

SPORT FISHING

Emergency Order

ALASKA DEPARTMENT
OF FISH & GAME

Under Authority of AS 16.05.060

Emergency Order No. 2-KS-2-05-22

Issued at: Palmer, Wednesday, January 26, 2022

Effective Date: 6:00 a.m. Sunday, May 1, 2022

Expiration Date: 11:59 p.m. Wednesday, July 13, 2022,
unless superseded by subsequent emergency order.

EXPLANATION:

This emergency order restricts sport fishing for king salmon in the Susitna River drainage to catch-and-release only. Catch-and-release fishing for king salmon is allowed in areas defined in regulation and during days and times specified in regulation. This emergency order further limits sport fishing gear to one unbaited, single-hook, artificial lure in all flowing waters of the Susitna River drainage. A single-hook is defined as a hook with only one point. Areas open to catch-and-release fishing for king salmon include waters normally open to king salmon fishing by regulation in Units 1 - 6 of the Susitna River drainage, such as lower minor tributaries within Unit 1 of the Susitna River and the Deshka River, Parks Highway streams within Unit 2, Yentna River (Unit 4), Talkeetna River (Unit 5), Chulitna River (Unit 6), and Upper Susitna River (Unit 3).

King salmon 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), (6)(A), and (7)(A) and (C), 5 AAC 61.120. (1) and (3)(B), and 5 AAC 61.122. (1) and (4)(A) are superseded by this emergency order. Under this emergency order, the following provisions are effective 6:00 a.m. Sunday, May 1 through 11:59 p.m. Wednesday, July 13, 2022:

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 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) 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;
- (6) in the Deshka River drainage, including Trapper Lake,
 - (A) in flowing waters, including waters within a one-half mile radius of its confluence with the Susitna River, only one unbaited, single-hook, artificial lure may be used;
 - (B) 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; 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; 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 open through the third Monday in June, and on Saturday, Sunday, and Monday for two consecutive weeks starting on the Saturday following the third Monday in June; 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;
- (3) in flowing waters only one unbaited, single-hook, artificial lure may be used;

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, 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; in waters open to sport fishing for king salmon, sport fishing 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;
- (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;
- (6) in the Fish Lake Creek drainage,
 - (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;
- (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;
 - (C) 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 61.120. 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;
- (3) in the Clear (Chunilna) Creek drainage;
 - (B) 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 61.122. 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, including king salmon; 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;

Doug Vincent-Lang,
Commissioner

By delegation to:



Sam Ivey,
Area Management Biologist

JUSTIFICATION:

The Susitna River and other king salmon stocks throughout Cook Inlet are experiencing a period of low productivity. Below average escapements have resulted in preseason and inseason restrictions and closures on the Deshka, Eastside, Talkeetna, and Yentna king salmon stocks and other isolated streams since 2012.

The preseason forecast for Deshka River king salmon is for a total run of 9,332 king salmon, with an 80% prediction interval of 5,637 - 15,450 fish. Despite a bump up in abundance experienced during the 2021 season that was heavily driven by a large return of 5-yr old fish off brood year 2016, a relatively low number of 4-yr old fish returning in 2021 suggests brood year 2017 will be weaker and contribute few 5-yr old fish to the 2022 run. The Biological Escapement Goal (BEG) on the Deshka River is 9,000 - 18,000 fish. Given a forecast at the low end of the BEG, a cautionary approach is warranted. Weir counts will be used to adjust management actions as run strength is monitored during the season. Mortality due to catch-and-release fishing and harvest of this stock in commercial and subsistence fisheries is not expected to reduce escapement below the lower end of the BEG.

Modeled escapement of the Yentna River king salmon stock is based on postseason aerial index counts of spawners on three major and five minor streams of the Yentna River drainage (Unit 4 of the Susitna River). The OEG was achieved in 2021; however, no trend in escapement is apparent for the Yentna stock in recent years. With king salmon production producing unpredictable runs variable around the low end of the escapement goal, continued catch-and-release fishing is justified in 2022.

Modeled escapement of the Talkeetna River king salmon stock is based on postseason aerial index counts of spawners on two major streams of the Talkeetna River drainage (Unit 5 of the Susitna River). The SEG was narrowly achieved in 2021; however, no trend in escapement is apparent for the Talkeetna stock in recent years. With king salmon production producing unpredictable runs variable around the low end of the escapement goal, continued catch-and-release fishing is justified in 2022.

Modeled escapement of the Eastside king salmon stock is based on postseason aerial index counts of spawners on eight streams within Unit 2 of the Susitna River. Escapement of the Eastside king salmon stock over the past three years has showed a very gradual upward trend above, but near the low end of the SEG. As negligible harvestable surplus exists for this stock and due to uncertainty in future returns, catch-and-release fishing is warranted in 2022.

The East Fork Chulitna River (Unit 6) SEG of 1,200 - 2,900 king salmon was missed in 2020 and achieved in 2021. Indexed escapement in Indian and Portage creeks of the upper Susitna River (Unit 3) have been

variable around the average of low run year escapements in recent years. As production remains low in this area of the Susitna River, continued catch-and-release fishing is warranted. These remote areas of the Susitna River drainage receive minor effort; mortality due to catch-and-release fishing is negligible.

Prohibiting retention of king salmon in the Susitna River drainage is expected to provide sport fishing opportunity and still achieve escapement goals during 2022. 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 2022 season with these restrictions. Data gathered from weirs, 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.