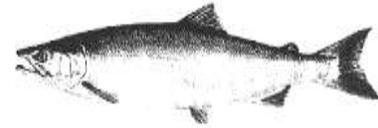


ALASKA DEPARTMENT OF FISH AND GAME DIVISION OF COMMERCIAL FISHERIES NEWS RELEASE



Douglas Vincent-Lang, Commissioner
Samuel Rabung, Director



Contact:
Cordova Management and Research Staff: Jeremy Botz,
Charles Russell, Stormy Haught, and Jenni Morella
Phone: (907) 424-3212
Fax: (907) 424-3235

Cordova ADF&G
401 Railroad Avenue
P.O. Box 669
Cordova, AK 99574
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2019 PRINCE WILLIAM SOUND SALMON SEASON SUMMARY

The following is an overview of the 2019 Prince William Sound (PWS) Area commercial salmon season. Please note that numbers in the narrative are rounded for simplicity and all data are preliminary.

The 2019 PWS Area commercial salmon harvest was 57.74 million fish. Harvest was composed of 18,400 Chinook, 2.55 million sockeye, 504,000 coho, 49.34 million pink, and 5.33 million chum salmon (Table 1). The 2019 harvest included 51.25 million (89%) commercial common property fishery (CCPF), and 6.48 million (11%) hatchery cost recovery and broodstock fish.

The estimated value of the commercial salmon harvest, including hatchery sales, was approximately \$113.96 million. During the 2019 season, 504 drift gillnet, 27 set gillnet, and 238 purse seine permit holders recorded at least one delivery. Drift gillnet exvessel harvest was valued at an estimated \$41.14 million (average permit earnings of \$81,600); set gillnet exvessel value an estimated \$2.36 million (average permit earnings at \$87,500); and purse seine exvessel value an estimated \$51.85 million (average permit earnings at \$218,000). Revenue generated for hatchery operations was approximately \$18.60 million.

GILLNET FISHERIES

COPPER RIVER DISTRICT

The 2019 preseason commercial harvest forecast for the Copper River District was 756,000 sockeye and 235,000 coho salmon. The 2019 common property Chinook salmon forecast was 31,000 fish. Gulkana Hatchery was projected to contribute 98,000 sockeye salmon to the common property fishery. The commercial salmon fishing season in the Copper River District began on Thursday, May 16 and continued on a regular schedule of two fishing periods per week for the duration of the Chinook and sockeye salmon fishery. Through the second week of August, the commercial fishery was open 648 hours compared to the recent 10-year (2009–2018) average of 718 hours. The harvest of 1.27 million sockeye salmon (Table 1) was 28% more than the previous 10-year (2009–2018) average harvest of 990,000 fish. The average sockeye salmon weight of 5.5 pounds was the largest in the last five years. Copper River District commercial sockeye salmon

harvest was 94% or 1.20 million wild fish, 3% or 39,800 Gulkana Hatchery fish, and 3% or 32,700 Main Bay Hatchery fish. The commercial harvest of 17,900 Chinook salmon (Table 1) was 44% above the previous 10-year (2009–2018) average harvest of 12,500 fish. The inriver goal for salmon passing the Miles Lake sonar site was 618,000–1,010,000 salmon. The 2019 sonar passage estimate was 1.04 million salmon. Preliminary inriver Chinook salmon abundance estimates indicate that spawning escapement was above the lower bound sustainable escapement goal (SEG) of 24,000 fish. Spawning escapement to Copper River delta systems based on aerial survey indices was 61,500 sockeye salmon, which is within the SEG range of 55,000–130,000 fish. The commercial harvest of 78,000 coho salmon (Table 1) was 37% below the previous 10-year (2009–2018) average harvest of 235,000 fish. The commercial coho salmon fishery was open for weekly 24-hour periods during the first four weeks of the fishery and remained closed for the last four weeks of the season. This year’s management of the coho salmon fishery required a more conservative approach due to low escapement indices throughout the run. Coho salmon spawning escapement to the Copper River Delta based on aerial survey indices is currently 22,800 and is below the SEG range of 32,000–67,000 fish.

BERING RIVER DISTRICT

The total Bering River District sockeye salmon harvest was 22,200 fish (Table 1), 11 times the recent 10-year average (2009–2018) CCPF harvest of 2,000 sockeye salmon. The sockeye salmon directed commercial fishery in the Bering River District was focused in the western portion of the district to target Copper River bound fish. The commercial harvest of 7,400 coho salmon (Table 1) was 89% below the previous 10-year harvest average of 67,000 fish. The coho salmon fishery was managed in concert with the Copper River District fishery and presented similar low harvest and escapement indices. The aerial escapement index of 17,600 sockeye salmon was within the SEG range of 15,000–33,000 fish. Bering River District coho salmon spawning escapement monitoring is ongoing, but peak escapement counts are currently 9,390 fish, below the SEG range of 13,000–33,000 fish.

COGHILL DISTRICT

Prince William Sound Aquaculture Corporation (PWSAC) forecast a 2019 run of 1.99 million chum and 233,000 coho salmon to Wally Noerenberg Hatchery (WNH). The CCPF drift gillnet harvest of chum salmon in the Coghill District was 1.04 million fish. The proportion of wild chum salmon in the Coghill District CCPF harvest was 3%. PWSAC harvested 1.39 million chum salmon (Table 1) (55% of the forecast) for cost recovery and broodstock. The total chum salmon harvest attributed to WNH was 2.6 million fish and was 31% above forecast. The CCPF drift gillnet harvest of sockeye salmon in the Coghill District was 392,000 fish; 160% above the recent 10-year average (2009–2018) of 153,000 fish. The proportion of wild sockeye salmon in the Coghill District CCPF harvest was 57%. Pink salmon CCPF drift gillnet harvest in the Coghill District was 287,000 fish, 27% of the recent 10-year average. The proportion of wild pink salmon in the Coghill District CCPF harvest was 72%. The CCPF drift gillnet harvest of coho salmon in the Coghill District was 95,300 fish, 170% above recent 10-year average.

The 2019 Coghill Lake sockeye salmon total run forecast was 473,000 fish. The Coghill River weir passed 32,200 sockeye salmon, which is within the SEG range of 20,000–60,000 fish.

ESHAMY DISTRICT

PWSAC forecast a run of 1.37 million Main Bay Hatchery sockeye salmon in 2019. The CCPF harvest of sockeye salmon in the Eshamy District was 666,000 fish (Table 1), 51% below the forecast and 29% below the recent 10-year (2009–2018) average of 937,000 fish. The proportion of wild sockeye salmon in the Eshamy District CCPF harvest was 14% (94,000 fish). The CCPF harvest of chum salmon was 172,000 fish (Table 1) and the proportion of wild chum salmon in the Eshamy District CCPF harvest was 4%. Pink salmon CCPF harvest in the Eshamy District was 311,000 fish (Table 1) compared to the recent 10-year (2009–2018) average of 168,000 fish; and the proportion of wild pink salmon in the Eshamy District CCPF harvest was 91%.

UNAKWIK DISTRICT

Unakwik District CCPF harvest was 9,079 sockeye salmon (Table 1), which was more than double the 10-year average (2009-2018) of 2,750 sockeye salmon.

PORT CHALMERS SUBDISTRICT

The drift gillnet gear group had exclusive access to the forecasted Port Chalmers chum salmon run of 250,000 fish. The Montague District CCPF drift gillnet chum salmon harvest was 1.52 million fish, 500% above forecast, with the proportion of wild chum salmon in the Port Chalmers Subdistrict <1% (11,400 fish) of CCPF harvest.

PURSE SEINE FISHERIES

CHUM SALMON

The 2019 chum salmon forecast was 3.10 million fish. The majority, 2.57 million (83%), were from PWSAC hatchery production, with 330,000 fish expected to return to the Armin F. Koernig hatchery (AFK). Based on the department's wild chum salmon forecast of 527,000 fish, there was a potential common property harvest of 327,000 wild chum salmon.

Total commercial chum salmon harvest in PWS was 5.35 million fish, including 1.39 million fish for WNH broodstock and cost recovery. The purse seine CCPF harvest of 1.18 million chum salmon was above the recent 10-year harvest average of 615,000 chum salmon. Purse seine chum salmon harvest in PWS was predominantly from the Southwestern and Eastern districts. Chum salmon commercial harvest in the Southwestern District was 545,000 fish, of which 484,000 (89%) were of AFK origin. Eastern District chum salmon commercial harvest was 530,000 fish, of which 494,000 (93%) were of wild stock origin.

PINK SALMON

The 2019 pink salmon total run forecast for PWS was 66.02 million fish, of which 57.88 million were estimated to be available for CCPF harvest. This estimate included 23.56 million wild stock fish, 22.30 million PWSAC hatchery fish, and 20.16 million Valdez Fisheries Development Association (VFDA) fish. Approximately 3.43 million (17%) of the projected 20.16 million VFDA pink salmon return would be needed for cost recovery and broodstock, leaving 16.72 million for CCPF. Approximately 2.87 million (13%) of the projected 22.30 million pink salmon run to the PWSAC hatcheries needed for cost recovery and broodstock. The remaining 19.43 million PWSAC pink salmon would be available for common property harvest. Based on the department's wild stock pink salmon forecast of 23.56 million fish, there was a potential CCPF of 21.73 million wild pink salmon.

The CCPF harvest of 44.26 million pink salmon was 7.76 million (15%) less than the 5 odd-year average, and 24% below the 57.88 million CCPF preseason forecast. Total pink salmon harvest was 49.34 million fish, including 5.08 million fish for hatchery cost recovery, broodstock, and raceway sales (2.97 million for PWSAC and 2.11 million for VFDA). Pink salmon otolith contributions estimate CCPF harvest contributions of 11.50 million Solomon Gulch Hatchery fish, 19.81 million PWSAC fish, and 18.04 million wild fish. The VFDA pink salmon run was 43% (9.1 million) below the preseason forecast of 20.16 million fish. The PWSAC pink salmon run was 11% (2.49 million) below the preseason forecast of 22.30 million fish. The wild pink salmon CCPF harvest of 18.04 million fish was the third-largest odd-year harvest since 1999. The number of active permits fished in the Prince William Sound purse seine fishery was the highest number since 1991 at 238 permits.

Aerial surveys to assess chum and pink salmon escapements began in mid-June and continued into September. Inseason pink and chum salmon escapement estimates were above the expected for the date in most districts during early-July, but salmon escapements started to decline across PWS in mid-July. This decline in escapements mid-season in PWS was most likely due to a record drought and heatwave that occurred during 2019. These unusual weather conditions complicated wild stock management as salmon milled offshore waiting on rain and cooler temperatures, this delayed CCPF opportunities from July 21 through August 5. Once salmon started to arrive at streams in sufficient numbers in early-August, CCPF opportunities were expanded in time and area to target surplus wild pink salmon. However, aerial surveys indicated that pink salmon were unable to enter streams because of low flow conditions, and significant prespawn mortality events were documented throughout PWS. The estimate of pink salmon escapement is not yet available, however overall escapements were likely within odd-year SEG ranges in most districts though given the drought conditions it is uncertain how viable escapements were based on the amount of pre-spawn mortality observed.

COHO SALMON

The VFDA coho salmon run was forecast to be 87,400 fish. Total CCPF harvest of coho salmon in PWS (excluding Copper River and Bering River districts) was 418,900 fish. Coho salmon otolith contributions estimate CCPF harvest contributions of 80,800 Solomon Gulch Hatchery fish, 219,600 WNH fish, and 118,600 wild fish.

Table 1.–Preliminary Area E salmon harvest, 2019.

District	Chinook	Sockeye	Coho	Pink	Chum	Total
Bering River	103	22,240	7,361	145	253	30,102
Copper River	17,842	1,269,300	77,755	204,522	25,148	1,594,567
Eastern	135	86,932	236,644	20,307,599	530,066	21,161,376
Northern	15	18,119	32,198	9,007,250	34,125	9,091,707
Coghill	107	392,498	104,238	412,850	1,040,466	1,950,159
Northwestern	29	28,121	4,485	875,264	22,382	930,281
Eshamy	61	666,285	1,295	311,885	172,014	1,151,540
Southwestern	56	42,880	28,241	9,922,006	545,374	10,538,557
Montague	39	3,927	657	292,543	1,523,100	1,820,266
Southeastern	10	5628	11118	2,921,323	38,366	2,976,445
Unakwik	2	9,079	0	4,052	1,739	14,872
CCPF Total	18,399	2,545,009	503,992	44,259,439	3,933,033	51,259,872
Hatchery						
Solomon Gulch	0	0	0	2,110,874	0	2,110,874
Cannery Creek	0	0	0	881,580	0	881,580
Wally Noerenberg	0	0	0	1,154,944	1,392,561	2,547,505
Main Bay	0	8,032	0	0	0	8,032
Armin F. Koernig	0	0	0	933,777	0	933,777
Hatchery Total ^a	0	8,032	0	5,081,175	1,392,561	6,481,768
PWS Total Harvest	18,399	2,553,041	503,992	49,340,614	5,325,594	57,741,640

^a Hatchery sales harvest for operating costs and broodstock harvest.