

SPORT FISHING

Emergency Order

ALASKA DEPARTMENT
OF FISH & GAME

Under Authority of AS 16.05.060

Emergency Order No. 2-KS-2-20-09

Issued at: Palmer, Tuesday, June 30, 2009

Effective Date: 6:00 a.m., Friday, July 3, 2009

Expiration Date: 11:59 p.m., Monday, July 13, 2009, unless superseded by subsequent emergency order.

EXPLANATION:

This emergency order closes the Parks Highway streams (Unit 2 of the Susitna River Drainage) and the Little Susitna River in the Knik Arm Drainage Area to fishing for king salmon effective at 6:00 a.m., Friday, July 3, through 11:59 p.m., Monday, July 13, 2009. Waters in Unit 2 that are closed to king salmon fishing include the Kashwitna River, Willow, Little Willow, Greys, Caswell, Sheep, Montana, Goose, Sunshine, Birch, Trapper, and Rabideux creeks, and all flowing waters of the Susitna River from the confluence with the Deshka River upstream to the confluence with the Talkeetna River.

REGULATION:

The provisions of 5 AAC 60.122. Special provisions and localized additions and exceptions to the seasons, bag, possession, and size limits, and methods and means for the Knik Arm Drainage Area. (9)(A) and 5 AAC 61.114. Special provisions and localized additions and exceptions to the seasons, bag, possession, and size limits, and methods and means for Unit 2 of the Susitna River Drainage Area. (1) are superseded by this emergency order. Under this emergency order, the following provisions are effective, beginning 6:00 a.m., Friday, July 3, through 11:59 p.m., Monday, July 13, 2009:

5 AAC 60.122. Special provisions and localized additions and exceptions to the seasons, bag, possession, and size limits, and methods and means for the Knik Arm Drainage Area.

(9) in the Little Susitna River drainage,

(A) Beginning 6:00 a.m., Friday, **July 3**, in flowing waters from its mouth upstream to the Parks Highway sport fishing is closed for king salmon;

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

(1) Beginning 6:00 a.m., Friday, **July 3**, Unit 2 is closed to sport fishing for all finfish species, including king salmon.

Denby S. Lloyd,
Commissioner

By delegation to:

Dave Rutz,
Area Management Biologist

JUSTIFICATION:

Nearly all of the king salmon harvest in Unit 2 of the Susitna Drainage takes place during three, 3-day weekends. Department staff have monitored these fisheries for the past two weekends and found that at a time when sport harvest should be high, few fish were observed caught or hooked. Anglers were also interviewed during these visits and the overall consensus was that the fishing has never been this poor. Because these fisheries are closed during the week, king salmon generally school up in large numbers at the mouths of these streams. On Friday, June 26, boat and foot surveys were conducted to count king salmon in traditional holding areas on these systems; few king salmon were observed during these surveys. On June 30, a helicopter survey was flown on Willow, Montana, and Sheep creeks and the Little Susitna River to count king salmon. The number of fish observed was far below expected numbers of fish required to meet escapement goals.

An exit survey conducted by the Division of Parks and Outdoor Recreation to count sport anglers and king salmon harvests on the Little Susitna River indicates that harvest of king salmon is down from previous years. Guide and angler reports suggest the 2009 king salmon run to the Little Susitna River is weak. The June 30 helicopter survey confirmed borderline numbers of fish necessary to meet the escapement goal. Given the Little Susitna's close proximity to other Parks Highway streams, it is reasonable to assume that a closure of the Parks Highway streams would transfer a significant amount of sport fishing effort to the Little Susitna River. Any additional harvest associated with increased angler participation may further jeopardize the likelihood of the Little Susitna River achieving its king salmon escapement goal.

The department currently has no in-season assessments methods to enumerate runs strength or count escapements (e.g. weir or sonar projects) for any of these systems. Escapements are monitored post-season through an aerial survey conducted by the department using helicopters. If the king salmon runs are indeed weak, and the sport harvest is not restricted during the season, it is likely that escapement goals for these systems will not be achieved in 2009. It is anticipated in 2009, with these restrictions in place, that the sport harvest could be reduced by as much as 25% for the Parks Highway streams and 15% for the Little Susitna River.

As provided by 5 AAC 75.003. Emergency order authority (1)(A), the department may, by emergency order, decrease sport fish bag and possession limits and annual limits and restrict methods and means of harvest when the total escapement is projected to be less than the escapement goal. Therefore, it is warranted to close the Parks Highway streams and the Little Susitna River to king salmon fishing for the remainder of 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.