries - Road Accessible

Moose, Kroto, and Peters creeks are accessible from Petersville Road located at mile 114.8 of the Parks Highway. Anglers looking for late-season action will find that coho salmon typically arrive about mid-August this far upstream, and have more color than those caught lower in the Susitna and Yentna rivers drainages.

Moose and Kroto creeks are tributaries of the Deshka River. Peters Creek is a tributary of the Kahiltna River which flows into the Yentna River, and then into the Susitna River. There are small camping areas near each creek, and limited services along the Petersville Road. The mouth of Peters Creek is also accessible by trail from Shulin Lake, which is a popular floatplane landing spot.

Fishing in Remote Sustina Fisheries

Alexander Creek flows directly into the Susitna River at river mile 10 upstream from Cook Inlet. It's not a big stream, but it is usually boatable by a jet-equipped river boat as far upstream as Trail Creek which is about 14 creek miles. The Yentna River enters the Susitna River from the west, approximately 30 river miles upstream from Cook Inlet. This river system drains the high peaks of the Alaska Range from Denali to Rainy Pass.

The mouth of Lake Creek can be fished from a boat or shore. Boat rentals are available from local lodges or air charter services, but it is advisable to make reservations ahead of time. Hiking up Lake Creek is tough. Few people get very far, so boating is the preferred choice. Lake Creek is shallow, rocky, and fast and there are braided channels and fallen trees. Only experienced boaters should attempt Lake Creek with extreme caution, and only in a light, nimble jet boat, for example an 18-foot boat with a 40 to 50-horsepower jet outboard. Even with this suggested rig, because of the current, sweepers, and rocks, boaters are limited to three to five miles of the creek. Above the five creek miles, Lake Creek becomes hazardous and hard on your valuable equipment.

Lake Creek can also be an exciting float trip, but it is not recommended for beginners. There are stretches of Class III waters, so don't overload your raft. Use at least a 12 or 13-foot self bailing raft with a rowing frame, and tie down your gear. Start in Chelatna Lake and plan on at least four to five days to complete the trip. There are also private guides offering float trips.

Bulchitna Lake, located about two miles upstream of Lake Creek's confluence with the Yentna River, offers an alternative to the fly-in angler who wants to hike to excellent fishing. Lake Creek is especially fast in the

Bulchitna area, so bring heavier gear, and load up with at least 15-pound line if you want to keep one of the 8 to 12-pound coho salmon.

The Talachulitna River is known for its quality rainbow trout and salmon fishing. The Talachulitna River is about 15 river miles upstream of the Skwentna River, and typically has coho salmon by early August. You can boat up from the Skwentna River, but be careful. The Skwentna River is a very fast, braided, glacial river with many deadfalls and overhanging trees. The mouth of the Talachulitna River is not a large area. If water conditions are right, only four to six boats can fish the confluence without compromising each other. Typically coho salmon fishing in this area can be excellent.

If you want to float the Talachulitna River for coho salmon, wait until at least August 10. Few coho salmon will be in the upper reaches by that time, but the rainbow trout and Arctic grayling fishing should be excellent. The Talachulitna River is a five to seven-day float trip, if you choose to float the entire river from Judd Lake to the Skwentna River confluence. The upper third is often shallow, and it is occasionally necessary to walk your raft and make short portages. During the high water season, this section of the river can be hazardous, as sweepers are abundant. Anglers have died as a result of rafts being pinned against or forced under sweepers.

A spillway through a short canyon is located about halfway down the Talachulitna River from its confluence with Talachulitna Creek. It should provide anglers with some excitement but unless you have an overloaded raft or if the river is very high, you shouldn't have any major problems.

Coho Salmon Fishing in Westside Susitna

If you plan to use your own boat to gain access to westside Susitna River coho salmon, you can launch from one of the access sites described in the eastside Susitna River section. Or you can launch at the Port of Anchorage and cross Northern Cook Inlet to the mouth of the Susitna River then head upstream. Just remember to enter and exit the river's mouth during the hours of high tide. When reading the tide book make sure you are adjusting for the difference in time the high tide arrives in Anchorage and then the mouth of the Susitna River.

Small plane access to westside Susitna River coho salmon fisheries is quite good. However, even for the experienced pilot, tricycle gear is not recommended. The only developed and maintained airport in the area is located in the community of Skwentna and the 2,500-foot-long runway is not monitored. Once you land at Skwentna, you will find a roadhouse offering guide services, rooms, meals, and a post office. To find coho salmon from Skwentna you must have access to a boat.

Other than the Skwentna airport, unless you have a properly-equipped wheel plane and are familiar with

gravel bar landings, a float plane is your best option. Float planes can access the mouths of most tributary streams, many of the lakes adjacent to the rivers, or the rivers themselves. Call an air charter operator in Anchorage's Lake Hood or Merrill Field and ask where they land. They may not give out any 'secret spots,' but in the interest of safety they will tell you where the traditional landing areas are.

West Cook Inlet Drainages

The west Cook Inlet area consists of all waters draining into the west side of Cook Inlet between the Susitna River and Cape Douglas (excluding the Susitna River), including Kalgin Island. West Cook Inlet offers some of the finest coho salmon fishing around. Since these streams



are accessible only by small plane or boat, anglers looking for a less crowded coho salmon experience might want to try one of the air taxi or guide services leaving from Anchorage's Lake Hood or Merrill Field.

As with any remote fishery, public access and services are limited and specific knowledge of the area is often the difference between having a successful trip and a bad experience.

Access to the Westside Fisheries - Boat or Plane

The west Cook Inlet area is not linked by road to Southcentral Alaska's highway system. There are a number of Merrill Field air taxi operators that run regularly scheduled flights to the area. Once you arrive in the area you will find a well-developed road system, and this is the key to reaching much of the available fishing. Once servicing oil and gas exploration and the timber industry, these roads are now largely unused and unmaintained. Even though landing strips were also constructed, and you may find some maps with landing strips indicated, with a couple of exceptions, these landings areas are now privately-owned and not available to the public.

Once on the ground you may still have to hire transportation, but the cost of a shuttle to the fishing holes is usually reasonable. Wheel-plane access to a few of the streams is quite good, using the old road as a runway. The oil and gas industry is still very active in the Beluga area, so be careful to avoid their work sites and watch out for equipment on the roads.

If you plan to use a boat to gain access, you will be faced with a number of significant logistical challenges. Realistically, boats are not practical in this area. Crossing northern Cook Inlet with its 30-foot tides and frequent high winds can be difficult. If you get into either the Chakachatna-McArthur or Beluga rivers, you won't go very far without a jet drive.

The Beluga, Lewis, and Theodore Rivers all wander through part of the Susitna Flats State Game Refuge. The lower reaches of the Chakachatna-McArthur River flows through the Trading Bay State Game Refuge. The Beluga River is glacial and not too productive for coho salmon, but several of its clear water tributaries are excellent producers. Coho salmon are found in Coal, Drill, Bishop, Coffee, Olsen, and Pretty Creeks from mid-July through mid-September.

The Theodore and Lewis rivers are accessible by plane, and once on the ground, by a gravel road system connecting with the Beluga landing strip. Coho salmon are present from mid-July through mid-September. Further south along the west Cook Inlet shoreline, anglers will find good coho salmon fishing in the Kustatan and McArthur rivers, Polly Creek, Cannery Creek, Wolverine Creek which is a drainage of the Big River Lakes, and Silver Salmon Creek. These streams are only accessible by airplane.



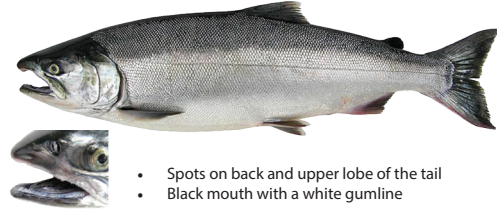
Pacific Salmon Identification

Chinook (king) Salmon



- Spots on back and both lobes of the tail
- Black mouth with a black gumline

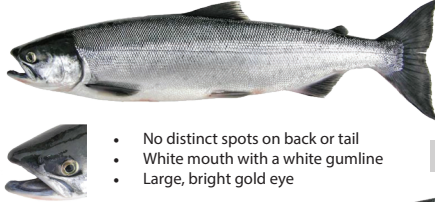
Coho (silver) Salmon



- Spots on back and upper lobe of the tail
- Black mouth with a white gumline

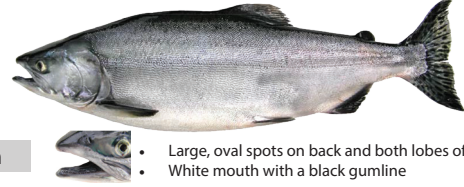
Marine Phase

Sockeye (red) Salmon



- No distinct spots on back or tail
- White mouth with a white gumline
- Large, bright gold eye

Pink (humpy) Salmon



- Large, oval spots on back and both lobes of tail
- White mouth with a black gumline

Chum (dog) Salmon



- No spots; calico bands on body (often faint in salt water)
- White mouth with a white gumline

Photographs courtesy of Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife.

Chinook (king) Salmon



- Spawning adults turn maroon or olive brown
- Spots on body and both lobes of the tail remain

Coho (silver) Salmon



- Males develop pronounced "kype" (hooked-nose)
- Spots on back and upper lobe of the tail remain
- Male and female turn dark maroon and have dark backs

Spawning Phase

Sockeye (red) Salmon



- Spawning adults develop dull-green heads
- Males develop hump on back
- Both female and male turn red

Pink (humpy) Salmon



- Spawners turn dull gray on their backs and upper sides
- Lower sides appear cream color or white
- Large, oval spots on back and both lobes of tail remain

Chum (dog) Salmon



- Spawners develop pronounced, vertical calico bands on sides
- Males exhibit large, canine-like teeth

Scan the QR code for Southcentral sport fishing regulations.

Find Ship Creek regulations under the "Anchorage Box!"



Photographs by the Alaska Department of Fish and Game.



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Except on state holidays



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