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Advisory Announcement

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2023 SOUTHEAST ALASKA HERRING SUMMARY

The department monitors herring stocks in Southeast Alaska that historically have been important to subsistence, personal use, and/or commercial fisheries. Basic stock assessment includes conducting aerial surveys to document herring spawn, but when warranted may include more extensive stock assessment including collecting herring samples for age, weight and length (AWL) analysis, conducting spawn/egg deposition surveys to determine the spawning biomass, and developing biomass forecasts. The following is a summary of 2023 herring aerial surveys, spawn observations, spawn deposition surveys, and fisheries results. In 2023, the persistence of large spawning events for the coastal stocks (Craig and Sitka) and poor spawning events for inside stocks (Revilla Channel, West Behm Canal, Ernest Sound, Hobart Bay, Seymour Canal, Hoonah Sound, Tenakee Inlet, and Lynn Canal) observed over the past several years indicate continued favorable environmental conditions for coastal stocks and poor conditions for inside stocks.

Revilla Channel (Section 1-F) – Aerial surveys were conducted from March 17 through April 2, with herring spawn first observed March 27 on Double Island. Spawning continued in Revilla Channel through April 1. Spawn was observed on Double, Dog, and Village Islands with the most intense spawn occurring on the western shore of Dog and Double Islands. The total cumulative spawn mileage of 4.6 nautical miles (nmi) in state waters is below the recent 10-year (2013–2022) average of 6.8 nmi. Herring samples were obtained for AWL analysis, but no spawn deposition survey was conducted. The last commercial fishery occurred in 1998.

West Behm (Sections 1-E/F) – Aerial surveys were conducted from April 2 through April 10. No herring or herring spawn was observed. The last commercial fishery occurred in 2011.

Craig (District 3) – Aerial surveys were conducted from March 17 through April 10, with herring spawn first observed April 1 on Wadleigh Island. The spawn event progressed extremely fast in Craig, with peak spawn occurring April 3 with 19.4 nmi of spawn observed and concluding by April 7. Spawn occurred around Abbess, Albertos, Ballenas, Fish Egg, Wadleigh, San Juan Bautista Islands, and the Prince of Wales Island shoreline from the Craig fuel dock extending north into Klawock Inlet. The total cumulative spawn mileage for the Craig/Klawock area in 2023 was 29.4 nmi, above the recent 10-year average of 24.8 nmi. Herring samples were obtained for AWL analysis and a spawn deposition survey was completed. The biomass forecast and GHL will be available in the fall.

The 2022/23 Craig herring guideline harvest level (GHL) was 7,761 tons of herring and was allocated between the winter food and bait fishery (60%) and the spawn-on-kelp fishery (40% plus any remaining winter food and bait GHL). The 2022/23 Craig winter food and bait fishery GHL was 4,656 tons. The fishery opened October 1 and closed February 28. A total of 741.6 tons was harvested by three permits. The unharvested portion of the GHL was added to the spawn-on-kelp pound fishery for a final GHL of 7,019 tons. The spawn-on-kelp fishery opened by regulation on March 17 and herring were first introduced to pound structures on March 29. There were a total of 41 pound structures actively fished with 79 permits landing 127.9 tons of spawn-on-kelp product. Final ex vessel value will be available in the fall.

Ernest Sound (District 7) – Aerial surveys were conducted from April 13 through May 15 and a skiff survey on May 8. Herring eggs were documented on approximately 1.9 nmi of shoreline mainly in 2 locations: Vixen Inlet and Onslow Island. The mileage of shoreline receiving herring eggs this year is similar to what has been observed for the past few years. A spawn deposition survey was not conducted. A commercial fishery last occurred in 2014.

District 10 (Hobart Bay/Port Houghton) – Aerial surveys were conducted from April 29 through May 19. Approximately 1.3 nmi of herring spawn was observed from Port Houghton to Windham Bay. The total amount of spawn observed was below the past few years and widely disbursed. Peak spawning occurred on May 18 with small spawn events occurring in Port Houghton, Hobart Bay, and Windham Bay totaling 1.3 nmi. A spawn deposition survey was not conducted. A commercial fishery last occurred in 2010.

Seymour Canal (Section 11-D, District 10) – Aerial surveys were conducted from April 18 through May 19. On May 8, active spawn was observed at Point Gambier extending north along the Stephens Passage shoreline. Spawning was observed along this shoreline until May 15, with the more intense spawn closer to Point Gambier, and a total length of 4.5 nmi of spawn observed. On May 15 and May 18, minimal spawning events were observed near Point Hugh and no other spawn was observed on the Glass Peninsula. This season was the first time in nearly 50 years with nothing more than spot spawns observed on the Seymour Canal or Stephens Passage shorelines of the Glass Peninsula and the first time since 2009 with more than a spot spawn observed on the Stephens Passage shoreline from Point Gambier north towards the Big Bend. This year's cumulative 4.6 nmi of spawn is above the recent 10-year average spawn mileage of 3.7 nmi. An sample of spawning herring was obtained for AWL analysis, but a spawn deposition survey was not conducted. A commercial fishery last occurred in 2014.

Tenakee Inlet (Sections 12-A and 13-C) – Aerial surveys were conducted from April 18 through May 8. Herring spawn was first observed on April 24 in the South Passage Point area with a total of 1.4 nmi extending west into Tenakee Inlet and south along the Chatham Strait shoreline. On May 3, spawning was observed on the Chatham Strait shoreline north of Basket Bay and inside Peninsular Point, and inside Peril Strait from Point Craven north into Florence Bay. Spawning was observed in the Florence Bay and Point Hayes area through May 7. This was the first season since 2019 with more than a spot spawn was observed inside Tenakee Inlet, although not in the proximity of the traditional spawning grounds on the shoreline between Corner and Crab Bays, and this continues a trend observed in the last three years of most of the spawning event occurring along the shorelines of Chatham Strait and the mouth of Peril Strait. This year's cumulative mileage of 7.6 nmi is well above the recent 10-year average spawn mileage of 1.7 nmi. An AWL sample of spawning herring was obtained, but a spawn deposition survey was not conducted. A commercial fishery last occurred in 2014.

Sitka Sound (Sections 13-A/B) – Aerial surveys were conducted from March 13 through April 29. Additional observations were made by local pilots who documented herring spawn from April 30 through May 1 and notified ADF&G with photos. Herring spawn was first observed in Sitka Sound on March 26. The primary herring spawning event for 2023 began on March 28 when 10.1 nmi of active herring spawn was observed along the Kruzof Island shoreline. Spawning peaked on April 4 when 29.8 nmi of active herring spawn was documented. The last day of the primary spawn event was April 9; however, smaller areas of herring spawn were observed or reported through May 1. Surveys from skiffs were conducted April 10 and 11 to identify additional areas of herring spawn not observed during the aerial surveys. In total, 83.8 nmi of shoreline with herring spawn was mapped in 2023 which is higher than both the recent 10-year average of 66.7 nmi and the 40-year (1983–2022) average of 61.5 nmi. Herring samples were obtained for AWL analysis and a spawn deposition survey was completed.

The commercial herring sac roe fishery total harvest was approximately 10,139 tons of herring with an average mature roe percentage of 11.3%. This year's harvest accounted for 34% of the 2023 guideline harvest level of 30,124 tons. The fishery was opened for 8 days between March 28 and April 7, with an average daily harvest of approximately 1,300 tons of herring and was closed April 11. For more detailed information on the 2023 Sitka Sound herring stock and fishery, see the *Sitka Sound Sac Roe Herring Fishery Summary* announcement from May 8, 2023.

Hoonah Sound (Section 13-C) – Five aerial surveys were conducted from April 14 to April 29. Several small schools of herring were seen, but no herring spawn was observed. Additionally, an ADF&G vessel conduced a sonar survey in Hoonah Sound on April 18 and April 19; several small schools of herring were found in the North and South Arms of Hoonah Sound, but no herring were observed near Emmons Island and the Vixen Islands, the historical spawning area. No spawn has been documented in Hoonah Sound since 2015 and the 2006–2015 average miles of spawn was 9.0 nmi. The commercial spawn-on-kelp fishery last took place in 2012.

Lynn Canal (Sections 11-A and 15-B/C) – Aerial surveys were conducted from April 18 through May 8. On May 1, 0.7 nmi of spawn was documented on the Lynn Canal shoreline north of Point Saint Mary with an additional spot spawn observed nearby on May 2. This is one of the smallest total cumulative spawn mileages documented for the Lynn Canal spawning stock since regular observations began in 1972 and well below the recent 10-year average of 4.1 nmi. This year's spawning

event continued the recent trend observed since 2019 of most annual spawning occurring along the Lynn Canal shoreline from north of Point Sherman south to Point Saint Mary. Commercial fisheries last occurred in 1982 and the commercial sac roe herring fishery was repealed by the Board of Fisheries in 2018.

Additional herring spawn events were observed by ADF&G or documented by pilots in other areas throughout Southeast Alaska on the way to or from surveys of the above listed areas. Typically, these additional spawning events are minor, but there were some relatively larger than normal spawn events observed in Sea Otter Sound. Sea Otter Sound had four days of active spawn with a total cumulative spawn mileage estimate of 4.6 nmi of moderate spawn. Other herring spawn events observed around the region included: 3.1 nmi in Zimovia Strait; 0.2 nmi east of Deer Is.; 0.8 nmi in Port Frederick on May 15; and 2.4 nmi in northern Stephens Passage on May 8–10 with an AWL sample obtained.

Advisory Announcement web site: *http://www.adfg.alaska.gov/index.cfm?adfg=cfnews.main*.

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