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Advisory Announcement

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2021 PRINCE WILLIAM SOUND SALMON FISHERY INFORMATION

General Information

This outlook is provided to assist the commercial salmon industry in planning for the 2021 season in the Prince William Sound (PWS) Management Area (Area E). Forecasts for commercial harvest (excludes hatchery cost recovery and raceway sales) by species are summarized in Table 1 with detailed Area E forecasts on ADF&G's web site:

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

Prince William Sound Aquaculture Corporation (PWSAC) hatchery forecasts can be found on the PWSAC web site:

<https://pwsac.com/2021/01/2021-pwsac-hatchery-return-forecast/>

Valdez Fisheries Development Association (VFDA) hatchery forecasts can be found on the VFDA web site:

<https://www.valdezfisheries.org/forecasted-returns/>

PWS commercial salmon fisheries are managed from the Cordova area office of ADF&G. As in past years, fishery announcements from the Cordova ADF&G office will routinely occur at 2:00 p.m. Announcement recordings will be available for gillnet fisheries at 907-424-7535 and seine fisheries at 907-424-7345. Additionally, announcement recordings are available by phone from the Anchorage office at 907-267-2843. Daily announcements are compiled and can be found on the ADF&G web site at:

<http://www.adfg.alaska.gov/index.cfm?adfg=cfnews.main>

The first announcement concerning the Copper River District will be issued between April 30 and May 7.

Gillnet Fishery

Copper River District

The Copper River delta spawning escapement goal (SEG) is 55,000–130,000 sockeye salmon; the upper Copper River SEG is 360,000–750,000 wild sockeye salmon. The 2021 inriver run goal past the Miles Lake sonar is 605,000–995,000 salmon consisting of the following components:

Spawning escapement	360,000–750,000 sockeye
Other salmon	17,500 salmon
Subsistence	73,500 salmon
Personal use harvest	116,500 salmon
Sport fishery	15,000 salmon
Gulkana broodstock	20,000 sockeye
Gulkana Hatchery surplus	2,600 sockeye
Total	605,000–995,000 salmon

The standard commercial fishing schedule is two evenly-spaced fishing periods per week with the first period each week starting on Mondays at 7:00 a.m. Fishing effort, harvest, and escapement trends on the Copper River Delta and at Miles Lake sonar station will inform the department's decisions on harvest opportunity.

The 2021 commercial harvest forecast for the Copper River District are 652,000 sockeye and 218,000 coho salmon (Table 1). The Chinook salmon harvest (all fisheries) forecast is 13,000 fish. The 2021 sockeye salmon harvest forecast is 47% below the 10-year (2011–2020) average of 1.23 million fish. Based on the recent poor Chinook and sockeye salmon production, a conservative management approach will be implemented at the start of the season. For Chinook salmon conservation, the 'inside closure area', as defined in 5AAC 24.350(1)(B), may be closed during early season fishing periods beyond regulatory requirements; this area may be expanded at the start of the season to include waters inside the barrier islands east of Coffee Creek West (60° 14.13' N. lat., 144° 58.31' W. long.).

Beginning in early to mid-August, the Copper and Bering River districts will be managed for coho salmon. The standard management strategy for coho salmon is one or two 24-hour commercial fishing periods per week depending on escapement and harvest levels.

Individuals planning to participate in state subsistence salmon fishing activities in the Prince William Sound Management Area may obtain a permit through any ADF&G office or online (<https://www.adfg.alaska.gov/Store/>). **In Cordova, permits will be available at the office during normal business hours Monday through Friday from 8:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m. and 1:00 p.m. to 5:00 p.m.** ADF&G staff will not be available to issue permits before hours, after hours, on state holidays, or on weekends. **Permit holders are encouraged to call the Cordova office at 907-424-3212 or report online (<https://www.adfg.alaska.gov/Harvest/>) to provide preliminary harvest reports to assist with inseason harvest tracking.**

Bering River District

The recent 10-year average (2011–2020) commercial harvests for the Bering River District are 4,000 sockeye and 61,000 coho salmon. The western portion of the Bering River District will open concurrent with the Copper River District to alleviate enforcement concerns in the line fishery along the district boundary. A broader Bering River District opening is expected only after sockeye salmon escapement is tracking to achieve the SEG. Beginning in early August, the Bering River District will be managed for coho salmon and management strategies will be similar to those used for Copper River District.

Eshamy District

The 2021 sockeye salmon run to Main Bay Hatchery (MBH) is forecast to be 1.08 million fish. PWSAC requires 568,000 (53%) sockeye salmon for cost recovery and broodstock, leaving 508,000 (47%) fish available for harvest. The management strategy in 2021 will be to provide two periods per week in the district. Extended closures and short duration periods are likely due to MBH cost recovery and broodstock needs. Fishing time in the Crafton Island Subdistrict may be adjusted based on the Coghill River wild sockeye salmon escapement. Eshamy District is expected to open for the 2021 season on May 31.

Eshamy River escapement will be assessed in 2021, but no forecast was produced this year due to lack of assessment in recent years. Beginning in early to mid-July, fishing time and area in Crafton Island Subdistrict will be driven by harvest of wild pink and sockeye salmon in Eshamy District, and the strength of wild pink and chum salmon escapement in the Southwestern, Eshamy, Northwestern, Coghill, and Northern districts.

Coghill District

The 2021 Coghill Lake sockeye salmon forecast is 282,000 fish with an SEG of 20,000–60,000 fish. The chum salmon run to Wally Noerenberg Hatchery (WNH) is forecast to be 1.68 million fish. PWSAC requires 797,000 (47%) chum salmon for cost recovery and broodstock, leaving 883,000 (53%) fish available for harvest. Coghill District is expected to open for the 2021 season on May 31.

The management strategy in 2021 will be to provide two periods per week. Based on the recent variability in sockeye salmon escapement to Coghill River and increased fishing effort in the Coghill District, 36 to 48 hour periods are likely in areas outside the WNH SHA and THA, and the Esther and Granite Bay subdistricts. WNH cost recovery and broodstock needs may necessitate extended closures of hatchery subdistricts. If sockeye salmon escapement in Coghill District indicates a strong run, the Port Wells area will be regularly opened north to the markers near Coghill Lagoon. If the Coghill River weir counts exceed the escapement goal, fishing area will be expanded to the mouth of Coghill River. If the drift gillnet fleet does not appear to be able to harvest available surplus Coghill Lake sockeye salmon, the purse seine fleet may be allowed to fish north of 61° latitude in the Coghill District.

PWSAC projects the 2021 run to WNH to be 89,000 coho salmon, requiring 2,700 fish for broodstock and all remaining fish available for harvest.

Unakwik District

The wild stock sockeye salmon commercial harvest 10-year average (2011–2020) in Unakwik Inlet is 3,510 fish. During the sockeye salmon run to Miners and Cowpen lakes, the management strategy will be to provide two periods per week. When implemented, this schedule is expected to run concurrently with openings in the Coghill District. Unakwik District is expected to open for the 2021 season on June 14.

Purse Seine Fishery

The 2021 pink salmon forecast for PWS is 57.38 million fish, of which 47.55 million are expected to be available for harvest. This pink salmon total run forecast includes 20.59 million Valdez Fisheries Development Association (VFDA) fish, 19.19 million wild fish, and 17.60 million PWSAC hatchery fish. Approximately 3.49 million (17%) of the projected 20.59 million VFDA pink salmon return will be needed for cost recovery and broodstock, leaving 17.10 million fish available for harvest. Approximately 4.49 million (26%) of the projected 17.60 million pink salmon run to the PWSAC hatcheries will be needed for cost recovery and broodstock, leaving 13.10 million fish available for harvest. Based on the department's wild stock pink salmon forecast of 19.19 million fish, there is a potential harvestable surplus of 17.35 million wild pink salmon. The department will manage for each district's aerial index escapement goal for a cumulative SEG of 1,121,000–2,555,000 pink salmon. **There is considerable uncertainty regarding the spawning success of wild pink salmon returning to PWS in 2019 due to severe drought conditions that persisted through much of pink salmon spawn timing. Pre-spawn mortality, lack of water in spawning streams, and high water temperatures were observed in 2019. This forecast does not integrate environmental indices or other indicators of spawning success and the 2021 prediction takes no account of the anomalous conditions observed during the 2019 parent year.**

The 2021 chum salmon forecast is 2.66 million fish, including both wild and hatchery chum salmon. The majority, 2.15 million (81%), are from PWSAC hatchery production, of which 470,000 fish are forecasted to be available to the commercial purse seine fishery, with 150,000 fish returning to the Armin F. Koernig hatchery (AFK) and 320,000 fish returning to the Port Chalmers remote release location. The wild chum forecast is for 508,000 fish. The department will manage for each district's escapement goal for a combined total of 200,000 fish, which leaves a potential harvestable surplus of 308,000 wild chum salmon.

The PWS purse seine fishery will begin on Monday, May 31, targeting the hatchery chum salmon runs to the AFK hatchery and Port Chalmers remote release site. At the AFK hatchery, a regular schedule of three fishing periods per week (Monday, Thursday, Saturday) is likely at the start of the season. A reduced schedule will be implemented, if necessary, to limit the harvest of salmon bound for other areas of PWS. In the Port Chalmers Subdistrict, a regular schedule of three fishing periods per week (Monday, Thursday, Saturday) is planned at the start of the season. A reduced schedule will be implemented, if necessary, to limit the harvest of salmon bound for other areas of PWS. The Port Chalmers enhanced chum salmon fishery will close in late July, after which purse seine fishing periods within the Montague District will be opened based on the strength of wild pink salmon stocks. During June and July, anadromous stream closures and regulatory closed waters within the open areas at AFK and Port Chalmers will be suspended to facilitate the harvest of hatchery chum salmon.

The PWS general waters of the eight purse seine districts will be managed based on the strength of wild stocks. Hatchery subdistricts will be managed based on the strength of both wild and hatchery stocks. Pink and chum salmon aerial escapement trends and fishery performance data will be evaluated inseason and compared to average historical performance to determine the frequency and duration of openings. The department has used yellow Salmon Harvest Task Force markers in the past to close terminal wild stock areas for both escapement and quality concerns. The coordinates for these markers are available to the public at the Cordova ADF&G office, online, and are included in an annual fishery news release.

Valdez Arm, Valdez Narrows, and Port Valdez will be managed for VFDA's cost recovery and broodstock needs. Openings in Valdez Arm and Port Valdez targeting VFDA pink salmon will be based on the strength of the hatchery run and VFDA's progress towards achieving the pink salmon cost recovery goal. Commercial purse seine openings targeting VFDA fish generally start during the first week of July with daily 14-hour periods (6 a.m. to 8 p.m.). In the remainder of the Eastern District, openings will be based on wild stock escapements. Port Valdez will be closed to commercial fishing opportunities north of a line from Entrance Point to Potato Point beginning on August 15. Valdez Narrows Subdistrict will open on Tuesday, September 7, to target surplus VFDA coho salmon. The VFDA hatchery coho salmon forecast is 87,700 fish with a commercial harvest of 32,000 fish.

The AFK, Cannery Creek Hatchery (CCH), and WNH pink salmon runs will be managed collectively to achieve PWSAC's cost recovery and broodstock goals. Prior to run entry sustaining consistent hatchery cost recovery harvest, the department may open the WNH, CCH, and AFK Hatchery THAs and SHAs to the commercial fishery to maintain pink salmon quality. Once PWSAC initiates cost recovery, they intend to complete at least 70–80% of their pink salmon cost recovery goal prior to recommending an opening of the commercial fishery in the hatchery subdistricts. To allow for an orderly and consistent commercial fishery, ADF&G will work closely with PWSAC to achieve the pink salmon cost recovery goal as rapidly as possible. The department evaluates late pink salmon run progress based on cost recovery and commercial fishery harvest rates, broodstock collections, sex ratios, stock composition estimates, and wild stock escapement data.

Table 1.—ADF&G, PWSAC, and VFDA commercial harvest forecast (hatchery stock estimates exclude cost recovery and raceway sales) for the 2021 salmon fishery in the Prince William Sound and Copper/Bering River areas.

PINK SALMON - HARVEST ESTIMATE (Thousands)

Wild Stocks	17,349
Hatchery Stocks^a	
Solomon Gulch	17,095
Armin F. Koernig	3,728
Wally Noerenberg	5,028
Cannery Creek	4,348
Wild & Hatchery	47,548

CHUM SALMON - HARVEST ESTIMATE (Thousands)

Wild Stocks	308
Hatchery Stocks^a	
Wally Noerenberg	883
Armin F. Koernig	150
Port Chalmers	320
Wild & Hatchery	1,661

COHO SALMON - HARVEST ESTIMATE (Thousands)

PWS Wild Stocks	No Projection
Copper River	218
Bering River	61
Hatchery Stocks^a	
Solomon Gulch	32
Wally Noerenberg	86
Wild & Hatchery	397

SOCKEYE SALMON - HARVEST ESTIMATE (Thousands)

Copper River Wild & Hatchery	652
Bering River	4
Coghill Lake	252
PWS Remainder	No projection
PWS Hatchery Stocks^a	
Main Bay	508
Wild & Hatchery	1,416

CHINOOK SALMON - HARVEST ESTIMATE (Thousands)

Wild Stocks	
Copper River	No Projection

^a Potential hatchery contributions to the commercial harvest are based on the forecast of total hatchery runs minus preseason estimates of cost recovery and broodstock harvest that will be required by hatchery operators.