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Advisory Announcement

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UPPER COOK INLET 2023 OUTLOOK FOR COMMERCIAL SALMON FISHING

Sockeye Salmon Forecast

In 2023, a run of approximately 5.1 million sockeye salmon is forecast to return to Upper Cook Inlet (UCI) with an estimate of 3.1 million available for harvest (commercial, sport, personal use, and subsistence).

The sockeye salmon total run forecast for the Kenai River is approximately 2.8 million fish. The 2023 sockeye salmon forecast is 765,000 less (21%) than the 20-year average run of 3.6 million, and 300,000 less than the 5-year average of 3.1 million. In 2023, the predominant age classes are projected to be age-1.2 (13%) and age-1.3 (71%). The Kenai River preseason forecast has overestimated the total run by an average of 8% over the past 10 years with a range of -50% to 39%.

The Kasilof River sockeye salmon run forecast is approximately 1.1 million fish which is 180,000 fish greater (19%) than the historical (1986–2022) average but is 160,000 fish greater (17%) than the recent 10-year average. The predominant age classes in the 2022 run forecast are age-1.2 (28%) and age-1.3 (50%). The Kasilof River preseason forecast has overestimated the total run by an average of 1% over the past 5 years with a range of -31% to 44%.

The Susitna River sockeye salmon run forecast is 340,000 fish, which is near the recent 5-year average.

The Fish Creek sockeye salmon run forecast for 2023 is 90,000 fish. The 2023 forecast is near the 5-year average run from 2016–2020. The years 2021 and 2022 were excluded from this analysis because the weir was not operated for the entire run.

2023 Sockeye Salmon Forecasts and Escapement Goals

System	Forecast	Goals ^a
Kenai River ^{b,c}	2,820,000	1,100,000–1,400,000
Kasilof River ^{b,d}	1,126,000	140,000–320,000
Susitna River	340,000	
Larson Lake	N/A	15,000–35,000
Chelatna Lake	N/A	20,000–45,000
Judd Lake	N/A	15,000–40,000
Fish Creek	90,000	15,000–45,000
Unmonitored Systems ^e	744,000	N/A
Total	5,120,000	

^a Goals listed here are as follows: Kenai River: Inriver; Kasilof River: Biological Escapement Goal (BEG); Susitna River: SEG (weir goals); and Fish Creek: Sustainable Escapement Goal (SEG).

^b Kenai River goal is DIDSON-based; Kasilof river is Aris-based.

^c Kenai River SEG is 750,000–1,300,000 sockeye salmon.

^d Kasilof River optimal escapement goal (OEG) is 140,000–370,000 sockeye salmon.

^e Unmonitored systems are estimated to be 15% of monitored systems.

2023 Fishing Strategies

Northern District Set Gillnet Salmon Fishery Overview and Management

- The 2023 Deshka River preseason king salmon forecasted total run of 7,243 fish is well below the sustainable escapement goal (SEG) of 9,000–18,000 fish. Based on this forecast and recent low king salmon production throughout the Susitna River Drainage, the department issued an Emergency Order (EO # 2-KS-2-05-23) which closed the Deshka River king salmon sport fishery.
- As regulated by the *Northern District King Salmon Management Plan* (NDKSMP), the 2023 directed king salmon commercial fishery in the Northern District (ND) will start the season closed. Escapement of king salmon into the Deshka River will be closely monitored. If the run is stronger than expected and sport fishing of king salmon is allowed in the Deshka River, the directed king salmon commercial fishery may occur.
- Beginning Monday, June 26, the ND set gillnet fishery will be managed per provisions found in the *Northern District Salmon Management Plan* (NDSMP). This plan provides for two 12-hour weekly fishing periods and follows standard regulatory gear stipulations.
- While Susitna River sockeye salmon were removed from stock of yield concern status at the 2020 Board of Fisheries meeting, restrictive actions to commercial fisheries that harvest this stock were retained in regulation. According to the NDSMP, the legal complement of gear in the ND set gillnet fishery may be reduced to either one or two nets per permit from July 20 through August 6 to conserve Susitna River sockeye salmon. However, in that portion of the General Subdistrict south of the Susitna River, options for gear reduction are limited to two nets per permit after July 30.
- The fishery will be closed for the season by EO when catch and effort cease ~ October 1.

Central District Set Gillnet Fisheries in Chinitna Bay, Western, Kustatan, and Kalgin Island Subdistricts of the Set Gillnet Salmon Fisheries Overview and Management

- Chinitna Bay, Western, Kalgin Island, and Kustatan subdistrict management will generally follow regulatory fishing periods and schedules, except for that portion of the Western Subdistrict south of Redoubt Point, where fishing is often allowed three days per week based on increasing harvest rates of Crescent River sockeye salmon.
- The Kalgin Island Subdistrict may also be given up to one extra fishing period per week if the Packers Lake sockeye salmon assessment shows that the escapement goal is projected to be achieved.
- The fisheries will be closed for the season by EO when catch and effort cease ~ October 1.

Upper Subdistrict set gillnet (ESSN) and Central District Drift Gillnet fisheries Overview

ESSN fishery

- The 2023 Kenai River late-run king salmon forecast projects a total run of 13,630 large (>75cm mid eye to tail fork) fish. The optimal escapement goal (OEG) for Kenai River late-run king salmon is 15,000–30,000 large fish. The *Kenai River Late-Run King Salmon Management Plan* (KRLKSMP) states that if the projected late-run large king salmon escapement is less than 15,000 large fish, the department shall close the sport fisheries in the Kenai River and in the salt waters of Cook Inlet north of the latitude of Bluff Point to the taking of king salmon and close the commercial set gillnet fishery in the Upper Subdistrict of the Central District. On March 2, 2023, the department issued an Emergency Order (EO # 2-KS-1-11-23) closing the king salmon sport fishery in the Kenai River beginning July 1, 2023. Subsequently, the department issued an Emergency Order (EO# 2S-1-23) closing set gillnet fishing in the Kenai, East Forelands, and Kasilof Sections to start the 2023 season. If inseason projections of large king salmon are improve and indicate the OEG will be achieved, then fishing opportunity will be reassessed and may be opened.
- The 2023 preseason estimate for the total run of Kenai River late-run sockeye salmon is 2.8 million fish. For sockeye salmon runs 2.3–4.6 million fish, the *Kenai River Late-Run Sockeye Salmon Management Plan* (KRLSSMP) stipulates ADF&G manage to the SEG range of 750,000–1,300,000 and achieve an inriver goal of 1.1 to 1.4 million fish. The department will formally reassess the UCI sockeye salmon run after July 20.

Central District Drift Gillnet Fishery

- The department manages the UCI drift gillnet fleet primarily under the guidance of the *Central District Drift Gillnet Fishery Management Plan* (CDDGFMP; 5 AAC 21.353). The purpose of this management plan is to ensure adequate escapement of salmon into Northern Cook Inlet drainages and to provide the department with management guidelines.
- The drift gillnet fishery opens the third Monday in June or June 19, whichever is later.
- Drift gillnet openings generally follow regulatory Monday/Thursday fishing periods; 7:00 a.m. to 7:00 p.m.

- During drift gillnet openings waters within two miles of the mean high tide mark on the eastern side of the Upper Subdistrict will be closed until those locations have been opened for set gillnets (5 AAC 21.310 (3)(A)).
- Drift gillnet fishery openings are stipulated in the CDDGFMP by date and sockeye salmon abundance.
- Additional fishing time may be added based on sockeye salmon abundance.

Inseason Management of the ESSN and Central District Drift Gillnet Fisheries

ESSN Fishery

Kasilof Section Prior to July 8

- Due to the preseason late-run Kenai king salmon sport fishing closure and stipulations within the KRLKSMP, the ESSN fishery is closed to begin the 2023 season. If inseason projections of large late-run Kenai king salmon are greater than forecasted and indicate the OEG will be achieved, then fisheries may be opened.

North Kalifornsky Beach (NKB) Statistical Area July 1 to July 8th

- Due to the preseason late-run Kenai king salmon sport fishing closure and stipulations within the KRLKSMP, the ESSN fishery is closed to begin the 2023 season. If inseason projections of large late-run Kenai king salmon are greater than forecasted and indicate the OEG will be achieved, then fisheries may be opened.

Kasilof, Kenai, and East Forelands Sections After July 8

- Due to the preseason late-run Kenai king salmon sport fishing closure and stipulations within the KRLKSMP, the ESSN fishery is closed to begin the 2023 season. If inseason projections of large late-run Kenai king salmon are greater than forecasted and indicate the OEG will be achieved, then fisheries may be opened.

Central District Drift Gillnet Fishery

- The 2023 run size for Kenai River late run sockeye salmon is projected to be 2.8 million fish, which leads to the following management provisions in the drift gillnet fishery:
 - Due to the preseason set gillnet closure, waters within two miles of the mean high tide mark on the eastern side of the Upper Subdistrict will be closed, to drift gillnets, until those locations have been opened for set gillnets (5 AAC 21.310 (3)(A)).
- **Prior to July 8,**
 - Regulations specify 12-hour District Wide regulatory Mon/Thurs fishing periods.
 - Additional time may be allowed District Wide or restricted as needed.
- **From July 9 through July 15,**
 - Drift gillnet fishing is restricted for both regulatory fishing periods to the Expanded Kenai and Expanded Kasilof Sections (Figure 2), and Drift Gillnet Area 1 (Figure

- 3). For Kenai River sockeye salmon runs greater than 2.3 million fish, one additional fishing period may be opened in the Expanded Sections and Area 1.
- Any additional fishing time is allowed only in the Expanded Kenai and Expanded Kasilof Sections.
 - **From July 16 through July 31,**
 - For runs of 2.3–4.6 million Kenai River sockeye salmon, fishing during one regulatory period per week will be opened in one or more of the following areas: the Expanded Kenai, Expanded Kasilof, the Anchor Point Section, and Drift Gillnet Area 1. The remaining regulatory period will be restricted to one or more of the following: Expanded Kenai and Expanded Kasilof Sections and Anchor Point section of the Upper Subdistrict. Any additional time shall be restricted to the Expanded Kenai Section, the Expanded Kasilof Section, and the Anchor Point Section.
 - **From August 1 through August 15,**
 - Regulatory Mon/Thurs fishing periods will be restricted to one or more of the following: Expanded Kenai Section, Expanded Kasilof Section, Anchor Point Section, or Drift Gillnet Area 1. Any additional fishing time will be dependent upon meeting sockeye and coho salmon escapement objectives but is limited to the Expanded Kenai or Kasilof and Anchor Point Sections.
 - Two one-percent rules apply to drift gillnet fishing in August. If the entire ESSN fishery is closed per its own one-percent rule, or if the department determines that less than one-percent of the season total drift gillnet sockeye salmon harvest has been taken per fishing period, for two consecutive fishing periods by drift gillnets, then regulatory fishing periods will be restricted to Drift Gillnet Areas 3 and 4.
 - The department uses all open drift gillnet periods regardless of the area(s) open to fishing to calculate the drift gillnet one-percent rule.
 - **From August 16 until closed by EO,**
 - Drift Areas 3 and 4 are open for regulatory periods.
 - Chinitna Bay may be opened by EO only, based upon chum salmon escapement objectives being met or when the chum salmon run is complete.
 - Drift fisheries close for the season by EO, when effort ceases, which is generally mid- to late-September.

Season Opening Dates

Season opening dates in 2023 for the various fisheries around the inlet are as follows:

- *Northern District king salmon fishery:* The directed king salmon fishery is closed to start the 2023 season until Deshka River king salmon sport fisheries are opened (EO # 2S-2-23).

- *Big River fishery*: June 2 and continuing through June 23, unless the 1,000 king 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.
- *Western Subdistrict set gillnet fishery*: June 19.
- *Drift gillnet fishery*: June 19.
- *All remaining set gillnet fisheries, except the ESSN fishery*: June 26.
- *ESSN fishery*: Closed

Set Gillnet Registration and Buoy Stickers

All Cook Inlet setnet fishermen are required to register prior to fishing for one of three areas of Cook Inlet: 1) the Upper Subdistrict of the Central District; 2) the Northern District; or, 3) all remaining areas of Cook Inlet (Greater Cook Inlet). Once registered for one of these three areas, fishermen may fish only in the area for which they are registered for the remainder of the year. No transfers will be permitted. Dual set gillnet permit holders are required to register both permits in the same registration area. Set gillnet permit holders fishing in the Northern District or the Greater Cook Inlet area can register at ADF&G offices in Soldotna, Homer, or Anchorage or by mail. Forms are available at area offices or on the department's Upper Cook Inlet commercial fishing homepage at: <http://www.adfg.alaska.gov/index.cfm?adfg=commercialbyareauci.salmon#/management>.

Fishermen wishing to register in person for the Upper Subdistrict must register in the **Soldotna ADF&G office** and must purchase buoy stickers at the time of registering. Electronic registration and buoy sticker purchasing may be completed online. Permit holders will need to create an ADF&G profile to access the new registration/sticker application.

General information and Contact Numbers

The UCI commercial fisheries information line will again be available by calling 262-9611. The most recent EO announcement is always available on the recorded message line and catch, escapement and test fishing information is included whenever possible. The same recording may be accessed at <http://www.adfg.alaska.gov/index.cfm?adfg=commercialbyareauci.main> and clicking on the UCI Commercial Fisheries Information Recording player.

All EO announcements are also faxed or emailed to processors as quickly as possible and posted at <http://www.adfg.alaska.gov/index.cfm?adfg=commercialbyareauci.salmon>. If you would like all EOs and News Releases emailed to you as soon as they are released, you can subscribe at this website for that service. For very general information, the Commercial Fisheries web page is found at <http://www.adfg.alaska.gov/index.cfm?adfg=fishingCommercial.main>.

If, during the summer, fishermen have information or questions concerning the commercial fishery, the Soldotna Division of Commercial Fisheries staff can be reached by phone at 262-9368, by fax at 262-4709, or by mail at 43961 Kalifornsky Beach Road, Suite B, Soldotna, 99669.

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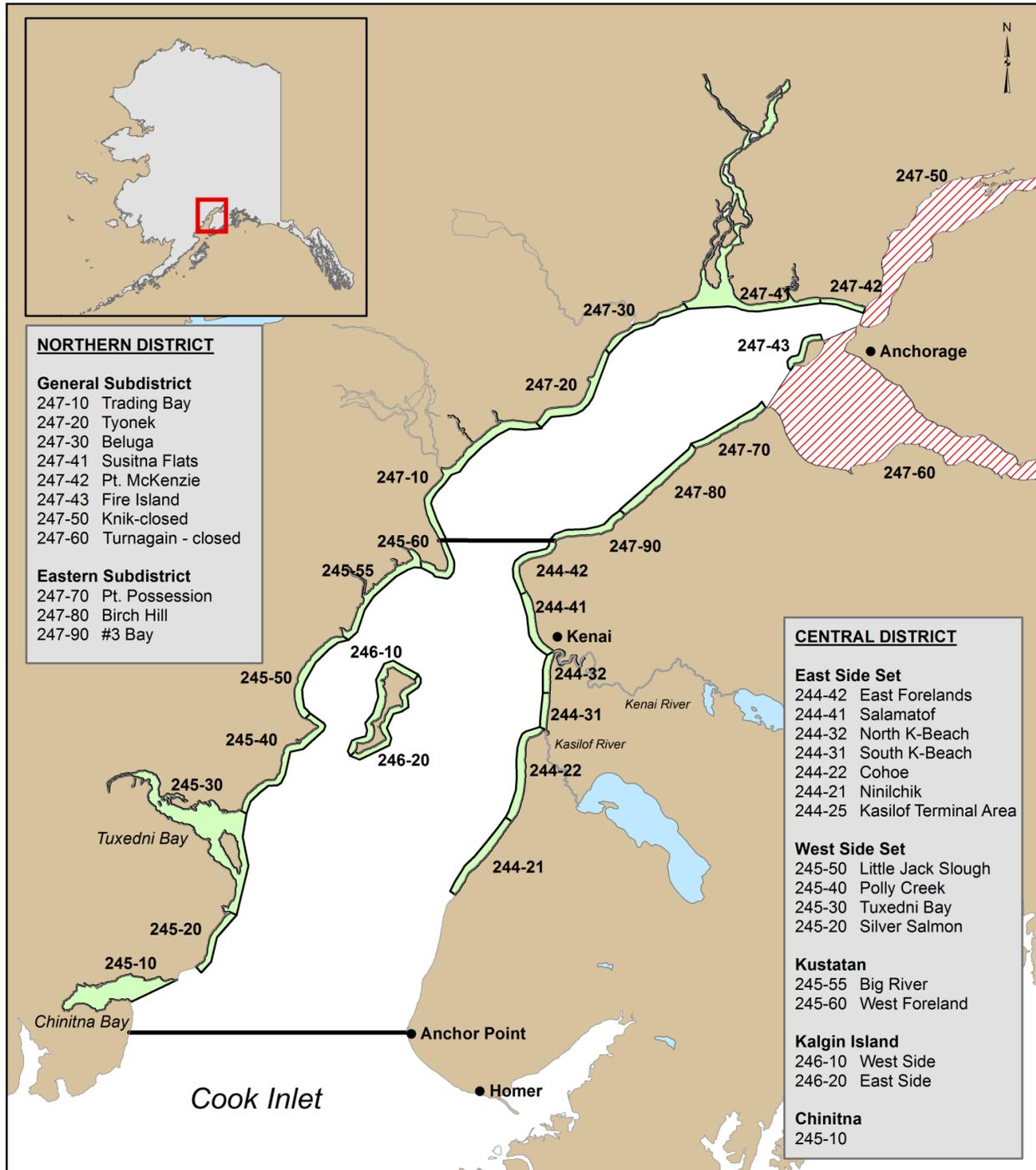


Figure 1. – Upper Cook Inlet commercial set gillnet statistical areas. The North Kalifornsky Beach (NKB) statistical area is 244-32.

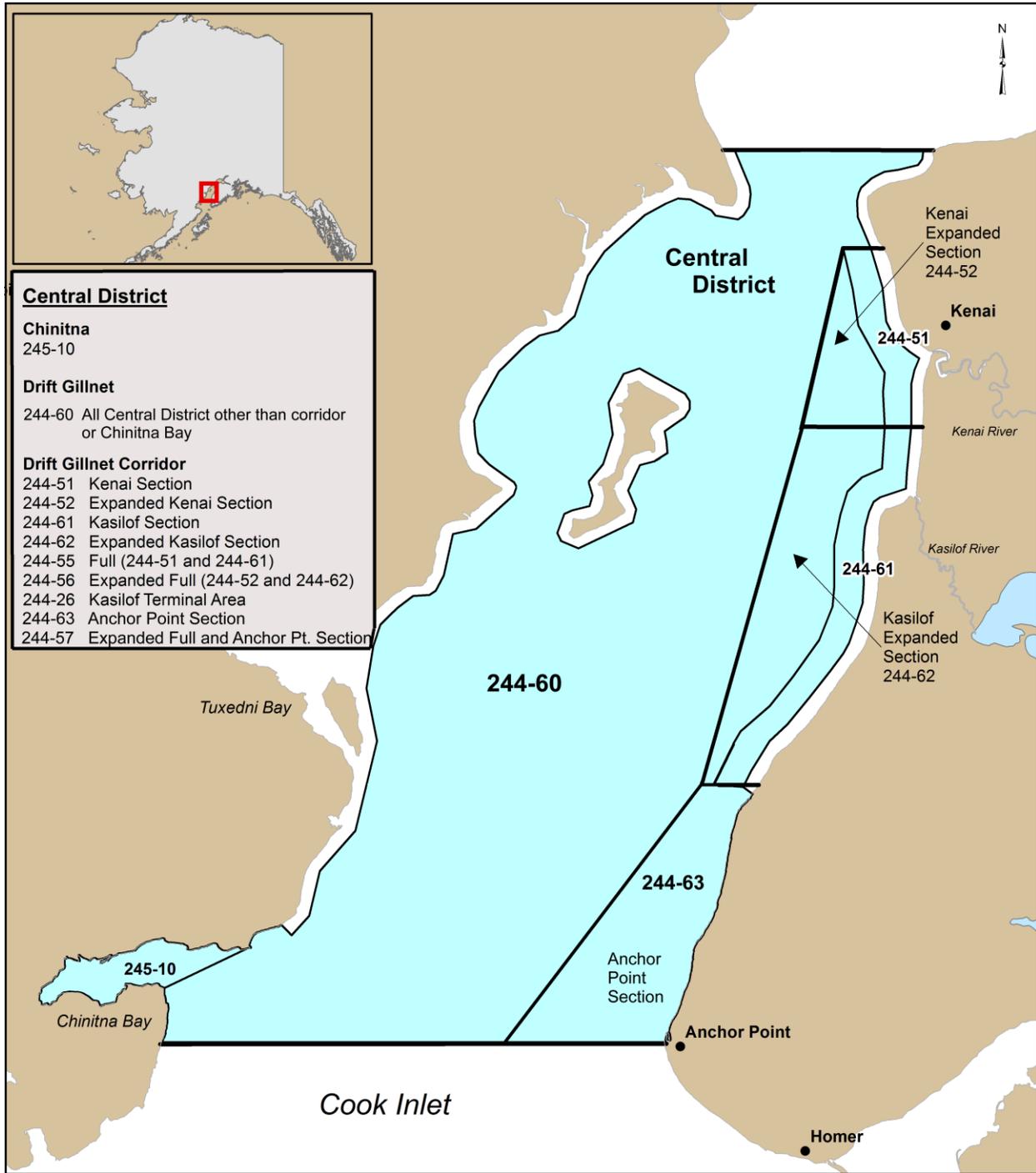


Figure 2. – Map of drift gillnet statistical areas.

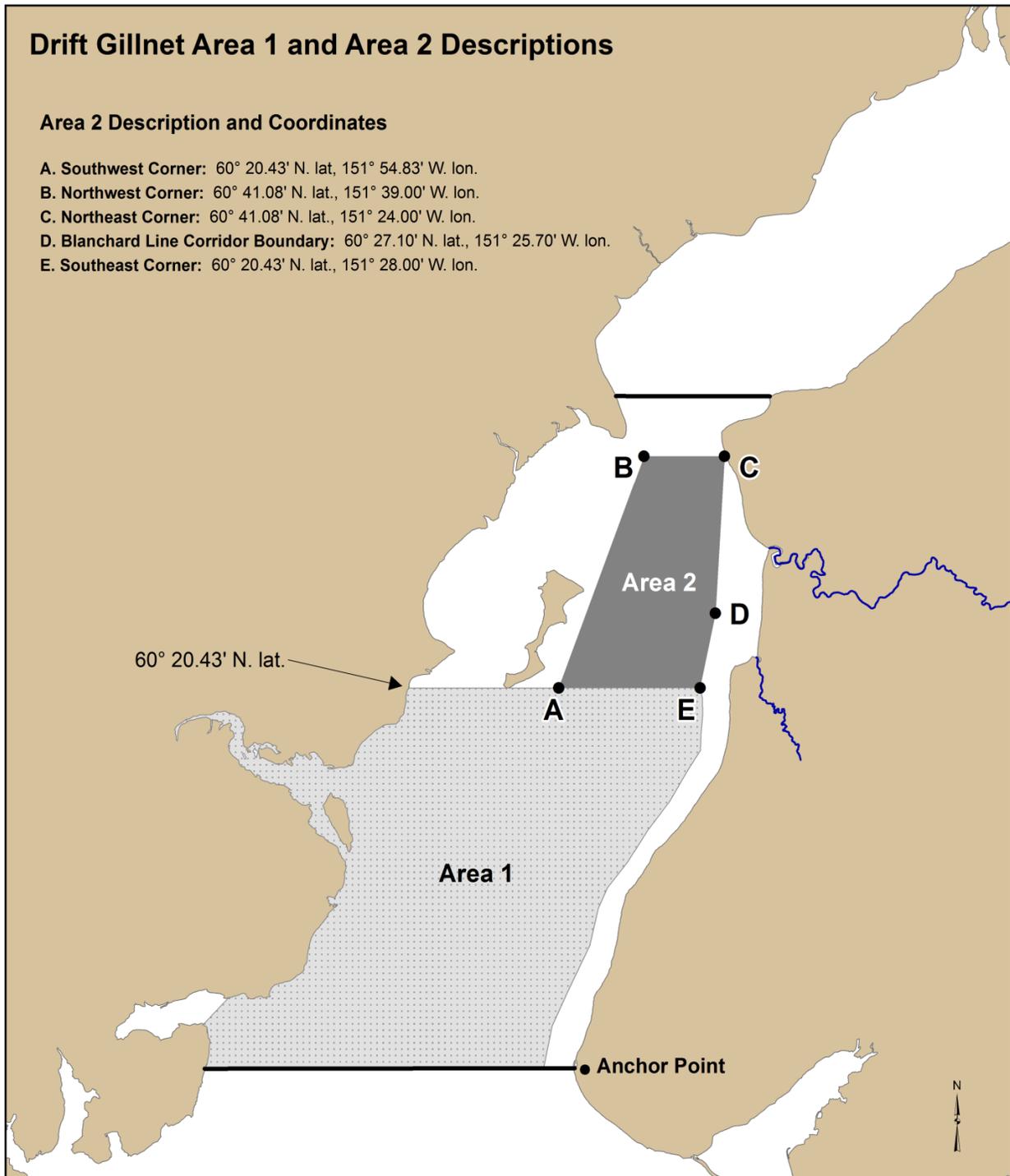


Figure 3.— Map of drift gillnet areas 1 and 2.

Latitude and Longitude are based on the North American Datum of 1983 (NAD 83), equivalent to the World Geodetic System 1984 (WGS 84).

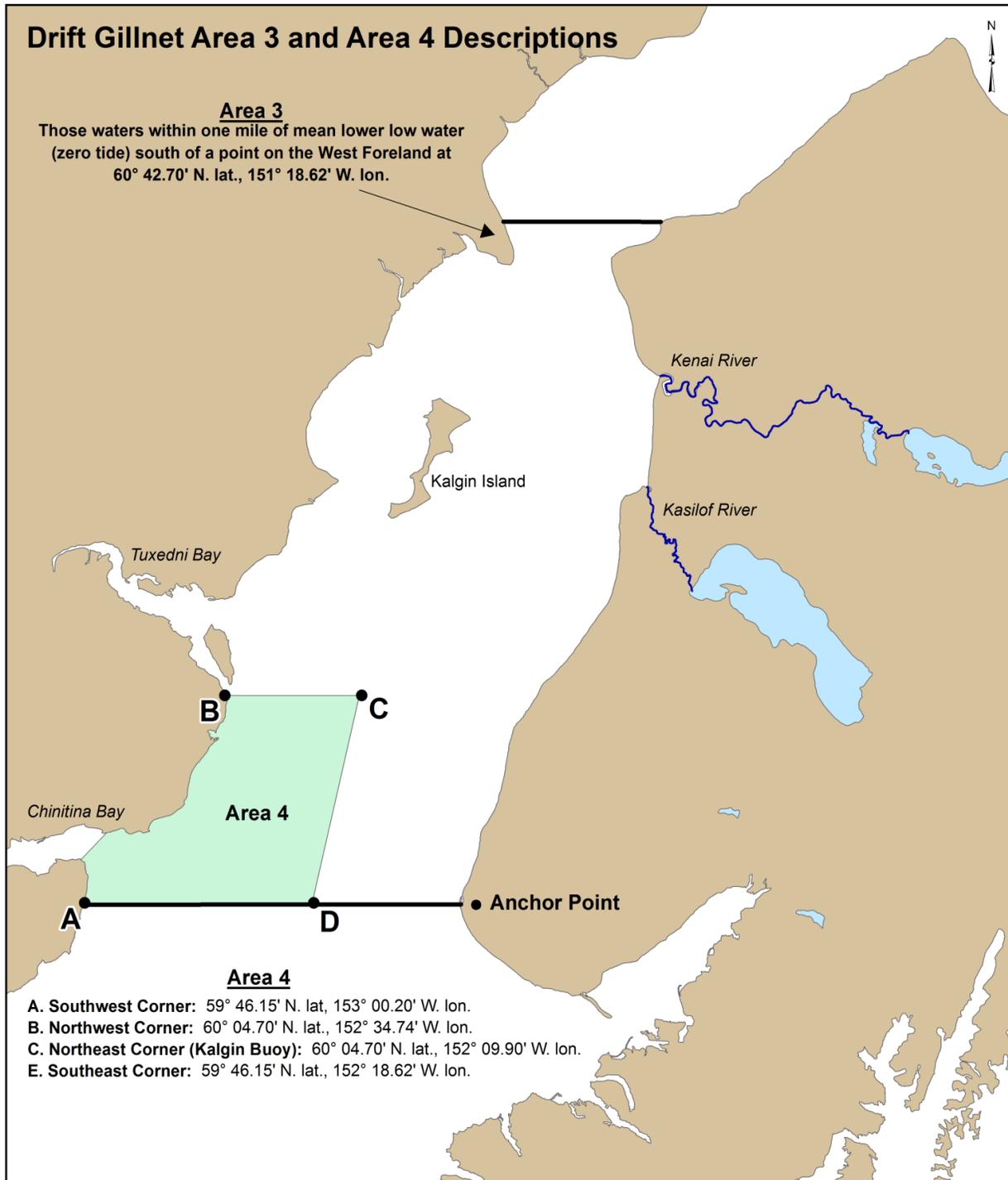


Figure 4.— Map of the drift gillnet areas 3 and 4; open after August 15.

Latitude and Longitude are based on the North American Datum of 1983 (NAD 83), equivalent to the World Geodetic System 1984 (WGS 84).