

SPORT FISHING

Emergency Order

ALASKA DEPARTMENT
OF FISH & GAME

Under Authority of AS 16.05.060

Emergency Order No. 2-KS-2-07-15

Issued at: Palmer, Thursday, February 19, 2015

Effective Date: 6:00 a.m., Friday, May 1, 2015

Expiration Date: 11:59 p.m., Monday,
July 13, 2015, unless superseded by
subsequent emergency order.

EXPLANATION:

This emergency order imposes gear, harvest, and other restrictions to sport fishing in the Susitna River drainage for the conservation of king salmon. This limits sport fishing gear in the Susitna River drainage to only one unbaited, single-hook, artificial lure; the use of bait is prohibited.

This emergency order also prohibits the harvest of king salmon (any size) in Units 1 (except Deshka River), 2, 3, 5, and 6 of the Susitna River, and in the Talachulitna River (within Unit 4). In the waters of Unit 2 open to king salmon fishing, fishing for trout and other species is not affected and is allowed as written in current regulation. The Deshka River remains open to harvest of king salmon seven day per week.

Within Unit 4 (Yentna drainage), except for the Talachulitna River, this emergency order allows harvest to occur each Friday, Saturday, Sunday, and Monday and prohibits the retention of king salmon (any size) each Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday.

Where harvest is prohibited, fishing for king salmon is allowed. However, king salmon may not be retained or possessed, and king salmon caught may not be removed from the water and must be released immediately in those waters.

A person, after harvesting a king salmon 20 inches or greater in length, may not fish for **any species of finfish on the same day in any flowing waters** open to sport fishing for king salmon in the Susitna River Drainage Area.

This emergency order is effective from 6:00 a.m., Friday, May 1, 2015, through 11:59 p.m., Monday, July 13, 2015.

REGULATION: The provisions of 5 AAC 61.112. Special provisions for the seasons, bag, possession, and size limits, and methods and means for Unit 1 of Susitna River Drainage Area. (1) and (4), 5 AAC 61.114. Special provisions for the seasons, bag, possession, and size limits, and methods and means for Unit 2 of Susitna River Drainage Area. (1) and (3), 5 AAC 61.116. Special provisions for the seasons, bag, possession, and size limits, and methods and means for Unit 3 of Susitna River Drainage Area. (2), 5 AAC 61.118. Special provisions for the seasons, bag, possession, and size limits, and methods and means for Unit 4 of Susitna River Drainage Area. (1), and (2), 5 AAC 61.120. Special provisions for the seasons, bag, possession, and size limits, and methods and means for Unit 5 of Susitna River Drainage Area. (1) and (2), and 5 AAC 61.122. Special provisions for the seasons, bag, possession, and size limits, and methods and means for Unit 6 of Susitna River Drainage Area. (1) and (4)(A), are superseded by this emergency order.

5 AAC 61.118. Special provisions for the seasons, bag, possession, and size limits, and methods and means for Unit 4 of Susitna River Drainage Area. (9)(C) and 5 AAC 61.123. Restrictions on sport fishing after taking king salmon 20 inches or greater in length in the Susitna River Drainage Area. (1)(M) are added by

this emergency order. Under this emergency order, the following provisions are effective, beginning 6:00 a.m., Friday, May 1, 2015, through 11:59 p.m., Monday, July 13, 2015:

5AAC 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. Unless otherwise specified by an emergency order issued under AS 16.05.060 , the following are localized additions and exceptions to the general seasons, bag, possession, and size limits, and methods and means to the general provisions specified in 5 AAC 61.110 and 5 AAC 75 for Unit 1 of the Susitna River Drainage Area:

(1) from September 1–July 13, in flowing waters only one unbaited, single-hook, artificial lure may be used;

(4) except in the Deshka River drainage, king salmon may not be retained or possessed; any king salmon caught must be released immediately and returned to the water unharmed;

5AAC 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. Unless otherwise specified by an emergency order issued under AS 16.05.060 , the following are localized additions and exceptions to the general seasons, bag, possession, and size limits, and methods and means to the general provisions specified in 5 AAC 61.110 and 5 AAC 75 for Unit 2 of the Susitna River Drainage Area:

(1) from January 1 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, Unit 2 is open to sport fishing for all finfish species, including king salmon; beginning May 1, king salmon may not be retained or possessed; any king salmon caught must be released immediately and returned to the water unharmed;

(3) in flowing waters only one unbaited, single-hook, artificial lure may be used from September 1– July 13;

5AAC 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. Unless otherwise specified by an emergency order issued under AS 16.05.060 , the following are localized additions and exceptions to the general seasons, bag, possession, and size limits, and methods and means to the general provisions specified in 5 AAC 61.110 and 5 AAC 75 for Unit 3 of the Susitna River Drainage Area:

(2) from May 1–July 13, king salmon may not be retained or possessed; any king salmon caught must be released immediately and returned to the water unharmed; sport fishing is not allowed from 11:00 p.m. to 6:00 a.m.;

5AAC 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. Unless otherwise specified by an emergency order issued under AS 16.05.060 , the following are localized additions and exceptions to the general seasons, bag, possession, and size limits, and methods and means to the general provisions specified in 5 AAC 61.110 and 5 AAC 75 for Unit 4 of the Susitna River Drainage Area:

(1) from September 1–July 13, in all flowing waters, only one unbaited, single-hook, artificial lure may be used;

(2) from May 1– July 13, king salmon may be retained on Fridays, Saturdays, Sundays, and Mondays only; any king salmon caught on Tuesdays, Wednesdays, and Thursdays must be released immediately and returned to the water unharmed; sport fishing is not allowed from 11:00 p.m. to 6:00 a.m.;

(9) the Talachulitna River drainage and all waters within a three quarter mile radius of its confluence with the Skwentna River,

(C) king salmon may not be retained or possessed; any king salmon caught must be released immediately and returned to the water unharmed;

5AAC 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. Unless otherwise specified by an emergency order issued under AS 16.05.060 , the following are localized additions and exceptions to the general seasons, bag, possession, and size limits, and methods and means to the general provisions specified in 5 AAC 61.110 and 5 AAC 75 for Unit 5 of the Susitna River Drainage Area:

(1) from September 1–July 13, in all flowing waters, only one unbaited, single-hook, artificial lure may be used;

(2) from May 1–July 13, king salmon may not be retained or possessed; any king salmon caught must be released immediately and returned to the water unharmed; 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. Unless otherwise specified by an emergency order issued under AS 16.05.060 , the following are localized additions and exceptions to the general seasons, bag, possession, and size limits, and methods and means to the general provisions specified in 5 AAC 61.110 and 5 AAC 75 for Unit 6 of the Susitna River Drainage Area:

(1) from September 1–July 13, in all 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) from January 1 - July 13, the waters are open to sport fishing for all finfish species, including king salmon; king salmon may not be retained or possessed; any king salmon caught must be released immediately and returned to the water unharmed;

5 AAC 61.123. Restrictions on sport fishing after taking king salmon 20 inches or greater in length in the Susitna River Drainage Area. Notwithstanding any other provision in this chapter, or unless modified by an emergency order issued under AS 16.05.060 , a person, after taking a king salmon 20 inches or greater in length, may not fish for

(1) any species of finfish on the same day in the following waters open to fishing for king salmon:

(M) any flowing waters open to sport fishing for king salmon in the Susitna River Drainage Area;

Sam Cotten,
Commissioner

By delegation to:

Sam Ivey,
Area Management Biologist

JUSTIFICATION:

Susitna River king salmon 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 been below average since 2007. Fewer than half the escapement goals were achieved from 2008 – 2012. The preseason strategy implemented in 2013 and 2014 reduced harvest by 70 percent in the Susitna River tributaries.

Given past performance of fisheries within the Susitna drainage and uncertainty over how returns may recover, continued conservative actions must be taken in 2015. Preseason restrictions set out under this emergency order are the same as those implemented in 2013 and 2014. Areas within the Susitna drainage that have demonstrated a chronic inability to achieve escapement goals when harvest is allowed during low run years warrant nonretention of king salmon. These areas correspond to Units 2, 3, 5, and 6 of the Susitna River. A 60 percent reduction in harvest is again required within Unit 4 of the Susitna River in order to achieve the escapement goal at Lake Creek, assuming a similar run as in 2013 and 2014. The escapement goal on the Talachulitna River was narrowly achieved in 2013 and 2014 under a nonretention restriction, and therefore it is warranted the Talachulitna River continue nonretention in 2015.

It is anticipated that these restrictions will reduce harvest by as much as 70 percent across the Susitna drainage, all units together, when combined with an annual limit reduction of five fish to two fish contained in another emergency order. This reduction is expected to provide the greatest potential for achieving escapement goals during 2015 yet continue to provide fishing opportunity throughout the season. 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 2015 season with these restrictions. Data gathered from weirs, boat surveys, and aerial surveys will be used to gauge run strength during the season.

PREVIOUS EMERGENCY ORDERS AFFECTED:

Emergency Order No. 2-KS-2-08-15 establishes a combined annual limit of two king salmon 20 inches or greater in length for fish harvested in the Susitna River and the Little Susitna River drainages. This emergency order remains in effect from 6:00 a.m., Friday, May 1, 2015, through 11:59 p.m., Monday, July 13, 2015.

Emergency Order No. 2-KS-2-10-15 restricts bait use and allows only one unbaited, single-hook, artificial lure on the Deshka River. This emergency order remains in effect from 6:00 a.m., Friday, May 1, 2015, through 11:59 p.m., Monday, July 13, 2015.

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.