

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



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PRINCE WILLIAM SOUND HERRING: All herring fisheries in Prince William Sound **will remain closed in spring 2012**, including purse seine and gillnet sac roe, spawn-on-kelp in pounds, and wild spawn-on-kelp fisheries. The Prince William Sound herring biomass is estimated to be just above the minimum spawning biomass threshold of 22,000 tons (**22,400 tons**). According to 5AAC 27.365(b) Prince William Sound herring management plan, no fishery may be opened if the estimated spawning biomass is below this threshold level. Although the projection is for a biomass slightly greater than the threshold, the biomass is projected to include a large percentage of fish not fully recruited to the spawning population and almost any exploitation will reduce the biomass to below the regulatory threshold.

Hydroacoustic, net sampling, and aerial surveys were conducted in 2011 to assess herring biomass, disease prevalence, age composition, and growth. In March and April 2011, acoustic surveys were conducted with the ADF&G vessel R/V *Solstice* and the M/V *Auklet*, contracted by the Prince William Sound Science Center (PWSSC). Broad scale surveys were conducted in eastern Prince William Sound up to Tatitlek Narrows. Detailed acoustics data were collected on major concentrations in Port Gravina, between St. Matthews Bay and Red Head and in Port Fidalgo.

Age composition samples in Eastern PWS were predominately age 4-7 (Greater than 90% in most samples). Spawning fish samples contained slightly more age-6 and -7 fish than samples collected prior to spawning. The department collected additional age, sex, and size data along with disease assessment data in eastern PWS during spring 2011.

Herring disease assessment has been part of the annual assessment program that the department has completed each spring since 1993. Disease sampling in early April and November 2011 documented no viral hemorrhagic septicemia virus (VHSV). Prevalence of *Ichthyophonus hoferi* ranged from 11.7% in St. Matthews Bay to 46.7% in Port Gravina near Hells Hole in April. *I. hoferi* prevalence in November 2011 was 13.3% (subadult fish) and 63.3% (adult fish) from samples collected in Port Gravina. The department will continue to monitor these disease indices this spring.

A total of 26.2 mile-days of spawn were observed in spring 2011; less than the observed mile-days in all years with commercial sac roe fishing openings. Seventeen mile-days were assessed as dissipating or drift of milt. Most spawning events were in northeastern (15.5 mile-days) and southeastern (10.2 mile-days) PWS. Only 0.4 mile-days of spawn were observed on Montague Island in 2011.

So far in spring 2012, the department has conducted an acoustics survey and aerial surveys; collected age, sex, size, and disease data from prespawning and spawning fish. The acoustics survey began on 25 March with a broad-scale search on the east side up to Boulder Bay. Detailed acoustics data were collected on fish aggregations in Port Gravina, between St. Matthews Bay and Red Head, and on the south side of Port Fidalgo.

Aerial surveys began on 28 March and to date 14 surveys have been flown. Surveys have documented spawn in eastern PWS around Gravina Point (7 to 12 April), between St. Matthews Bay and Knowles Head (13 to 18 April); between Fish Bay and Landlocked Bay (11 to 16 April); and on the east side of Tatitlek Narrows and in Virgin Bay (13 to 16 April). Preliminary estimates are 18.3 mile-days (south of Knowles Head) and 18.6 mile-days (north of Knowles Head). To date, no fish or spawn have been documented in Fairmont Bay, Naked Island, Montague Island, or Knight Island.

Additional updates on the status of the PWS herring population will be announced when new information becomes available.