



# ALASKA DEPARTMENT OF FISH & GAME

## COMMERCIAL AND SPORT FISHERIES MEMORANDUM

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FROM: UCI CF/SF  
Management and Research Staff  
Soldotna/Anchorage/Palmer

SUBJECT: UCI Pre-Season Management Strategy  
for 2004

Commercial Fisheries Division and Sport Fish Division staff met in Soldotna at the Kenai River Center on April 27, 2004 and discussed Upper Cook Inlet (UCI) fishery management strategies for the 2004 season.

### *Meeting Objectives*

- Preview management strategies, tools, and criteria for sport, commercial, and personal use fisheries for the 2004 fishing season in UCI.
- Discuss data sharing, inseason projects and schedules for both.

### *Meeting Products*

- List of inseason data and projections to be shared inseason.
- Schedule for data sharing, projections, and daily staff meetings.
- List of management tools and general criteria for inseason management for commercial and sport fisheries throughout UCI.

### *Participants*

CF Staff: Jeff Regnart, James Browning, Jim Edmundson, Jeff Fox, Mark Willette, Suzanne Maxwell, Pat Shields, Dave Westerman, Bob Decino

SF Staff: Barry Stratton, Tom Vania, George Pappas, James Hasbrouck, Tim McKinley, Dave Rutz, Rich Yanusz, Robert Begich, Matt Miller, Larry Marsh, Jeff Breakfield, Patty Berkahn, Rob Massengill.

### *Disclaimer*

This document outlines the discussion between the Division of Commercial Fisheries staff and the Division of Sport Fish staff regarding UCI Pre-Season Management Strategy for 2004. Dates listed in this document serve as guidelines and are based upon past experience; actual dates of various management actions may vary depending upon inseason information. This document was edited for format and content, but is not necessarily a complete record of the discussion.

## ***Distribution***

Staff, Public, Board of Fisheries Members.

## ***Communication Protocols***

### **Standards for Decision Making**

Each fishery division makes assessments of run size, stock ID, fishery performance, and other measures of inseason performance for the particular fisheries and research projects for which they are responsible. Both fishery divisions have reviewed standard assessment methods used to manage salmon stocks in Upper Cook Inlet and agree that these methods are reasonable and reliable. As a result, both fishery divisions agree to honor the others' assessment methodologies and run assessments from projects they operate. Moreover, both fishery divisions are actively developing improved methods of inseason assessment.

Each fishery division makes management decisions as a result of the assessments for the fisheries for which they are responsible. In general, management decisions that directly affect either the commercial or recreational fishery will be made by the fishery division directly responsible for that fishery. For example, management decisions inriver concerning late run Kenai River chinook salmon are made by Division of Sport Fisheries (SF) staff in consultation with Division of Commercial Fisheries (CF) staff because restrictions to the chinook salmon sport fishery could trigger management actions that affect the east side set net fishery. This memo serves to describe preseason management strategies that have been developed and discussed by both fishery divisions, to facilitate management decisions directly affecting commercial and sport fisheries inseason.

### **Inseason Communication of Assessments**

Beginning some time after July 1, but no later than July 10, daily staff meetings will be held at 1:00 p.m. in the Soldotna office conference room. Meetings prior to July 1 will be held as necessary to communicate information relevant to both fishery divisions. Palmer and Anchorage SF staff will teleconference with the Soldotna meeting, as they deem necessary. The primary purpose of the staff meetings is to share and discuss fishery and assessment information, and determine data needs for possible future fisheries decisions. Staff meetings will stress interpretation of data, rationale behind fishery decisions, discussions of management strategies for future decisions, possible anticipated problems and review of run assessment to date. To facilitate rapid sharing of inseason information, all staff will have access to the SF Intranet site. CF staff will be given a user-id and password prior to the season so that all management and research staff can post and interpret each division's assessments.

## Information Provided by Commercial Fisheries Division

### **Standard Assessments**

Daily escapement data from four sonar sites (Kenai, Kasilof, Yentna, and Crescent), operated by CF, are generally ready by 10:00 a.m. On days following a fishing period, processor reports of catch are finalized by approximately 1:00 p.m. Indices from the Offshore Test Fish (OTF) project, a transect test fishery operated by CF offshore of Anchor Point, are generally available by 11:00 a.m. Age, weight and length (AWL) data summaries are distributed as they are processed, with updates prepared every 2 – 3 days (Scale sampling is conducted on the harvest after commercial openings, and from escapement at the adult enumeration projects). At critical points in the fishery, AWL reports are provided on request. Mark Willette (or CF designee) will respond to in-season research data requests on a time available basis and will be responsible for projections of inriver returns, and reporting achievement of OEGs, SEGs and BEGs of sockeye salmon in the Kasilof, Kenai, Yentna, and Crescent rivers. Pat Shields will respond to questions regarding catch data, offshore test fish data, and emergency orders. Pat will generally include a synopsis of conditions, outlooks, and rationale with the emergency order email. The target audiences for these emails are department staff familiar with fishery management and will not have the EO/ADA statement required for public distribution. Actual emergency orders and news releases will be posted on the Central Region CF Internet site.

The OTF program provides important early in-season information regarding total UCI sockeye salmon run strength. Six stations are fished daily near the southern line of the Central District. OTF index catches are expanded to total run size based on the historical relationship between commercial catch rates, OTF indices, and seasonal run timing. This year, due to fishing schedules, a reasonable estimate of the total UCI return strength will first occur on or about July 22. An estimate of the total return to the Kenai River generally will not be possible until one period later on or about July 25 due to availability of age composition information from Yentna River. This projection will be updated daily after the July 25 estimate or as needed.

Commercial CPUE or catch performance graphs are prepared after Central District drift gillnet and set gillnet fishing periods. In general, current year data are overlaid on recent (10-15 years) historical data or compared against a subset of years with similar run strengths and timing. When developed, graphs will be shared at staff meetings, emailed and posted on the SF intranet.

## Information Provided by Sport Fish Division

### **Standard Assessments**

Kenai River chinook salmon sonar estimates, Kenai River chinook salmon creel data, and weir passage information (Russian River, Deep Creek, Ninilchik River, Deshka River, Fish Creek, Cottonwood Creek and Little Susitna River) will be posted for staff on the SF Intranet site and made available to the public on the internet daily. Estimates of the catch and projections of total Kenai River chinook salmon escapements will be posted Monday, Wednesday, and Friday of each week beginning July 11. A subdirectory on the SF Intranet will also include data or observations concerning the Kenai River PU dip net fishery, predictions of the sport harvest above RM 19, a summary of sockeye salmon passage at the Kenai River chinook salmon sonar

site, and CPUE data for sockeye and chinook salmon in the Kenai River chinook salmon netting study. Larry Marsh or George Pappas will respond to sport fish data requests for the Kenai Peninsula, Dave Rutz for Northern Cook Inlet and the west side north from Tuxedni Bay, Matt Miller for the Anchorage area including Turnagain Arm, and Nicky Szarzi for the Westside south of Tuxedni Bay. Questions regarding Kenai chinook salmon assessment should be directed to Tim McKinley.

Kenai River coho salmon are assessed by monitoring annual smolt production, total harvest, and the relationship between the two. A sample of smolt has been captured, tagged, and released annually since 1992; this has served the dual-purpose of estimating annual smolt production and the population-specific harvest in commercial fisheries. The Statewide Harvest Survey has provided estimates of the inriver sport and personal-use harvest. Combining harvest estimates from all sources has provided an estimate of the total annual harvest of Kenai River coho salmon from 1993 through 2002. Questions regarding Kenai coho salmon assessment should be directed to Tim McKinley.

## Distribution of Information

Generally, paper copies of in-season escapement or passage estimates, OTF, and catch data are placed on the desk of each CF biologist, the SF research project leader, and SF Area Management Biologist in Soldotna as they become available. This information is also placed at the front counter available to the public. When all data are available, CF also distributes them via email to interested staff of both divisions across the state and places them in a directory on the SF Intranet. Estimates of abundance and catch and escapement graphs are distributed at staff meetings following full-district or Northern District fishing periods, and will be placed on the SF Intranet at that time. All recreational fishery information will be posted on the SF Intranet daily and paper copies of pertinent information may be provided at daily staff meetings. In-season escapement or passage estimates (SF and CF) and catches (CF) are also available on the ADF&G web site.

## *Management Strategies for the 2004 Season*

### Early Run Chinook and Sockeye Salmon

#### **Northern District Chinook Outlook**

The department does not forecast northern-bound chinook salmon stocks. However, a run of 47,000 chinook salmon to the Deshka River is projected for the 2004 season. This would lead to a surplus of 19,000 to 34,000 fish available for harvest. Based on Deshka River weir counts in late May, an E.O. has been issued to allow bait in the Deshka River sport fishery prior to June 8 in order to increase exploitation of the projected surplus. The commercial fishery in the Northern District will open for three periods beginning on May 31. The commercial fishery will be managed as specified in 5 AAC 21.366.

## **Early Run Kenai River Chinook Outlook**

The preseason outlook for early run Kenai River chinook salmon in 2004 is 14,000 fish which is slightly below the recent year average of 16,000 fish. The outlook is based on a model of sibling returns and stock/recruitment information. The current escapement goal range is 7,200 to 14,400 fish.

## **Early Run Russian River Sockeye Outlook**

No formal forecast is prepared for early run Russian River sockeye salmon. The escapement goal for this stock is 14,000 to 37,000 fish past the weir (5 AAC 21.361). Based on recent return performance of this stock (escapements of 30,000 to 50,000 fish in the past five years), average fishery performance is anticipated.

## **Strategy for Management of the Commercial Fishery**

### **Big River Commercial Fishery**

The Big River set gillnet fishery for sockeye salmon will be managed according to the Big River Sockeye Salmon Management plan (5 AAC 21.368). The fishery will open the Kustatan Subdistrict June 2 for Monday, Wednesday, and Friday weekly fishing periods. This fishery will close if the harvest of chinook salmon reaches 1,000 fish prior to the regulatory closure date of June 24. Inseason regulatory actions for sockeye salmon are not anticipated.

## **Strategy for Management of the Sport Fishery**

### **Northern District Chinook Salmon**

Westside Susitna chinook salmon fisheries were liberalized by regulatory actions taken at the 2002 Board of Fisheries meeting. Most Westside Susitna systems now have a 2 fish possession limit and bait is allowed by regulation in the Dëshka River on June 8. Additionally, Eastside Susitna chinook salmon fisheries may be liberalized with additional fishing day(s) added to the fishery. This decision is generally made during the last week of June based on recreational catch rates and aerial surveys.

### **Early Run Kenai River Chinook Salmon**

Early run Kenai River chinook salmon will be managed according to the Kenai River Early-Run King Salmon Management Plan (5 AAC 56.070). Given the anticipated total return of 14,000 fish and an anticipated harvest of approximately 3,500 fish (based upon an exploitation rate of 27% with the slot limit), no fishery restrictions are anticipated. However, this fishery and stock are monitored closely and a decision regarding restriction of the fishery, if necessary, would likely occur in early to mid June. Any decision to liberalize the fishery would likely happen around mid to late June.

### **Early Run Russian River Sockeye Salmon**

Given the outlook described above, no fishery restrictions are anticipated in this fishery. The

fishery will open by regulation on June 15. Generally, by June 20, a decision can be made as to whether the escapement goal will be achieved and the sanctuary area can be opened.

## UCI Sockeye Salmon

### Outlook

A run of 5.2 million sockeye salmon is forecasted to return to Upper Cook Inlet in 2004, with a projected harvest of 3.7 million sockeye salmon, see the 2004 forecast and commercial fishing outlook for more complete description.

### Strategy for Management of the Commercial Sockeye Fishery

The Kenai River late-run sockeye salmon commercial, sport and personal use fisheries shall be managed to achieve the following objectives:

- Meet an OEG of 500,000 – 1,000,000 late-run sockeye salmon;
- Achieve inriver goals as established by the board and measures at the Kenai River sonar counter located at river mile 19, and;
- Distribute the escapement of sockeye salmon evenly within the OEG range, in proportion to the size of the run.

### Upper Subdistrict Set Gillnet

- The Kasilof Section now opens on the first regular period on or after June 25.
- From June 25 through July 7 the department may not allow more than 48 hours of additional fishing time by EO per week (Sunday through Saturday) and must close the fishery for 48 consecutive hours per week
- Beginning July 8, the Kasilof Section will be managed in combination with the Kenai and East Forelands Sections. The forecast is for a Kenai River run of 3.2 million sockeye salmon, therefore, staff will manage as if it is **between 2 and 4 million** Kenai sockeye salmon until an assessment is made that changes that projection. The department shall manage for an inriver goal range of 750,000 – 950,000 sockeye salmon past the sonar counter at river mile 19. Staff may allow two 12-hour regular periods and up to 36 hours of additional fishing time per week, but will keep the entire Upper Subdistrict closed for a continuous 48-hour period per week. If the Kenai and East Forelands Sections are not open, the department may limit regular and extra periods in the Kasilof Section to within ½ mile of shore.
- If the Kenai River sockeye salmon assessment changes and is **less than 2 million**, the department shall manage for an inriver goal range of 600,000 – 850,000 sockeye salmon past the sonar counter at river mile 19. Under this scenario, there will be no more than 24 hours of additional fishing time per week in the Upper Subdistrict. If the Kenai and East Forelands Sections are not fished during regular or additional openings, the department may limit

regular and additional periods in the Kasilof Section to within ½ mile of shore. There would be no mandatory window closures. If the Kenai River sockeye salmon run is assessed to be under 2 million fish and the department determines that the Kasilof River sockeye salmon OEG of 300,000 may be exceeded, the department may allow 24 hours of additional fishing time per week after July 15 within ½ mile of shore in the Kasilof Section.

- If the Kenai River sockeye salmon assessment changes and is for a run of **more than 4 million** fish, the department shall manage for an inriver goal range of 850,000 – 1,100,000 sockeye salmon past the sonar counter at river mile 19. Staff may allow up to 60 hours of additional fishing time per week and will close the Upper Subdistrict for 36 consecutive hours per week. If the Kenai and East Forelands Sections are not fished, the department may limit regular and extra periods in the Kasilof Section to within ½ mile of shore.
- The Upper Subdistrict set gillnet fishery will close no later than August 7.
- From August 1 to August 7, regardless of the size of the sockeye salmon run to the Kenai River, the department is limited to no more than one E.O. not to exceed 24 hours in duration.

### **Central District Drift Gillnet Fishery**

- There will be one regular period restricted to the Kenai and Kasilof Sections between July 9 and July 15. This will either be on July 12 or July 15 in 2004. The Kasilof Section boundaries will likely be expanded during this restricted period. In addition, the next regular period will likely have a restriction in the northern portion of the Central District potentially closing the area north of Kalgin Island.
- Between July 16 and July 31 the department will restrict two consecutive drift gillnet periods to either or both of the following areas: (1) the Kenai and Kasilof Sections; and/or, (2) that portion of the Central District south of Kalgin Island. The area south of Kalgin Island may be used when necessary in returns when the Kenai sockeye run strength is approaching 3 million or there are Kenai chinook salmon concerns which may prevent fishing by set gillnets in the Upper Subdistrict.
- If the sockeye return is greater than three million and the department restricts the periods immediately before or on July 25 and after July 25 then the area described in the “Upper Cook Inlet 2002 Outlook For Commercial Salmon Fishing” in Figure 2 may be added to the other open area during these restricted periods.
- If the sockeye return is greater than four million for the fishing period immediately after July 25, the entire Central District normally open to drifting may be open to fishing. If this occurs, only one regular period restriction from July 16 to July 31 may actually occur.
- Appropriate restrictions of time and area will be implemented to achieve adequate escapements to the area’s rivers. For Northern District streams, Central District restrictions will end in late July or early August depending on the amount of divergence from the goal

and the apparent run timing of the run in question. These restrictions will likely occur in concert with restrictions for Northern District set gillnet fisheries. Restrictions to the Northern District set gillnets may occur anytime in late July and will cease when it is determined that they are no longer effective; likely early to mid August depending on run timing.

- For Northern District set gillnet fisheries additional fishing time to harvest surplus salmon may occur anytime in late July and will cease on August 15.
- The season closes on August 9 so the last regular period will be August 9 for 2004.

### **Drift gillnet Pink Salmon Fishery**

- The Cook Inlet Pink Salmon Management Plan (5AAC21.356) authorizes a drift gillnet fishery during even years only; it stipulates:
  - Open on the first three Monday, Wednesday, and Friday periods after Aug 9.
  - Limited to the area - see map attached to 2004 UCI Outlook for Commercial Salmon Fishing).
  - Maximum mesh size is 4.75-inch mesh. The maximum mesh depth remains 45 meshes

### **Season Opening dates**

Season opening dates for the various fisheries around the inlet are as follows:

**Big River Fishery:** June 2 and continuing through June 23 unless the 1,000 chinook salmon harvest limit is reached prior to that date. Weekly fishing periods are Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays from 7:00 a.m. to 7:00 p.m. with a 1,800-foot separation between nets.

**Northern District King Salmon Fishery:** There will be three fishing periods; May 31, June 7 and June 14, from 7:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. In that area from one mile south of the Theodore River to the Susitna River, there is only one open period during this fishery, which will occur on June 7 in 2004. Weekly fishing periods are on Mondays only, from 7:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. with a single 35 fathom set gillnet per permit and a 1,200 foot separation between nets.

**Western Subdistrict Set Net Fishery:** June 17

**Drift and all remaining set gillnet fisheries except the Upper Subdistrict:** June 28. The drift season will close August 9. One of the drift fishing periods scheduled for July 12 or July 15 will be limited by E.O. to the Kenai and Kasilof Sections only. Two consecutive periods between July 16 and July 31 will also be restricted as described above. Further restrictions by E.O. may also occur.

**Upper Subdistrict Set Net Fishery:** June 28 for the Kasilof Section (that portion south of the Blanchard Line). The Kenai and East Forelands Sections (that portion north of the Blanchard Line) will open July 8. All sections of the Upper Subdistrict will close for the season on August 7.

**Drift Gillnet Pink Salmon Fishery:** Commercial openings will occur on August 11, 13 and 16, from 7:00 a.m. to 7:00 p.m., in 2004.

## **Strategy for Management of the Sockeye Salmon Sport Fishery**

### **Kenai River Sockeye Salmon**

In the Kenai River, sockeye salmon passage is monitored by sonar in the main stem of the Kenai River at river mile 19. Main stem recreational fisheries for late-run sockeye salmon are managed under provisions of the Kenai River Late-Run Sockeye Salmon Management Plan (5 AAC 21.360). Kenai River sockeye escapement is estimated by subtracting final upriver harvest estimates from final sonar counts. Final estimates are generally available 12 months after the season ends. Preliminary escapement estimates are generated by subtracting historical average upriver harvests from final sonar counts. Preliminary escapement estimates are generally available at the end of the season.

The 2004 in-river goal is 750,000 – 950,000 sockeye salmon past the sonar counter at river mile 19. The OEG range is 500,000 – 1,000,000 sockeye salmon. This is the number of sockeye salmon past the sonar at river mile 19 minus the sockeye salmon sport harvest upstream of the sonar. If it is determined late in July that the Kenai River escapement is projected to be less than needed to attain the lower end of the OEG, sport fishery restrictions would be implemented to assure that the 500,000 sockeye salmon OEG goal is achieved. Restrictive management actions in the recreational fisheries have typically been enacted in concert with commercial actions and are designed to provide for additional conservation of Kenai River sockeye salmon stocks. In the mainstem of the Kenai River, the daily bag and possession limit for sockeye salmon is 3 fish unless the department determines the total return projection for Kenai River sockeye salmon exceeds 2 million fish and achieving the lower end of the OEG is assured, at which time the bag limit may increase to 6 fish. Restrictive management actions in the recreational fishery could include reduction in daily bag and possession limits and/or restrictions by time and area, or closure.

### **Russian River Sockeye Salmon**

The late-run sockeye salmon fishery in the Russian River and at its' confluence with the Kenai River are managed under provisions of the Russian River Sockeye Salmon Management Plan (5 AAC 21.361). Escapement of sockeye is monitored at the Russian River weir and the escapement goal is 33,000 – 121,000 fish. No formal forecast of late run Russian River sockeye salmon is made, but it is anticipated that returns to the Russian River weir will approximate the recent five year average of 80,000 fish. If restrictions or liberalizations to this fishery are necessary, they would likely occur during late July or early August.

### **Susitna River Sockeye Salmon**

Sockeye escapement into the Susitna River is monitored based on a sonar count at mile 7 of the Yentna River. Historical counts indicate that Yentna River comprises about 48% of the total sockeye salmon return to the Susitna River. Recreational harvests of sockeye salmon are incidental to harvests of other fish species. The total sport harvest from the Susitna River is about 6,000 sockeye salmon. This harvest is fairly proportional between East and Westside Susitna

River tributaries at about 3,000 per system. Of the 3,000 fish harvested from the Westside Susitna streams, the Yentna River accounts for about 2,500 of the harvest. Most of the sport harvest in the entire Susitna River drainage occurs prior to July 25<sup>th</sup>, which is at, or prior to, the 75<sup>th</sup> percentile of the return to the Yentna River. Although it is unlikely that restrictions would provide any substantial savings in terms of sockeye salmon being harvested by the sport fishery, recreational fishery restrictions in the Susitna River drainage will be considered if the lower end (90,000 sockeye salmon) of the Yentna River escapement goal is not achieved.

## **Strategy for Management of the Personal Use Fishery**

**Fish Creek Sockeye Salmon:** The Fish Creek personal use fishery may open by E.O. only if the upper end of the sockeye salmon escapement goal range of 20,000 – 70,000 is projected to be exceeded. Based on previous years stocking levels, it is unlikely that this fishery will open in 2004.

### **Kenai River Sockeye Salmon**

The Kenai River personal use dip net fishery is open from July 10 through July 31 from 6:00 a.m. to 11:00 p.m. each day. If it is determined that the sockeye salmon return will not achieve the OEG range of 500,000 – 1,000,000 fish, this fishery would be restricted in conjunction with a restriction to the sport fishery. If the total return projection for Kenai River sockeye salmon exceeds 2 million fish and achieving the lower end of the OEG is assured, the hour restriction on dip netting may be lifted (i.e. dipnetting 24 hours a day) through July 31. No additional action is likely in this fishery regarding coho salmon beyond those specified in the Kenai River Coho Salmon Conservation Management Plan (5 AAC 21.357).

### **Kasilof River Sockeye Salmon**

The Kasilof River personal use dip net fishery is open from June 25 to August 7, 24 hours per day. The Kasilof personal use gillnet fishery is open June 15 to June 24 from 6AM to 11PM each day. If it is projected that the lower end of the Kasilof River sockeye salmon OEG range of 150,000 – 300,000 fish will not be achieved, these fisheries will be restricted by E.O.

## **Late Run Kenai River Chinook Salmon**

### **Outlook**

The forecast for the 2004 season is approximately 61,000 chinook salmon. The escapement goal is 17,800 – 35,700 chinook salmon. It is anticipated that approximately 9,000 fish will be harvested in the Deep Creek marine fishery and the commercial fishery, leaving an inriver return of approximately 52,000. An in-river harvest of approximately 15,500 fish is anticipated, resulting in a 36,500 fish escapement.

## **Strategy for Management of the Commercial Fishery**

Given the current forecast for Kenai River sockeye (3.2 million) and the forecast for Kenai River chinook (61,000), closure of the Upper Subdistrict set net fishery and drift gillnets in the setnet

area is unlikely in 2004.

### **Strategy for Management of the Sport Fishery**

The late run Kenai River chinook salmon fishery is managed under provisions of the Kenai River Late-Run King Salmon Management Plan (5 AAC 21.359) and the Kenai River Late-Run Sockeye Salmon Management Plan (5 AAC 21.360). Sonar at river mile 9 is used to estimate passage of chinook salmon into the Kenai River. A creel survey is used in-season to estimate recreational catch, harvest and effort. A mean run timing model is used to project total in-river return. The late run chinook salmon management plan calls for a BEG range of from 17,800 to 35,700 chinook salmon. Typically, escapement projections are sufficiently accurate soon after July 20 to provide the basis for in-season management actions. The return is expected to be above average and the escapement is anticipated to be about 36,500 fish. If the run returns as expected and the harvest rates are as anticipated, in-season restrictions to this fishery are not anticipated. However, restrictive actions would be considered if the projected escapement was to fall below 17,800 chinook salmon. These restrictions would most likely occur within the July 20 - 31 time period when projections of harvest indicate that the escapement is at or below 17,800 fish. Restrictive management actions could consist of restricting the use of bait and/or combinations of restrictions by time and area. By regulation, the late run chinook salmon fishery will not be extended into August.

## **Coho Salmon**

### **General Inseason Assessment Tools and Outlook**

Coho salmon will be caught in the OTF project and drift gillnet fishery beginning around July 10. In general the coho salmon OTF project catches correlate with commercial drift catch per unit effort information but not with passage information gained from Northern Cook Inlet tributaries streams. Drift CPUE information is our best assessment tool in-season. OTF project coho salmon catch information does not provide a good tool for in-season abundance assessment. CF and SF staff will continue to work on these data to refine the methods and estimates of run strength for pink, chum, and coho salmon.

Weirs will be operated at Russian River, Little Susitna River, Cottonwood Creek and the Deshka River for coho salmon enumeration during the 2004 season. Enumeration of coho salmon at each of these sites except the Deshka River occurs too late in the season to use the information for in-season management. In the Deshka River, the 25% point in the run appears to occur at the weir on August 1 and the mid point occurs on August 9.

### **Strategy for Management of the Commercial Coho Salmon Fishery**

The department manages the commercial fishery in UCI to minimize the harvest of Northern District and Kenai River coho salmon through stipulations in various fishery management plans. The measure of our success is the frequency of inriver restrictions of sport fisheries. These stipulations in management plans have been put in place to pass more coho salmon through to the Northern District and the Kenai River to provide for sport fisheries.

The department will not restrict regular periods in UCI unless escapement indices or other abundance indices for chinook, sockeye, coho, chum, or pink salmon are below sustained yield objectives. These indices may be CPUE data, sonar counts, or other indicators as appropriate. A biological justification is needed to close or restrict a regular period. The department is not targeting a stock or minimizing coho or chinook harvests during regular periods. Regular periods are allocations given to the commercial fishery through the Board process and not subject to E.O. adjustments for anything other than biological reasons. The department will not restrict a regular period even if coho salmon are expected to be the most abundant species.

The department will take into account coho salmon run strength before allowing the drift gillnet fleet to fish south of Kalgin Island or in the “Box” during the regular periods near July 25 (for a description of the box see figure 2 in the “Upper Cook Inlet 2004 Outlook For Commercial Salmon Fishing”). A mixture of criteria will be evaluated to determine duration, number of periods and area below Kalgin Island or in the “Box” may be utilized for drift gillnet fishing during the two restricted regular periods near July 25. Fishing south of Kalgin Island would not be allowed if coho salmon were projected to require in-river restrictions.

The commercial fishery in late July will be managed to achieve the sockeye salmon in-river goal, as has been the practice since 2000. If additional fishing time is necessary in early August in the Upper Subdistrict as allowed in 5 AAC 21.357. Kenai River Coho Salmon Conservation Management Plan, both gear types will be allowed.

## **Strategy for Management of the Coho Salmon Sport Fishery**

### **Kenai Peninsula**

Coho salmon fisheries in drainages of the Kenai Peninsula are not monitored on an in-season basis. The BOF reduced bag and possession limits for coho salmon from 3 to 2 fish daily for most road accessible systems throughout UCI during the February 2000 meeting in Anchorage. Given these conservation measures, no in-season management actions will likely be taken to restrict recreational coho salmon fisheries on the Kenai Peninsula during the 2004 season.

### **Northern Cook Inlet**

Typically, Northern Cook Inlet recreational coho salmon fisheries are not liberalized. During 1997 and 1999 restrictions were implemented in the Little Susitna River and Knik Arm streams. Restrictions were based on commercial catch rates and in-river recreational harvest rates. No action is anticipated in Knik Arm streams during the 2004 season. A two fish daily bag limit is in effect and Cottonwood, Wasilla, and Fish creeks are only open on weekends for 12 hours per day. Coho weirs will be operated only on Cottonwood Creek and the Deshka and Little Susitna Rivers to provide enumeration of the escapement. Restrictive action is also unlikely in the Little Susitna River given the two fish daily bag limit.

## **Strategy for Management of the Commercial Pink and Chum Salmon Fishery**

## **Pink Salmon Management Plan**

The experimental pink salmon fishery created by the BOF will occur during the 2004 season.

### **UCI Chum Salmon**

Chum salmon are not harvested to an appreciable degree in the Upper Subdistrict. The Kenai River Late-Run Sockeye and Northern District Salmon management plans stipulate that no additional fishing shall be given to the drift gillnet fishery outside the Kasilof and Kenai Sections until a significant harvestable surplus of chum salmon is available. The department will not restrict regular periods in UCI unless escapement indices or other abundance indices for chinook, sockeye, coho, chum, and pink salmon are below sustained yield objectives. These indices may be CPUE data, sonar counts, or other indicators as appropriate. A biological justification is needed to close or restrict a regular period. The department is not targeting a stock (chum salmon) or minimizing coho or chinook harvests during regular periods. Regular periods are allocations given to the commercial fishery through the Board process and not subject to Emergency Order adjustments for anything other than biological reasons.

## **Strategy for Management of the Pink and Chum Salmon Sport Fishery**

### **UCI Pink and Chum Salmon**

Recreational fisheries for chum and pink salmon are not managed on an in-season basis in Cook Inlet. Catch and harvest levels are low relative to abundance as anglers target chinook, coho and sockeye salmon. Pink salmon and chum salmon are enumerated at existing weir sites. Of specific interest is the enumeration of pink salmon through the Deshka weir. Additionally, chum salmon are enumerated by aerial survey in some West Cook Inlet streams.