

SPORT FISHING

Emergency Order

ALASKA DEPARTMENT
OF FISH & GAME

Under Authority of AS 16.05.060

Emergency Order No. 2-KS-2-07-16

Issued at: Palmer, Thursday, February 18, 2016

Effective Date: 6:00 a.m. Sunday, May 1, 2016

Expiration Date: 11:59 p.m. Wednesday, July 13, 2016, unless superseded by subsequent emergency order.

EXPLANATION:

This emergency order imposes gear, harvest, and other restrictions to sport fishing in the Westside Susitna River tributaries for the conservation of king salmon. This limits sport fishing gear in the Westside Susitna River tributaries to one unbaited, single-hook, artificial lure only, except in the Deshka River.

The Deshka River remains open to harvest of king salmon seven days per week and bait and multiple hooks are allowed per regulation. Only an annual limit of two king salmon over 20 inches applies from a separate emergency order.

Within Unit 4 (Yentna drainage), except for the Talachulitna River, this emergency order allows harvest to occur each Friday, Saturday, Sunday, and Monday and prohibits the retention of king salmon (any size) each Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday.

On the Talachulitna River, king salmon may not be retained or possessed, and king salmon caught may not be removed from the water and must be released immediately in those waters. This emergency order is effective from 6:00 a.m. Sunday, May 1 through 11:59 p.m. Wednesday, July 13, 2016.

REGULATION:

The provisions of 5 AAC 61.112. Special provisions for the seasons, bag, possession, and size limits, and methods and means for Unit 1 of Susitna River Drainage Area. (1), (2) and (4), and 5 AAC 61.118. Special provisions for the seasons, bag, possession, and size limits, and methods and means for Unit 4 of Susitna River Drainage Area. (1), and (2), are superseded by this emergency order. 5 AAC 61.118. Special provisions for the seasons, bag, possession, and size limits, and methods and means for Unit 4 of Susitna River Drainage Area. (9)(C) is added by this emergency order. Under this emergency order, the following provisions are effective, beginning 6:00 a.m. Sunday, May 1 through 11:59 p.m. Wednesday, July 13, 2016:

5 AAC 61.112. Special provisions for the seasons, bag, possession, and size limits, and methods and means for Unit 1 of the Susitna River Drainage Area. Unless otherwise specified by an emergency order issued under AS 16.05.060, the following are localized additions and exceptions to the general seasons, bag, possession, and size limits, and methods and means to the general provisions specified in 5 AAC 61.110 and 5 AAC 75 for Unit 1 of the Susitna River Drainage Area:

(1) from September 1 – July 13, in flowing waters only one unbaited, single-hook, artificial lure may be used;

(2) in waters open to sport fishing for king salmon, from May 1 – July 13, sport fishing for any finfish species is closed from 11:00 p.m. to 6:00 a.m.;

(4) except in the Deshka River drainage, king salmon may not be retained or possessed; any king salmon caught must be released immediately and returned to the water unharmed;

5 AAC 61.118. Special provisions for the seasons, bag, possession, and size limits, and methods and means for Unit 4 of the Susitna River Drainage Area. Unless otherwise specified by an emergency order issued under AS 16.05.060 , the following are localized additions and exceptions to the general seasons, bag, possession, and size limits, and methods and means to the general provisions specified in 5 AAC 61.110 for Unit 4 of the Susitna River Drainage Area:

(1) from September 1 – July 13, in flowing waters only one unbaited, single-hook, artificial lure may be used;

(2) from May 1 – July 13, king salmon may be retained on Fridays, Saturdays, Sundays, and Mondays only; any king salmon caught on Tuesdays, Wednesdays, and Thursdays must be released immediately and returned to the water unharmed; sport fishing is not allowed from 11:00 p.m. to 6:00 a.m.;

(9) the Talachulitna River drainage and all waters within a three-quarter mile radius of its confluence with the Skwentna River,

(C) king salmon may not be retained or possessed; any king salmon caught must be released immediately and returned to the water unharmed;

Sam Cotten
Commissioner

By delegation to:

Sam Ivey
Area Management Biologist

JUSTIFICATION:

Susitna River king salmon and other king salmon stocks throughout Cook Inlet are experiencing a period of low productivity and, since 2007, below average run strength. The department monitors escapement on five streams of the Westside Susitna River (Units 1 and 4 of the Susitna River) with established escapement goals. Fewer than half the escapement goals were achieved 2008 – 2012. The preseason strategy implemented in 2013 – 2015 reduced harvest by 60 percent among Westside Susitna streams and resulted in the majority of goals being made.

Given past performance of fisheries within Westside Susitna River tributaries, continued conservative actions must be taken in 2016. Preseason restrictions set out under this emergency order are similar as those implemented in 2013 – 2015, with the exception of the Deshka River starting the season allowing bait and multiple hooks per regulation. Escapement and harvest data from 2013 – 2015 in combination with stronger age class returns over recent years warrants increasing sport harvest on the Deshka River by 1,500 fish. A 60 percent reduction in harvest is again required within Unit 4 of the Susitna River in order to achieve the escapement goal at Lake Creek, assuming a similar run as in 2013 – 2015. The escapement goal on the

Talachulitna River was narrowly achieved in 2013 – 2015 under a nonretention restriction, and therefore it is warranted the Talachulitna River continue nonretention in 2016.

It is anticipated that these restrictions on the Westside Susitna River will contribute to a reduction in harvest by as much as 60 percent across the Susitna River drainage, all units together, when combined with an annual limit reduction of five fish to two fish contained in another emergency order. This reduction is expected to provide the greatest potential for achieving escapement goals during 2016 yet continue to provide fishing opportunity throughout the season. Below average runs during previous years, past performance of fisheries within the Susitna River drainage under previous years' management strategies, and uncertainty over how returns may recover in the future justify starting the 2016 season with these restrictions. Data gathered from weirs, boat surveys, and aerial surveys will be used to gauge run strength during the season.

PREVIOUS EMERGENCY ORDERS AFFECTED:

Emergency Order No. 2-KS-05-16 imposes gear and harvest restrictions to sport fishing in Eastside Susitna River tributaries. This emergency order remains in effect from 6:00 a.m. Sunday, May 1 through 11:59 p.m. Wednesday, July 13, 2016.

Emergency Order No. 2-KS-2-06-16 establishes a combined annual limit of two king salmon 20 inches or greater in length for fish harvested in the Susitna River and the Little Susitna River drainages. This emergency order remains in effect from 6:00 a.m. Sunday, May 1 through 11:59 p.m. Wednesday, July 13, 2016.

DISTRIBUTION: The distribution list for this emergency order is on file at the Region II Office of the Alaska Department of Fish and Game, Division of Sport Fish, 333 Raspberry Road, Anchorage, AK 99518, (907) 267-2218.