



FISHING IN WESTERN PRINCE WILLIAM SOUND

Prince William Sound

Prince William Sound (PWS) is known for its spectacular coastal scenery and ample saltwater fishing opportunities. PWS provides anglers a full range of species to target including all five Pacific salmon species, halibut, rockfish, lingcod, sharks, steelhead trout, rainbow trout, cutthroat trout, and Dolly Varden. It is also home to a popular shrimp fishery during the summer and fall months. Coho and pink salmon are the most abundant salmon species present in PWS waters. Accessible roadside fishing opportunities are limited in PWS, most of the fisheries are accessible only by boat or plane.

The PWS Management Area includes all coastal marine waters within 200 miles of shore from Cape Fairfield to Cape Suckling. All freshwater drainages that flow in PWS from Cape Fairfield to Cape Suckling, excluding the Copper River drainage upstream of a line crossing the Copper River between the south bank of the confluence of Haley Creek and the south bank of the confluence of Canyon Creek in Wood's Canyon. The Western PWS area includes the community of Whittier and the villages of Chenega and Tatitlek. The Alaska Marine Highway ferry system regularly



serves Whittier, and will “whistle stop” at Chenega and Tatitlek. This publication will cover Western PWS fisheries from Whittier to Unakwik Inlet.

Fishery Management

The Division of Sport Fish is charged with the management of Alaska's sport fisheries under the sustainable yield principle, through regulations and management plans adopted by the Alaska Board of Fisheries. Enforcement of fishing regulations is primarily the responsibility of the Alaska Department of Public Safety, State Troopers' Bureau of Wildlife Enforcement. Management of PWS sport fisheries is based out of the Anchorage office, with an area office located in Cordova that is staffed seasonally.

At times the Division issues in-season regulatory changes, called Emergency Orders, primarily in response to under- or over-abundance of fish. Emergency Orders and their respective News Releases are available on the ADF&G website. Select the “Sport Fishing” webpage and under “Quick Links” select “News Releases/EOS.” After posting online, the Division sends Emergency Orders to newspapers, television and radio stations, and other agencies. Anglers may also subscribe to receive email notifications regarding sport fishing closures and liberalizations. ADF&G also maintains two hotline





recordings during the fishing season. Anglers can call (907) 267-2516 (updated by the Division of Sport Fish) or (907) 424-7535 (updated by the Division of Commercial Fish). Anglers may also contact the ADF&G Anchorage office at (907) 267-2218 or the ADF&G Cordova office at (907) 424-3212.

There is an active commercial fishery in PWS, so please be careful around their boats and nets. The Division of Commercial Fisheries offers a wealth of information on their webpage, including in-season harvest information. For additional information, please visit the ADF&G website at www.adfg.alaska.gov and select the “Commercial Fishing” webpage. Anglers may also contact the ADF&G Commercial Fish Central Region office at (907) 267-2105. In addition, there are state and private nonprofit hatcheries that rear salmon in PWS that enhance commercial, sport, subsistence, and personal use fisheries.

Weir Counts

Both the Division of Commercial Fisheries and the Division of Sport Fish maintain fish weirs and sonar projects in order to help with in-season management. In addition, private non-profit hatcheries may have weir projects set up. When available, weir counts and sonar estimates can be found on the ADF&G Sport Fish webpage under the “Fish Count” tab.

Fishing Regulations

PWS is such a vast area and it has sport fishing regulations affecting bag and possession limits, tackle, areas open to fishing, and hours open to fishing. Please review the current Southcentral Sport Fishing Regulations Summary booklet before you go fishing. Don’t forget to read the PWS “General Regulations,” “Fresh Water Special Regulations,” and “Salt Water Special Regulations” sections. Anglers can either pick up a hardcopy of the Southcentral regulations booklets at local ADF&G offices, sporting good stores, or review it online on the ADF&G website. Be sure you have the current years sport fishing license or ADF&G Permanent ID Card in your possession. Also, anglers need to purchase a King Salmon stamp to fish for king salmon (exceptions are listed in the regulation booklet). Licenses and stamps can be purchased at local ADF&G offices, on the ADF&G online store, or through various vendors.

“Party” Fishing

Party fishing, such as when anglers “pool” their harvest to achieve a “boat limit,” is illegal. A fish belongs to the person who originally hooked it. Under Alaska law, once your daily bag limit is reached, you cannot harvest more fish “for the boat.”

Only under certain conditions can anglers can give someone their fish, and sport caught fish can never be sold, bartered, or traded. Check the regulation booklet for the rules on giving away fish. Once an angler gives away his/her bag limit, he/she may not harvest additional fish of that species on the same day.

Fish Identification

Coho salmon or king salmon? Pelagic rockfish or nonpelagic rockfish? You’ll find a fish identification guide in the back of the current Southcentral Sport Fishing Regulations Summary booklet. The identification guide does not include all the rockfish species in Alaska but provides the most common species caught for pelagic and nonpelagic.

Pink Salmon

There are over 200 streams in PWS that support natural returns of pink salmon. In addition, to the four private nonprofit hatcheries that rear pink salmon. Pink salmon have a two-year life cycle. Wild pink salmon fry do not

rear in fresh water, instead, almost immediately after emergence, they travel to near shore salt waters to feed. Pink salmon grow quickly, reaching 3.5 to 4 pounds before returning for spawning the following summer.

Pink salmon return to PWS from mid-June through late August, with the peak typically occurring in late July. Noteworthy Western PWS pink salmon fisheries occur at Sawmill Bay on Evans Island, at Lake Bay, and Cannery Creek in Unakwik Inlet.

Medium-sized spinners or lures such as ¼ to ¾-oz. Pixees, Daredevles, or Vibrax in size 4-6 provide good action here. Fishing is generally best within a few hours either side of high tide.

Coho Salmon

Western PWS's small, scattered wild coho salmon runs present a management challenge. To help relieve pressure and to provide diverse opportunity, hatchery coho salmon smolt are stocked at Chenega and Whittier in Western PWS.

Wild coho salmon spawn in Western PWS's freshwater streams August through October. After spawning, the adult fish die, leaving their eggs to hatch the following spring. Juvenile coho salmon remain in fresh waters that summer and the following winter. In the spring of their second or third years, the young fish, now called smolt, migrate to the saltwaters. They remain in marine waters about 14 months before returning to fresh water as 8- to 12-pound adults to spawn. There are many factors that affect juvenile coho salmon survival in the fresh water stages of their life cycle. Flooding of their fresh water streams has the most impact on juveniles, which then affects the number and run timing of adult coho salmon.

Bay of Isles on Knight Island, Port Chalmers on Montague Island, Jackpot Bay, Culross Passage, Lake Bay on Esther Island, and Perry Island are just a few of the areas boat anglers report success when fishing for coho salmon. Both boat and shore anglers either fish where they see jumpers, or fish near a freshwater stream. Boat anglers out of Whittier troll or mooch for cohos around Pigot Point at the head of Passage Canal. The peak for Whittier shore anglers is typically late August through early September, sometimes as late as early October.

While most anglers use spinners or lures on medium-action rods and at least 15-lb.-test monofilament, fishing herring or salmon roe suspended below a bobber is also popular and productive. Cohos strike readily at lures, roe, and streamer flies, making these aggressive and hard fighting fish a prime target of sport anglers.

Sockeye Salmon

Small runs of sockeye salmon are available in PWS

during most of the summer. Juvenile sockeye salmon may spend up to four years rearing in freshwater lakes before becoming smolt and migrating to the saltwaters. Once at sea, they reach 4- to 12-pounds after one to four years. In Western PWS, Eshamy Lagoon, Coghill Lake, and Main Bay are favorite destinations for both sport anglers and commercial fishing boats.

Size 2-6 streamer flies on a 8-9 wt. fly rod, or small spinners and a medium-action spinning rod loaded with 15-20 lb. monofilament are popular sport fishing methods. Some anglers report success with a size 1/0 bare red hook and a small flasher/dodger.

Coghill River

The most popular freshwater sport fishery for sockeye salmon in Western PWS is at the Coghill River. Sockeye salmon begin returning in late June, peak in early July, and continue into August. Coghill can be accessed by boat from Whittier or by float plane into Coghill Lake. Anglers commonly troll or snag in the saltwater lagoon, or fish from shore at the outlet of the lake. Typical escapement is 25,000 to 30,000 fish and typical commercial harvest is around 60,000.

Eshamy Lagoon

Eshamy Lagoon can have strong sockeye salmon runs. Historical weir count estimates range from 12,900 in 2004 to 41,800 in 2006. The Eshamy return usually begins in mid- to late July and runs through August. Eshamy can be accessed by boat from Whittier or Valdez, or by float planes that land in the lagoon. Anglers fish in the lagoon or at the outlet of Eshamy Creek.

Main Bay

The Main Bay hatchery run begins to return in early June and peaks in late June to early July, but anglers can catch a few fish as late as early August. 400,000 to 700,000 sockeye salmon return to the Main Bay hatchery every year. Sport anglers troll at the mouth of the bay, or anchor (out of the path of commercial boats) and cast into schools of jumpers.

Chinook Salmon

Chinook salmon return at different ages. Some, called "jacks," return after only one year in salt water. These fish weigh only 1-2 pounds and are almost always males. Others return after two years at about 5-15 pounds. Most of these are also males. The majority of Chinook salmon; however, return after three and four years at sea at a weight of 25-45 pounds.

Stocked Chinook salmon are available in Whittier through an ADF&G state hatchery program. Wild "feeder" king salmon can sometimes be caught in Western PWS. The Whittier stocked Chinook salmon begin to return in mid-

to late May and are available to anglers through mid-June. Most anglers head to the Whittier Small Boat Harbor or Smitty's Cove, or wherever jumpers are spotted. Anglers fish all tidal stages. Most fish harvested by shore anglers are snagged, which is legal in PWS salt waters outside the Whittier Small Boat Harbor.

Boat anglers also find success trolling for Chinooks. Boats troll off the points in Passage Canal, or head out to Ester Island. Anglers have also had success in Lake Bay on Ester Island in late May and June. Many Chinook salmon anglers also use larger lures and spoons, such as ½- to 2-oz. Pixees, Daredevls, Vibrax, or herring under a bobber. Trolling anglers often add a flasher/dodger.

Chum Salmon

Chum salmon have the widest distribution of any of the Pacific salmon, and utilize the broadest spawning areas, both intertidal and freshwater. Like pink salmon, chum salmon fry also quickly move out to near shore salt waters soon after emerging from the gravel. Chum feed in ocean waters for 3 to 6 years before returning as 7- to 18-pound fish.

In Western PWS, chum salmon are usually taken by anglers targeting other species of salmon. Chums are especially hard fighters that will take a variety of flies and lures. Hatchery chum salmon runs to Esther Island and Port Chalmers are fished by sport anglers.

Halibut

Halibut spawn in deep offshore waters from November through March. After hatching, the larvae drift with ocean currents, feeding on plankton then larger and larger fish and shellfish. The larvae start life like other fish, with an eye on each side of the head. When the larvae are about 6 months old, the left eye moves over the snout to the right side of the head, and the coloration on the left side of the body fades. Halibut are found throughout Western PWS waters, on or near the bottom over mud, sand, or gravel banks, and below steep drop-offs.

Most popular fishing methods include herring or fish heads on a circle hook, or large white jigs. Average weight of harvested fish ranges from 8-75 pounds, although fish 350 pounds and over are sometimes caught.

Rockfish and Lingcod

Both rockfish and lingcod are found throughout Western PWS waters. These fish are extremely long-lived and slow to reproduce. Some rockfish have been aged at over 100 years old. Careful management is required for sustainable fisheries, so rockfish and lingcod both have special regulations. Always review the current Southcentral Sport Fishing Regulations Summary booklet and Emergency Orders before you go fishing.

Alaskan waters are home to roughly 40 different types of rockfish, but only about 10 species are regularly caught in the sport fishery. Rockfish are a remarkable and diverse species of fish with extremely long-life expectancies. Certain species of adult rockfish can reach 40 inches and 30 pounds. Rockfish are commonly caught while fishing for halibut over rocky structure. Bringing these deep dwelling fish to the surface can result in "barotrauma" caused by the expansion of gases in their swim bladder. However, using deepwater release mechanisms (DWM) can greatly increase rockfish survival by mitigating the effects of "barotrauma." Beginning in 2020, all vessels sport fishing in the saltwaters of Alaska must have a functioning DWM on board, and all rockfish not harvested must be released at depth of capture, or at a depth of 100 feet.



Adult lingcod are often caught near steep rocky banks by anglers jigging for halibut. In Western PWS, fish up to 30 pounds are caught. Lingcod spawn December through March, with males guarding nests through June. Without this protection, other fish and shellfish would eat all the eggs within days. Males are very defensive during this time, and will snap at anything, thus making them more vulnerable to overharvest.

Shellfish

Crab

There is a PWS tanner crab and golden king crab season; however, this is a subsistence fishery and only open to Alaska residents. There are regulations on the season, buoys, pot construction, pot limits, and a permit is required. For additional information, please check with the local ADF&G office.

Shrimp

Northern (formerly called "pink"), spot, and coonstripe shrimp are the main shrimp species in Prince William Sound. Northern shrimp occur over the widest depth range. Spot and coonstripe shrimp typically are found in shallower water and over rock piles or debris-covered

bottoms. Spot and sidestripe shrimp are the species most often caught in the recreational fishery.

There are regulations on buoys, pot construction, pot limits, and a permit is required. For additional information, please with the local ADF&G office or review the current regulation booklet.



Clams

There are few places in Western PWS where clams are available. Look for butter and littleneck clams on cobble beaches around PWS shorelines.

Freshwater Fishing

Around the Western PWS's many salmon streams, anglers often find Dolly Varden feeding on out-migrating fry and smolt in the spring and early summer, and eggs and flesh in the late summer and fall. For an on-shore break, try light tackle where streams empty into salt waters.

Very small populations of cutthroat trout can occasionally be found in Western PWS fresh waters. PWS is the extreme northern and western range of this fish, so management is conservative and special regulations apply. There are no native populations of rainbow trout or Arctic grayling in Western PWS. Rainbow trout are stocked in landlocked lakes near Valdez and Cordova.

Hotels, Fishing Charters, Camping

Since the only road-accessible fisheries areas are in

Whittier and Valdez, many sport anglers charter a boat to access these fisheries. For charter information, as well as, hotels and camping information, contact the Chamber of Commerce or visitor's center for the city you'd like to fish from.

- Whittier Chamber of Commerce
PO Box 607, Whittier, Alaska 99693
www.whittieralaskachamber.org
- Valdez Convention & Visitor's Bureau
309 Fairbanks Drive, Valdez, Alaska 99693
www.valdezalaska.org

Western PWS also has public cabins managed by the U.S. Forest Service's Chugach National Forest. For more information about the public cabins, please visit the U.S. Forest Service's website at www.fs.usda.gov, to reserve a public use cabin please visit www.recreation.com, or contact the Chugach National Forest Glacier Ranger District at Forest Station Road, PO Box 129, Girdwood, Alaska 99587 (907) 783-3242.

Weather

Summer temperatures are usually moderate, with highs ranging from 55°F to 70°F (12.7°C to 21°C). Layered clothing is best, and don't forget to pack a raincoat, rain pants, and a good waterproof hat. Weather conditions in PWS can change quickly. Use caution when boating and obtain current weather forecasts from National Oceanographic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) at (907) 835-4505, or from their recorded message at 1 (800) 472-0391. A current weather briefing is also available for boaters equipped with VHF by dialing up "Weather 1" on the radio and listening to the current NOAA weather forecast.



SPORT FISHING SERIES PRODUCED BY:

Southcentral Region
Alaska Department of Fish and Game
Division of Sport Fish

333 Raspberry Road
Anchorage, Alaska 99518
Sport Fish Information Center

(907) 267-2218
M-F 8am - 5 pm
Except on state holidays



These opportunities funded in part by Federal Aid in Sport Fish and Wildlife Restoration.

The Alaska Department of Fish and Game complies with Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990. This summary is available in alternative communication formats. If you need assistance, please contact the ADF&G ADA Coordinator at (907) 465-6078; TTY/ Alaska Relay 7-1-1; or 1 (800) 770-8973.