

Division of Commercial Fisheries
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Advisory Announcement

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Kuskokwim Bay Salmon Fishery Announcement #1

2023 Kuskokwim Bay Commercial Fishery Outlook

This is an announcement from the Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ADF&G) for commercial fishermen in Districts 4 and 5, Kuskokwim Bay.

ADF&G does not anticipate any commercial gillnet openings in Kuskokwim Bay Fishing Districts 4 and 5 in 2023.

Commercial fishing in Districts 4 and 5 is managed in accordance with the District 4 and 5 Salmon Management Plan (5AAC 07.370) and targets salmon bound for the Kanektok and Goodnews rivers. There were no commercial fisheries in District 4 and 5 from 2016 to 2019 and 2022 due to lack of a commercial buyer. In 2020 and 2021, a single salmon processor operated within Kuskokwim Bay. The commercial fishing season was delayed until late June in 2020 and early July 2021 to allow for Chinook salmon escapement in order to achieve escapement goals in light of continued low returns. With the exception of sockeye salmon, commercial harvest for all species in District 4 and 5 were well below average in 2020 and 2021 with chum salmon catch per unit effort (CPUE) and harvest being some of the lowest on record.

Kuskokwim Bay has no formal forecast for salmon returns. Broad expectations are developed based on parent-year escapements and recent year trends. The 2023 preseason outlook for Chinook and chum salmon in Kuskokwim Bay Fishing Districts 4 and 5 is for well below average runs. The sockeye salmon outlook is for an average to above average run. Kanektok River Chinook salmon escapement is evaluated through a peak aerial survey that has a sustainable escapement goal (SEG) with a range of 3,900–12,000 fish. Aerial survey data for Chinook salmon are available in 8 of the last 10 years with the escapement goal being met every year except 2013 and 2014. While the goal has been met recently, aerial survey counts were near the lower bound of the goal range. The department relies on subsistence reports from local residents and commercial catch statistics to approximate run strength for Kanektok River chum salmon. Chum salmon escapement has not been formally assessed since 2015 when the Kanektok River weir ceased operations. Commercial catch statistics and local observations have indicated that chum salmon run strength between 2020 and 2022 was poor. These observations are corroborated by the unprecedented extremely poor chum salmon returns to the Yukon and Kuskokwim Rivers.

ADF&G staff met with the processor and a small group of Quinhagak subsistence and commercial fishers by teleconference on March 8, 2023, to discuss, receive feedback, and answer questions related to this announcement.

For additional information concerning this advisory announcement:

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