

PERSONAL USE FISHING

Emergency Order

ALASKA DEPARTMENT
OF FISH & GAME

Under Authority of AS 16.05.060

Emergency Order No. 3-RS-03-16

Issued at: Glennallen, Tuesday, June 14, 2016

Effective Date: 12:01 a.m. Monday, June 20, 2016

Expiration Date: 11:59 p.m. August 31, 2015,
unless superseded by subsequent emergency order.

EXPLANATION:

This emergency order amends the schedule for the personal use dip net salmon fishery in the Chitina Subdistrict of the Upper Copper River for the week of June 20, 2016.

In addition, this emergency order closes the Chitina Subdistrict Personal Use Dip Net Salmon Fishery to the retention of king salmon. King salmon incidentally taken may not be retained and must be released immediately and returned to the water unharmed.

REGULATION:

Consistent with the COPPER RIVER PERSONAL USE DIP NET SALMON FISHERY MANAGEMENT PLAN, 5 AAC 77.591, the personal use dip net salmon fishery in the Chitina Subdistrict of the Upper Copper River District will be open from 12:01 a.m. Monday, June 20 through 11:59 p.m. Sunday, June 26, 2016. The retention of king salmon is prohibited. King salmon incidentally taken must be released immediately and returned to the water unharmed.

Sam Cotten
Commissioner

by delegation to:



Mark A. Somerville
Area Management Biologist

JUSTIFICATION:

The Copper River personal use fishery is managed under direction outlined in the *Copper River Personal Use Dip Net Salmon Fishery Management Plan* (5 AAC 77.591). The plan establishes the season from June 7 through September 30, and directs the department to establish weekly periods based on Miles Lake sonar counts. During June 6 – June 12, there were 115,439 salmon counted past the Miles Lake sonar. The preseason projection for this period was 90,770 salmon, which results in a surplus of 24,669 salmon. Copper River sockeye salmon migratory timing and the previous five-year average harvest and participation rates indicate sufficient numbers of salmon available to maintain 168 hours of fishing time during the week of June 20 – June 26.

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 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 Chitina Subdistrict personal use dip net fishery 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.