

SPORT FISHING

Emergency Order

ALASKA DEPARTMENT
OF FISH & GAME

Under Authority of AS 16.05.060

Emergency Order No. 2-KS-1-09-24

Issued at: Soldotna, Thursday, March 14, 2024

Effective Date: 12:01 a.m. Monday, July 1, 2024

Expiration Date: 11:59 p.m. Thursday, August 15, 2024, unless superseded by subsequent emergency order.

EXPLANATION:

This emergency order closes the Kenai River to fishing for king salmon and prohibits the use of bait and multiple hooks in the Kenai River from its mouth upstream to ADF&G markers located at the outlet of Skilak Lake from 12:01 a.m. Monday, July 1 through 11:59 p.m. Thursday, August 15, 2024. This closure prohibits all sport fishing for king salmon, including catch-and-release fishing. King salmon may not be retained or possessed; king salmon caught while fishing for other species may not be removed from the water and must be released immediately.

REGULATION:

The provisions of 5 AAC 57.120 (a)(2)(A) and (a)(3)(A), and 5 AAC 57.121 (1)(B) are superseded by this emergency order. The following provisions are effective 12:01 a.m. Monday, July 1 through 11:59 p.m. Thursday, August 15, 2024:

5 AAC 57.120. General provisions for seasons, bag, possession, annual, and size limits, and methods and means for the Kenai River Drainage Area.

(a)(2) king salmon 20 inches or greater in length, as follows:

(A) from July 1 – August 15, the Kenai River from its mouth upstream to an ADF&G regulatory marker located at the outlet of Skilak Lake, is closed to sport fishing for king salmon; king salmon may not be retained or possessed; king salmon may not be removed from the water and must be released immediately;

(a)(3) king salmon less than 20 inches in length as follows:

(A) from July 1 – August 15, flowing waters and unstocked lakes and ponds and in the Kenai River from its mouth upstream to ADF&G markers located at the outlet of Skilak Lake, are closed to sport fishing for king salmon; king salmon may not be retained or possessed; king salmon may not be removed from the water and must be released immediately;

5 AAC 57.121. Special provisions for the seasons, bag, possession, and size limits, and methods and means for the Lower Section of the Kenai River Drainage Area.

(1) sport fishing gear restrictions:

(B) from July 1 – August 15, in the Kenai River from its mouth upstream to an ADF&G regulatory marker located approximately 300 yards downstream from the outlet of Skilak Lake, only one unbaited, single-hook, artificial lure may be used;

Doug Vincent-Lang,
Commissioner

By delegation to:



Phill Stacey
Area Management Biologist

JUSTIFICATION:

The *Kenai River Late-Run King Salmon Management Plan* (5 AAC 21.359) directs the department to manage to achieve the escapement goal of late-run king salmon into the Kenai River system. The optimal escapement goal (OEG) for late-run Kenai River king salmon is 15,000 – 30,000 king salmon 75 cm mid eye to tail fork and longer.

Kenai River king salmon and other king salmon stocks throughout Cook Inlet are experiencing a period of low productivity and below average run strength. The 2023 forecast for the stock of large (≥ 75 cm mid-eye-to-tail-fork-length [METF] or approximately ≥ 34 inches in total length) late-run king salmon in the Kenai River is 13,639 fish. This total run forecast is below the optimum escapement goal range of 15,000 to 30,000 fish. Based upon the difference between the forecast and actual total run from 2018–2022 there is an 80% chance the total run will be between 8,366 to 22,233 fish. This prediction interval is wide and indicates a 20% chance the total run could be outside the prediction interval. The forecast is well below the 20-year average run of approximately 22,270 fish and slightly higher than the recent 5-year (2019–2023) average total run of approximately 12,840 large fish. If realized, this forecast would be the 3rd highest run in the past five years but rank as the 7th lowest in the past 38 years. Closing the late-run king salmon sport fishery preseason is warranted until data from inseason assessment projects indicate that fishing opportunity can be afforded without jeopardizing the achievement of the OEG.

DISTRIBUTION:

The distribution list for this emergency order is on file at the Region 2 Office of Alaska Department of Fish and Game, Division of Sport Fish, 333 Raspberry Road, Anchorage, AK 99518, (907) 267-2218.