

SPORT FISHING

Emergency Order

ALASKA DEPARTMENT
OF FISH & GAME

Under Authority of AS 16.05.060

Emergency Order No. 2-KS-2-10-18

Issued at: Palmer, Monday, March 13, 2018

Effective Date: 6:00 a.m. Tuesday, May 1, 2018

Expiration Date: 11:59 p.m. Friday, July 13, 2018, unless superseded by subsequent emergency order.

EXPLANATION:

This emergency order restricts sport fishing for king salmon in the Deshka River and Yentna River drainages to catch-and-release and prohibits fishing for king salmon in the remainder of the Susitna River drainage. In addition, sport fishing gear is limited to one unbaited, single-hook, artificial lure in all waters of the Susitna River drainage. A single hook is defined as a hook with only one point.

Fishing for other finfish species remains open. In the waters of Unit 2 normally open to king salmon fishing, fishing for trout and other species is allowed seven days per week. King salmon may not be targeted and those caught while fishing for other species may not be removed from the water and must be released immediately. The area affected by this emergency order includes all waters open to king salmon fishing in Units 1- 6 of the Susitna River drainage.

REGULATION:

The provisions of 5 AAC 61.110. (1)(A) and (B)(i), 5 AAC 61.112. (1), (4), (6)(A) and (B), 5 AAC 61.114. (1) and (3), 5 AAC 61.116. (2), 5 AAC 61.118. (1), (4), and (7)(A), 5 AAC 61.120. (1), and 5 AAC 61.122. (1) and (4)(A) are superseded by this emergency order. Under this emergency order, the following provisions are effective, beginning 6 a.m. Tuesday, May 1 through 11:59 p.m. Thursday, July 13, 2018:

5 AAC 61.110. General provisions for seasons, bag, possession, annual, and size limits, and methods and means for the Susitna River Drainage Area.

1) king salmon

(A) king salmon may not be retained or possessed; king salmon caught must be released immediately; a person may not remove a king salmon from the water before releasing the fish;

(B) less than 20 inches in length

(i) king salmon may not be retained or possessed; king salmon caught must be released immediately; a person may not remove a king salmon from the water before releasing the fish;

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.

(1) in flowing waters only one unbaited, single-hook, artificial lure may be used;

(4) except in the Deshka River, sport fishing for king salmon is closed;

(6) in the Deshka River drainage, including Trapper Lake,

(A) in flowing waters upstream of the Moose/Kroto Creeks, only one unbaited, single-hook, artificial lure may be used;

(B) from its mouth upstream to ADF&G regulatory markers located 300 feet downstream of the weir (river mile 7), and in all waters within a one-half mile radius of its confluence with the Susitna River; king salmon may not be retained or possessed; king salmon caught must be released immediately; a person may not remove a king salmon from the water before releasing the fish; from its mouth upstream

to ADF&G regulatory markers near Chijuk Creek (river mile 17), and in all waters within a one-half mile radius of its confluence with the Susitna River, only one, unbaited, single hook, artificial lure may be used; the remainder of the drainage is closed to sport fishing for king salmon;

5 AAC 61.114. Special provisions for the seasons, bag, possession, and size limits, and methods and means for Unit 2 of the Susitna River Drainage Area.

(1) from May 1 - July 13, Unit 2 is open to sport fishing for all finfish species, except king salmon; sport fishing for king salmon is closed;

(3) in flowing waters only one unbaited, single-hook, artificial lure may be used;

(15) from May 1 – July 13, sport fishing for any finfish species is not allowed from 11:00 p.m. to 6:00 a.m.;

5 AAC 61.116. Special provisions for the seasons, bag, possession, and size limits, and methods and means for Unit 3 of the Susitna River Drainage Area.

(2) from May 1 – July 13, fishing for king salmon is closed; sport fishing for any finfish species is not allowed from 11:00 p.m. to 6:00 a.m.;

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.

(1) in flowing waters only one unbaited, single-hook, artificial lure may be used;

(2) from May 1 – July 13, sport fishing is not allowed from 11:00 p.m. to 6:00 a.m.;

(4) king salmon may not be retained or possessed; king salmon caught must be released immediately; a person may not remove a king salmon from the water before releasing the fish;

(7) in the Lake Creek drainage,

(A) from an ADF&G regulatory marker located approximately 100 yards upstream of its mouth to an ADF&G regulatory marker located approximately one-quarter mile upstream of Bulchitna Lake, only one unbaited, single-hook, artificial lure may be used;

5 AAC 61.120. Special provisions for the seasons, bag, possession, and size limits, and methods and means for Unit 5 of the Susitna River Drainage Area.

(1) in flowing waters only one unbaited, single-hook, artificial lure may be used;

(2) from May 1 – July 13, sport fishing is not allowed from 11:00 p.m. to 6:00 a.m.;

5AAC 61.122. Special provisions for the seasons, bag, possession, and size limits, and methods and means for Unit 6 of the Susitna River Drainage Area.

(1) in flowing waters only one unbaited, single-hook, artificial lure may be used;

(4) in the East Fork of the Chulitna River drainage, including all waters within a one-quarter mile radius of its confluence of the East Fork and West Fork and including the Middle Fork of the Chulitna and the first quarter mile of Honolulu Creek,

(A) the waters are open to sport fishing for all finfish species, except for king salmon; sport fishing for king salmon is closed;

Sam Cotten,
Commissioner

By delegation to:

Samantha Oslund,
Assistant Area Management Biologist

JUSTIFICATION:

The Susitna River, Little Susitna River, 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 24 streams within the Northern Cook Inlet Area, of which 17 have established escapement goals. King salmon counts have ranged from poor to below average since 2007.

On the Deshka River, sibling models suggest a potential weak run of 5 year old fish in 2018. 5-yr old fish typically constitute about half a given year's run. There is also uncertainty in the forecast of 4-yr old fish in 2018. The Deshka River failed to achieve its escapement goal in 2017, despite inseason actions to restrict and eventually close the sport fishery. The potential for a run size less than experienced in 2017, warrants closure from the outset of the season.

The department monitors escapement on three streams of the Yentna River drainage (Unit 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 – 2016 reduced harvest by 60 percent among Yentna River drainage streams and resulted in the majority of goals being made through this time period by restricting days of fishing and an annual limit reduction. During this time period, the Talachulitna River was restricted to catch-and-release only. All escapement goals in 2017 were missed even after fisheries were closed late in the season. Given the potential for Susitna River king salmon returns in 2018 to be less than in 2017, prohibiting retention is expected to provide the greatest potential for achieving escapement goals during 2018 yet continue to provide fishing opportunity throughout the season.

The department monitors escapement on eight streams on the Eastside Susitna River (Units 2, 3, 5, and 6) with established escapement goals. Fewer than half the escapement goals were achieved 2008 – 2012. The preseason strategy implemented over the past five years to reduce harvest by 100 percent among Eastside Susitna streams by allowing catch-and-release fishing only, still resulted in the majority of goals being missed in three of the past five years. Nearly all goals were missed during 2016, a year where goals were achieved in other areas of the Susitna River drainage and when goals were expected to have been made on Eastside Susitna streams. Most goals in this area were again missed in 2017. Areas within the Susitna River drainage that have demonstrated a chronic inability to achieve escapement goals when restricted to nonretention during low run years warrant closure. In addition to these management actions to the sport fishery, the Northern District commercial king salmon fishery will also be closed.

Prohibiting retention of king salmon in the Susitna River drainage is expected to provide some opportunity and still achieve escapement goals during 2018. 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 2018 season with these restrictions. Data gathered from weirs, guide logbooks, fishwheels, boat surveys, and aerial surveys will be used to gauge run strength during the season.

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.