



Advisory Announcement

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BRISTOL BAY 2020 COMMERCIAL SALMON FISHING OUTLOOK

COVID-19

Under Alaska's Health Mandates 10, 11, and 12, commercial fishing is an Essential Business and is part of Alaska's Essential Services and Critical Infrastructure. Commercial fishermen should ensure that all travel and other activities in support of commercial fishing operations follow protocols in Alaska COVID-19 Health Mandates. COVID-19 Health Mandates may be found here: <https://gov.alaska.gov/home/covid19-healthmandates/>.

The department is continuing preseason preparations for normal operations of all run assessment projects and fishery management functions following the protocols in Alaska COVID-19 Health Mandates. We ask that forms required for fishery participation be submitted electronically and well in advance of the season when possible. See below for details.

INTRODUCTION

This document provides general information to fishermen, processors, and the public concerning the upcoming Bristol Bay salmon season. Included is the general framework for management of each of the five major districts and the 2020 salmon forecast.

During the season, Bristol Bay salmon fishing announcements are broadcast on marine VHF channel 07A. Current fishing announcements are aired on local radio stations—KAKN and KDLG. As conditions in the fishery change, for the most current information, fishermen should stand by at regular announcement times: 9:00 a.m., 12:00 noon, 3:00 p.m., 6:00 p.m., and 8:00 p.m., unless otherwise stated. Information is also available via telephone; for east-side fisheries (Naknek-Kvichak, Egegik, and Ugashik), dial 246-INFO (4636), for west-side fisheries (Nushagak and Togiak) dial 842-5226. Fishermen are asked to note that regular office hours at the Dillingham ADF&G office will be 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. Monday thru Friday. In addition to the regular office hours, from June 20 to July 12 the Dillingham office will be open on weekends from 8:00 a.m. until 12:00 noon. In King Salmon the office hours are as follows: June 1 to June 14 and after July 17: 8:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m., and 1:00 p.m. to 4:30 p.m., closed for lunch and weekends. From June 15 to July 17: 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. seven days per week.

ADF&G Forms

Regarding district registration cards: set gillnet permit holders are only required to fill out and return set gillnet registration cards if they fish in the Nushagak District. Drift gillnet permit holders must fill out and return district registration cards prior to commercial fishing in any district in Bristol Bay. PDF files of district registration cards, permit holder agent authorization forms, and dual drift registration forms are posted on the ADF&G Bristol Bay homepage online and can be printed, completed, mailed to the address on the printout, or submitted electronically to Dillingham at tim.sands@alaska.gov and karen.brito@alaska.gov or King Salmon at travis.elison@alaska.gov and mary.emery@alaska.gov. If electronic submission or mail submission is not possible, forms will be available May 1 and may be submitted to Anchorage, King Salmon, or Dillingham office personnel. These resources are available online at:

<http://www.adfg.alaska.gov/index.cfm?adfg=commercialbyareabristolbay.salmon#management>

Inseason Fishery Information

Fishery updates, announcements, catch and escapement information, and Port Moller Test Fishery genetic stock composition estimates will be available at:

<http://www.adfg.alaska.gov/index.cfm?adfg=commercialbyareabristolbay.salmon>

The Port Moller Test Fishery daily catch updates and interpretations of the data will be posted at the following web site once the project becomes operational on June 10:

<https://www.bbsri.org/port-moller-test-fishery>

Alaska Wildlife Troopers – Summer 2020 Outlook – Bristol Bay

Enforcement Priorities:

- The department is concerned about underreporting of king salmon harvested in the Bristol Bay fishery. Tenders can expect to be boarded and checked for undocumented king salmon on board their vessels. All king and coho salmon must be reported on fish tickets at the time of landing.
- Continued strong focus on fishing district lines and open/closed fishing periods in all districts using all available assets.
- Routine boarding of drift gillnet and processor vessels as well as beach patrols to verify licensing and permitting regulations are met. Fishermen and processors are reminded that at the time of delivery of fish, a fish ticket must be generated and must include the signature of a company representative and the full name and signature of the CFEC permit holder (BOTH permit holders if dual drift operation). The permit holder(s) must be present at the time of delivery in order to sign the fish ticket. Crew members cannot sign fish tickets for permit holders. Fish tickets also must include the number or pounds of fish, by species, retained by a commercial fisherman for that person's own use.
- Continued enforcement of state boating safety laws in cooperation with the U.S. Coast Guard.

- Continued enforcement and educational outreach regarding potential conflicts between resource users and marine mammals in cooperation with National Marine Fisheries Service.
- Increased checks for compliance with legal gear length and depth, and continued focus on basic vessel ID and gear ID such as buoy and cork markings, and lighting requirements.
- AWT has noted an increase in violations for grounding and failure to report lost gillnets. Fisherman are reminded to review gillnet specifications and operations regulations and be aware that fishing a drift gillnet when the net, or vessel to which it is attached, is grounded is prohibited by regulation and the loss of a gillnet, or portion of the gillnet, is required to be reported to a local department office in Dillingham or King Salmon within 15 hours.

Fishermen and processors should be aware of the reporting requirements in 5 AAC 06.377(b) that state:

“Each commercial fisherman shall report, on an ADF&G fish ticket, at the time of landing, the number of king and coho salmon taken but not sold.”

SALMON OUTLOOK

BAYWIDE

The 2020 Bristol Bay inshore sockeye salmon run is forecasted to be approximately 46.6 million fish. Based on the forecast and using the midpoints of the lower or upper portion of escapement goal ranges, depending on forecasted run size, 34.6 million fish are potentially available for commercial inshore harvest (Table 1). The department manages fisheries based on inseason information regarding abundance. The inseason management approach uses a suite of assessment tools to provide information on abundance and run timing in each district, and that information will be used by the department to determine fishing opportunity.

The commercial salmon season in Bristol Bay opens June 1 by regulation. Fishing in eastside districts and Togiak will be allowed using a weekly schedule that will vary by district. The schedules are in place to balance fishing opportunity with escapement in the early part of the season, particularly for king salmon. As each run develops and sockeye salmon run characteristics become defined within individual districts, fishing time will be adjusted accordingly. In the Nushagak District, management will focus on king salmon in the early part of the season, and switch to sockeye salmon management as abundance dictates.

2020 Regulatory Changes

The Alaska Board of Fisheries (BOF) met in Anchorage in March 2020 and took action on proposal 279, which repealed 5AAC 06.333(a)(3). The result of this action will allow the use of dual permit operations to continue in the Nushagak District and the Ugashik District after June 29 if/when the Naknek River Special Harvest Area is in use.

NAKNEK-KVICHAK DISTRICT

An inshore run of approximately 19.0 million sockeye salmon is expected for the Naknek-Kvichak District in 2020. Based on the forecast, the projected harvest in the Naknek-Kvichak District is approximately 12.3 million sockeye salmon: 5.9 million from the Kvichak River, 2.3 million from the Alagnak River, and 4.1 million from the Naknek River (Table 1). Sockeye salmon returning to the Naknek-Kvichak District are predicted to be 39% age-1.2, 44% age-1.3, 14% age-2.2, and 2%

age-2.3 fish.

The Naknek River escapement goal range is 800,000 to 2.0 million sockeye salmon. The Kvichak River escapement goal range is 2.0 million to 10.0 million sockeye salmon. The Alagnak River escapement goal is a minimum of 210,000 sockeye salmon. Escapements will be managed within the lower or upper portions of the escapement goals proportional to the run size based on the preseason forecast and inseason assessment of run size.

Fishing in the Naknek-Kvichak District will be open four days per week from 9:00 a.m. Monday to 9:00 a.m. Friday, beginning 9:00 a.m. Monday, June 1 and ending 9:00 a.m. Wednesday, June 24. Drift gillnets will be restricted to fishing in the Naknek Section only, while set gillnets will be allowed to fish in the entire Naknek-Kvichak District. From June 24 until July 17, fishing periods will be based on sockeye salmon escapements, abundance in the district, and gear group harvest percentages. District test fishing for inseason management may be conducted periodically depending on run characteristics. As in previous years, some openings could occur on short notice.

EGEGIK DISTRICT

A forecasted inshore run of approximately 10.2 million sockeye salmon is expected for the Egegik River in 2020. The escapement goal range for sockeye salmon is 800,000 to 2.0 million fish. Based on the forecast, the potential surplus of fish available for harvest is 8.5 million (Table 1). Approximately 43% of the run is expected to be age-1.3 fish, followed by age-2.2 (29%), age-1.2 (17%), and age 2.3 (10%).

For 2020, separate gear openings and extensions will be used to adjust harvest to achieve allocation percentages. Fishermen are reminded that regulations direct the department to avoid “to the extent practicable,” continuous fishing with set gillnet gear in the Egegik District, therefore, Egegik set gillnet fishermen should expect breaks in fishing.

Based on the Kvichak River sockeye salmon forecast, fishing will begin in the full Egegik District. The season will start with a three day per week schedule that will be in effect until June 17. The primary reason for the three day per week schedule is to provide for king salmon escapement to rivers flowing into the Egegik district. Commercial fishing will be allowed in the Egegik District from 9:00 a.m. Monday, until 9:00 a.m. Wednesday and from 9:00 a.m. Thursday until 9:00 a.m. Friday. This schedule will begin at 9:00 a.m. Monday, June 1 and run through 9:00 a.m. Wednesday, June 17 for drift and set gillnet gear. After June 17, additional fishing time for both gear groups will be announced according to sockeye salmon run strength. As in previous years, some openings could occur on short notice. Periods will be adjusted to allocate harvest between drift and set gillnet gear groups.

In addition, subsistence fishing will be permitted in the waters of the Egegik commercial district from 12:01 a.m. Monday, June 1 until 11:59 p.m. Wednesday, June 17. The department will consider additional directed subsistence openings but will wait until inseason to announce those openings.

UGASHIK DISTRICT

The forecasted Ugashik River sockeye salmon inshore run in 2020 is 4.5 million fish. The escapement goal range is 500,000 to 1.4 million sockeye salmon. Based on the forecast, 3.3 million fish are potentially available for harvest. Approximately 49% of the run is expected to be age-1.2, 31% age-1.3, 19% age-2.2, and 1% age-2.3 fish.

The Ugashik District allocation plan specifies 10% for set gillnet and 90% for the drift gillnet group. As in previous years, separate gear openings and adjusting length of commercial periods will be used to address allocation between gear groups in 2020.

Beginning 9:00 a.m. Monday, June 1, commercial fishing in the Ugashik District will be allowed on a 9:00 a.m. Monday to 9:00 a.m. Friday schedule through 9:00 a.m. Friday, June 19. Based on the Kvichak River sockeye salmon forecast, fishing will begin in the full Ugashik District. Additional fishing time after June 19 will depend on fishery performance and run strength indicators. Permit holders should note that the regulation restricting opportunity to no more than 48 hours between June 16 and June 23 will not be in effect in 2020.

In addition, subsistence fishing will be permitted in the waters of the Ugashik commercial district from 12:01 a.m. Monday, June 1 until 11:59 p.m. Friday, June 19.

It is unknown at this time whether walrus will return to the Cape Greig area. If they do, the department will use the adjusted line from 2016. If they do not, the district boundaries will revert to those in regulation at 5 AAC 06.200(d). The first announcement of the 2020 season will clarify which boundary will be in place for the summer.

At the March 2013 meeting, the BOF made changes to when Area T permit holders may fish in the inner portion of the Cinder River Section (river and lagoon) and the Inner Port Heiden Section. The BOF adopted proposals that would allow Area T permit holders to fish within the inner portion of the Cinder River Section and Inner Port Heiden Section during all months when open by regulation. For further information contact ADF&G in Port Moller at 907-375-2716. Area T permit holders who fish the Cinder River and Port Heiden sections and deliver their catch in the Ugashik District are reminded to report the section of catch on the appropriate fish tickets and note that transporting fish from the sections mentioned above to deliver in the Ugashik District is not permitted during July.

NUSHAGAK DISTRICT

Nushagak River king salmon are managed according to the *Nushagak-Mulchatna King Salmon Management Plan* (5 AAC 06.361). This plan directs the commercial fishery to be managed for an inriver goal of 95,000 king salmon. King salmon escapement in the Nushagak River did not meet the lower end of the escapement goal range in 2019. In order to avoid consecutive years of escapement below the escapement goal range, a conservative approach to management of the commercial fishery in the Nushagak District will be used. The department will closely monitor king salmon escapement and does not anticipate any directed king salmon openings in 2020.

The Nushagak District sockeye salmon inshore run forecast is approximately 12.0 million fish: 2.3 million for escapement and 9.7 million potentially available for harvest in the Nushagak District commercial salmon fishery (Table 1). The total inshore run by river system is: Wood River 8.3 million (escapement goal range 700,000 to 1.8 million), Igushik River 1 million (escapement goal range 150,000 to 400,000), and Nushagak River 2.8 million (escapement goal range of 370,000 to 900,000). Approximately 54% of the forecasted run is expected to be age-1.2 sockeye salmon, < 2% age-2.2, 43% age-1.3, and < 1% age-2.3 fish.

The strategy for 2020 is to start directed sockeye salmon openings once there is an escapement of at least 100,000 sockeye salmon past the Wood River tower. This is contingent upon the Nushagak River king salmon escapement projecting to be at least 95,000 fish. If Nushagak River king salmon escapement is projecting below 95,000 fish, the department may wait to allow directed sockeye

salmon openings to for additional king salmon to pass through the commercial fishing district.

Openings will be scheduled based on sockeye salmon escapement levels in the Nushagak and Wood rivers. Mesh size will be limited to 5.5 inches or smaller. If the Nushagak River sockeye salmon escapement decreases relative to expected escapements, the department may first warn and then impose the 4.75-inch mesh restriction in the Nushagak District. Based on changes made by the BOF in December 2015, the department would also open the Wood River Special Harvest Area (WRSHA) at this time. Subsequently, if Nushagak River sockeye salmon escapement falls below the projected 370,000 fish curve, then the department may limit fishing to only the WRSHA to protect Nushagak River sockeye salmon. Commercial openings in the district may follow as allowed by escapement levels in the Nushagak River.

Igushik River sockeye salmon will be managed independently of the Nushagak-Wood River sockeye salmon stocks. Set gillnet fishing will begin in the Igushik Section when there is a market available. Initial openings will be 8 hours per day and additional time will be added if large harvests or escapement information indicate more time is warranted. Drift gillnet openings in the Igushik Section will be added as needed to control sockeye salmon escapement. Igushik River sockeye salmon returns can be quite variable relative to forecasted run strength. Management will incorporate a readiness to respond with increasing early set gillnet openings and attempt to maintain the 6% sockeye salmon harvest allocation to the Igushik Section set gillnet group by only adding drift gillnet openings as needed.

The department will switch to pink and coho salmon management within the Nushagak District around July 23, when sockeye salmon harvest decreases. Sonar counts will cease approximately July 25. After that, management decisions will be based on catch per unit effort, subsistence reports, and possibly aerial surveys.

District test fishing for inseason management may be conducted periodically depending on run characteristics. Permit holders interested in test fishing in the Nushagak District should contact Tim Sands in Dillingham at (907) 842-5227.

TOGIAC DISTRICT

The 2020 inshore run of Togiak River sockeye salmon is forecast to be approximately 880,000 fish. Based on the forecast, approximately 690,000 sockeye salmon will potentially be available for commercial harvest. The escapement goal range is 120,000 to 270,000 sockeye salmon. Approximately 32% of the run is expected to be age 1.2; 1% of the run is expected to be age 2.2; 66% is expected to be age 1.3; and 1% is expected to be age 2.3.

Unlike other fishing districts in Bristol Bay that require emergency orders to announce fishing periods, Togiak District follows a regular weekly schedule that allows fishing in Togiak Bay Section four days per week, fishing in Kulukak Section two and a half days per week, and fishing in Matogak, Osviak, and Cape Peirce sections five days per week. Following the *Registration and Reregistration* regulations, permit holders are restricted from fishing in the Togiak District until 9:00 a.m. July 27 if they have fished in any other district in Bristol Bay, and conversely, restricts permit holders from fishing in any other district until 9:00 a.m. July 27 if they have fished in the Togiak District. A 2015 BOF action now requires vessel transfers to be restricted in Togiak District similarly to the restriction of permit transfers. Other recent regulation changes prevent drift gillnet fishing effort near the Togiak River mouth through July 15 and restricts mesh size to 5.5 inches or smaller between June 15 and July 15 for the conservation of king salmon.

King salmon run strength to the Togiak River has been considered below average for several years. The department is anticipating another poor king salmon run, and permit holders can expect emergency orders to reduce the weekly fishing schedule in the last two weeks of June in the Togiak River Section.

Harvest of coho and pink salmon will be dependent on market presence. If a market for coho salmon is present, the department will continue to follow the regular weekly schedule unless it is determined that more conservative action is needed.

Acknowledgements

The department would like to again thank stakeholders for funding assistance via the Bristol Bay Fisheries Collaborative (BBFC) in 2019. The BBFC began in 2016 as an agreement between ADF&G and the Bristol Bay Science and Research Institute (BBSRI) to work together with stakeholders to restore a world class fisheries management system and raise funds to support and maintain it. This agreement is supported by ADF&G, the Bristol Bay Regional Seafood Development Association (BBRSDA), processors, municipalities, villages, support industries, individual setnet fishermen, and other stakeholders. A list of organizations that committed financial support to the BBFC in 2019, as well as additional information about this agreement can be found at <https://www.bbsri.org/bbfc>.

In 2019, BBSRI and BBRSDA funded a second test boat in the Port Moller Test Fishery. This vessel targeted stations offshore of the traditional test fishing stations. Information from the two-vessel program provided much more accurate stock composition estimates and characterized the inshore arrival of the run better than information from a single-boat program.

Table 1.—Forecast of total run, escapement, and harvest of major age classes of sockeye salmon returning to Bristol Bay river systems in 2020.

DISTRICT	Millions of Sockeye Salmon									
	River	Forecasted Production by Age Class					Forecasted		South	BB
		1.2	2.2	1.3	2.3	Total	Escapement	Harvest	Peninsula ^a	Inshore
NAKNEK-KVICHAK										
	Kvichak	5.07	2.23	3.04	0.07	10.42	4.00	5.92	0.50	9.92
	Alagnak	1.94	0.48	1.61	0.06	4.08	1.57	2.32	0.20	3.89
	Naknek	0.78	0.17	4.19	0.33	5.47	1.10	4.11	0.26	5.21
	Total	7.80	2.88	8.84	0.46	19.97	6.67	12.34	0.96	19.01
	EGEGIK	1.88	3.13	4.66	1.08	10.75	1.70	8.53	0.52	10.23
	UGASHIK	2.31	0.87	1.46	0.04	4.67	1.18	3.28	0.22	4.45
	NUSHAGAK									
	Wood	5.81	0.14	2.68	0.04	8.66	1.53	6.72	0.42	8.25
	Igushik	0.37	0.00	0.68	0.01	1.07	0.28	0.74	0.05	1.02
	Nushagak	0.67	0.03	2.12	0.06	2.90 ^b	0.50	2.26	0.14	2.77
	Total	6.85	0.18	5.47	0.10	12.63	2.30	9.72	0.61	12.03
	TOGIAK	0.30	0.01	0.61	0.01	0.93	0.20	0.69 ^c	0.04	0.88
	BRISTOL BAY									
		19.14	7.06	21.04	1.68	48.95	12.04	34.56	2.35	46.60
		39%	14%	43%	3%	100%				

Note: This table is a summary. Slight differences may appear due to rounding.

^a Projected harvest is based on WASSIP estimates of the combined median harvest rates of the South Alaska Peninsula June, post-June, and North Peninsula fisheries in 2006-2008.

^b Nushagak River forecast total includes age-0.3 and age-1.4 fish.

^c Forecasts for Kulukak, Kanik, Osviak, and Matogak river systems are not included. These systems contribute approximately 50,000 sockeye salmon to Togiak District harvest each year.