

SPORT FISHING

Emergency Order

ALASKA DEPARTMENT
OF FISH & GAME

Under Authority of AS 16.05.060

Emergency Order No. 3-KS-06-16

Issued at: Glennallen, Tuesday, June 14, 2016

Effective Date: 12:01 a.m. Saturday, June 18, 2016

Expiration Date: August 11, 2016, unless superseded by subsequent emergency order.

EXPLANATION:

This emergency order prohibits the retention of king salmon in all flowing waters of the Copper River upstream of the Klutina River. King salmon may not be retained or possessed and must be released immediately. In addition, the use of bait and treble hooks in these waters is also prohibited.

REGULATION:

The provisions of 5 AAC 52.022. General provisions for seasons, bag, possession, and size limits, and methods and means for the Upper Copper River and Upper Susitna River Area. (a)(3)(A) and (B) and 5 AAC 52.023. Special provisions for seasons, bag, possession, and size limits, and methods and means for the Upper Copper River and Upper Susitna River Area. (3) and (9)(B) are superseded by this emergency order. Under this emergency order, the following provisions are effective, beginning 12:01 a.m. Saturday, June 18 through 11:59 p.m. Wednesday, August 10, 2016:

5 AAC 52.022. General provisions for seasons, bag, possession, and size limits, and methods and means for the Upper Copper River and Upper Susitna River Area.

(a)(3) king salmon: may be taken only from January 1 – July 19, as follows;

(A) 20 inches or greater in length; king salmon may not be retained or possessed; all king salmon caught must be released immediately;

(B) less than 20 inches in length; king salmon may not be retained or possessed; all king salmon caught must be released immediately;

5 AAC 52.023. Special provisions for seasons, bag, possession, and size limits, and methods and means for the Upper Copper River and Upper Susitna River Area.


(3) in the Copper River drainage, in that portion of the mainstem of the Copper River downstream of the upstream bank of the Klutina River,

(9) in the Gulkana River drainage

(B) only unbaited, single-hook, artificial lures may be used in that portion of the mainstem of the Gulkana River upstream from the Richardson Highway Bridge to an ADF&G regulatory marker located approximately at an unnamed creek flowing into the Gulkana River about seven and one-half miles upstream from the confluence with the West Fork of the Gulkana River;

Sam Cotten
Commissioner

by delegation to:



Mark A. Somerville
Area Management Biologist

JUSTIFICATION:

The king salmon run to the Copper River appears to be weaker than the preseason forecast of 64,000 king salmon and run timing earlier than average. The cumulative commercial harvest, as of June 12, is approximately 10,554 king salmon. This is below the expected level, and is the 7th lowest cumulative harvest through this date since 1980. For comparison, cumulative harvest through June 12, 2015 was 17,746 king salmon.

Catch rates in the Native Village of Eyak research fish wheels through June 12 indicate early run timing and a cumulative catch less than the average for this date. Additionally, recapture rates of king salmon have been exceptionally high and project a potential inriver return below the lower end escapement goal for the Copper River drainage of 24,000 king salmon.

A cumulative count of 18 king salmon have passed the Gulkana River king salmon counting tower through June 12. These counts are 30% of the average for this date and with the king salmon run approximately 5 days early into the Copper River, the Gulkana River tower counts should be significantly higher than currently observed. Given the uncertainty associated with all of the indicators of Copper River king salmon abundance, a precautionary management approach in the upper Copper River fisheries is warranted.

The *Copper River King Salmon Fishery Management Plan* directs the department to manage the Copper River fisheries to achieve a sustainable escapement goal in the upper Copper River of 24,000 or more king salmon. From 2002 – 2008, Copper River king salmon escapement averaged 33,316 fish. From 2009 – 2015 spawning escapement averaged 24,820 king salmon and fell below the escapement goal in 2 of those 7 years. Inseason run strength indicators through June 12, and generally poor stock performance trend over the last 7 years, indicate the need to take restrictive action and therefore justify prohibiting the retention of king salmon in the Copper River sport fishery upstream of the Klutina River to ensure achievement of the sustainable escapement goal.

DISTRIBUTION:

The distribution list for this emergency order is on file at the Region III Office of the Alaska Department of Fish and Game, Division of Sport Fish, 1300 College Road, Fairbanks, AK 99701, (907) 459-7357 and the Glennallen Area Office of the Alaska Department of Fish and Game, Division of Sport Fish, PO Box 47, Glennallen, AK 99588, (907) 822-3309.