

SPORT FISHING

Emergency Order

ALASKA DEPARTMENT
OF FISH & GAME

Under Authority of AS 16.05.060

Emergency Order No. 2-SS-2-53-12

Issued at: Palmer, Wednesday, August 15, 2012

Effective Date: 12:01 a.m., Friday, August 17, 2012

Expiration Date: 11:59 p.m. December 31, 2012, unless superseded by subsequent emergency order.

EXPLANATION:

This emergency order supersedes Emergency Order No. 2-SS-2-51-12, issued in Palmer on Wednesday, August 8, 2012. This emergency order closes all waters of the Knik Arm Management Area, excluding the Eklutna Tailrace, to fishing for coho salmon effective 12:01 a.m., Friday, August 17, 2012. The closure prohibits sport fishing for coho salmon, including catch-and-release fishing. Coho salmon may not be retained or possessed; coho salmon accidentally caught while fishing for other species may not be removed from the water and must be released immediately.

REGULATION:

The provisions of 5 ACC 60.120. General provisions for seasons, bag, possession and size limits, and methods and means for the Knik Arm Drainages Area. (2)(A) and (2)(B) are superseded by this emergency order. Under this emergency order, the following provisions are effective beginning August 17, 2012;

5 AAC 60.120. General provisions for seasons, bag, possession and size limits, and methods and means for the Knik Arm Drainages Area.

(2) Salmon other than king salmon;

(A) 16 inches or greater in length may be taken from January 1 - December 31; excluding Eklutna Tailrace, bag and possession limit is three fish, of which none may be coho salmon; sport fishing for coho salmon is closed, coho salmon of any length may not be retained or possessed; coho salmon caught may not be removed from the water and must be released immediately; in Eklutna Tailrace, bag and possession limit is three fish, of which all three may be coho salmon;

(B) salmon, other than king salmon, less than 16 inches in length may be taken from January 1-December 31; excluding Eklutna Tailrace, bag and possession limit of 10 fish, of which none may be coho salmon; in Eklutna Tailrace, bag and possession limit of ten fish, of which all may be coho salmon;

Cora Campbell,
Commissioner

By delegation to:

Sam Ivey,
Area Management Biologist

JUSTIFICATION:

The 2012 return of coho salmon to the Knik Arm Management Area streams of Northern Cook Inlet appears to be below average. The department has a weir located about 4 miles upstream of the Little Susitna Public Use Facility to evaluate coho salmon run strength. On August 8, below-average coho numbers prompted the department to issue an emergency order closing the Little Susitna River to fishing for coho salmon. Weir counts since that time have remained below average. As of August 14, with approximately 60 percent of the historical run complete, only 2,587 coho salmon had passed through the weir. Based on these weir counts, the department is projecting a total escapement of approximately 4,260 coho salmon, well below the Sustainable Escapement Goal (SEG) range of 10,100 to 17,700 fish.

Coho salmon returning to Fish Creek are counted at a weir located upstream of Knik-Goose Bay Road, and upstream of the sport fishery. As of August 14, the total weir count was 347, which is below the average count of 1,700 by this date. The projected escapement based on average run timing is 960, which is below the SEG of 1,200- 4,400 fish. With approximately 40 percent of the run complete by this date, the SEG is not likely to be attained without further fishery restrictions.

Data from previous weir counts on Knik Arm streams indicate that when there is a weak return to one Knik Arm stream, returns to other Knik Arm streams are weak as well. Fishing reports received from guides and anglers fishing Knik Arm systems indicate below-average returns. Staff surveys of the Jim Creek system over the past three weeks produced findings similar to surveys conducted the past two seasons, with fewer fish than optimal present for achieving the escapement goal. The escapement goal was not achieved on Jim Creek 2010 - 2011, or on the Little Susitna River 2009 - 2011. Given the poor return of coho salmon to waters of the Knik Arm area of Northern Cook Inlet (NCI), it is warranted to close the recreational fisheries in Knik Arm at this time. The Eklutna Tailrace is excluded from this restriction because it is a stocked fishery.

PREVIOUS EMERGENCY ORDERS AFFECTED:

Emergency order No. 2-SS-2-50-12, which restricted bait and closed fishing for coho salmon on the Little Susitna River, remains in effect. Emergency Order No. 2-SS-2-51-12, which restricted bag and possession limits to one coho on Jim Creek, is superseded.

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.