



**Advisory Announcement:**  
*For Immediate Release: December 4, 2023*

**Time: 3:00 p.m.**

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**2023 Alaska Peninsula and Aleutian Islands Salmon Season Summary**

The following is an overview of the 2023 Alaska Peninsula, Aleutian Islands, and Atka-Amli Islands Areas (Figure 1; Area M) commercial salmon fishing season.

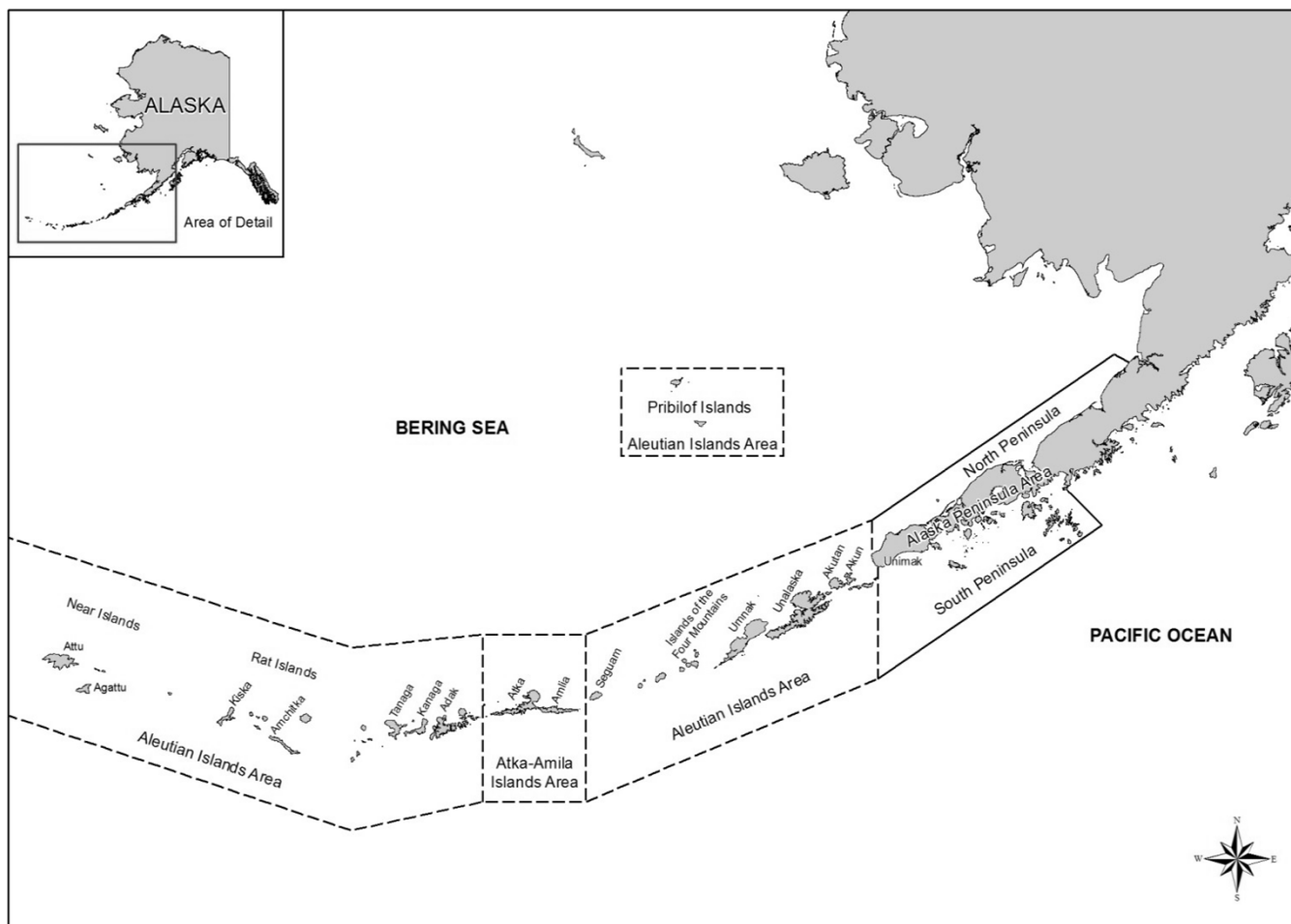


Figure 1.—Map of the Aleutian Islands, Atka-Amli Islands, and Alaska Peninsula Management Areas, also known as Area M.

Commercial fishing effort in 2023 was slightly below average compared to recent years. Of the 392 eligible commercial salmon permits, 275 (70%) made commercial landings. By gear type, a total of 70 purse seine, 141 drift gillnet, and 64 set gillnet permit holders made deliveries in 2023. Participation rates for purse seine permit

holders was above average (59%), participation of drift gillnet permit holders was average (88%) and set gillnet permit holder participation was below average (58%; Table 1).

Table 1. –Commercial salmon fishery 2023 limited entry permit activity and 10-yr. averages, by gear type, Area M.

Gear Type	2023 Permits			2013-2022 Average Permits		
	Available	Fished	% of Permits Fished	Available	Fished	% of Permits Fished
Purse Seine	119	70	59%	119	60	50%
Drift Gillnet	161	141	88%	162	143	88%
Set Gillnet	111	64	58%	112	83	74%
Total	392	275	70%	393	286	73%

Total preliminary harvest presented from the 2023 commercial salmon fishing season should closely approximate final harvest numbers for all species. The data detailed in this report are considered preliminary. The 2023 commercial salmon harvest in Area M totaled 12,468 Chinook, 2,893,426 sockeye, 204,075 coho, 17,121,981 pink, and 1,213,292 chum salmon (Table 2). There was no commercial harvest in Aleutian Islands and Atka-Amlia Islands Areas.

Table 2.– Alaska Peninsula commercial salmon harvest, 2023.

Location	Number of Salmon					
	Chinook	Sockeye	Coho	Pink	Chum	Total
North Peninsula	1,401	1,152,719	6,419	24,590	92,429	1,277,558
South Peninsula	11,067	1,740,707	197,656	17,097,391	1,120,863	20,167,684
Total	12,468	2,893,426	204,075	17,121,981	1,213,292	21,445,242

Preliminary exvessel value of salmon harvested in Area M totaled \$20,584,195 (Tables 3 and 4). This was below the 10-year average exvessel value of \$36,005,912 (Table 4). Purse seine fishermen averaged \$215,217 per fished permit, drift gillnet earnings averaged \$28,665 per permit fished, while set gillnet earnings averaged \$23,083 (Table 4). Exvessel value information was generated from fish tickets and does not include postseason adjustments paid to fishermen.

Table 3. –Preliminary commercial exvessel values by fishery and species, 2023.

Location	Value					
	Chinook	Sockeye	Coho	Pink	Chum	Total
North Peninsula	\$16,674	\$3,606,854	\$7,355	\$14,959	\$140,783	\$3,786,625
South Peninsula	\$25,579	\$5,676,782	\$243,631	\$9,187,959	\$1,663,619	\$16,797,569
Total	\$42,253	\$9,283,636	\$250,986	\$9,202,919	\$1,804,402	\$20,584,195

Note: Due to rounding of cents, totals may differ by small amounts.

Table 4. –Estimated commercial salmon harvest and value, by gear type, 2013-2023.

Year	Total Catch	Total Value	Average Exvessel Value		
			Purse Seine	Drift Gillnet	Set Gillnet
2013	12,170,573	\$33,304,122	\$292,012	\$81,775	\$54,526
2014	5,288,925	\$27,652,179	\$143,970	\$112,946	\$57,598
2015	23,875,739	\$30,763,822	\$280,629	\$67,506	\$59,743
2016	9,654,544	\$26,266,222	\$137,766	\$107,587	\$57,373
2017	31,328,829	\$63,014,340	\$618,771	\$161,222	\$73,688
2018	6,030,310	\$27,632,532	\$161,799	\$110,945	\$30,429
2019	27,172,788	\$44,189,560	\$323,769	\$113,936	\$48,372
2020	9,152,962	\$14,547,225	\$102,791	\$44,823	\$17,112
2021	26,742,829	\$56,683,207	\$511,534	\$126,482	\$38,813
2022	14,686,489	\$57,719,223	\$342,637	\$208,782	\$36,283
2023	21,445,242	\$20,584,195	\$215,217	\$28,665	\$23,083
2013-2022 Avg.	16,824,167	\$36,005,912	\$285,894	\$103,025	\$48,628

## SOUTH ALASKA PENINSULA

### South Unimak and Shumagin Islands June Fisheries

During the February 2023 Alaska Peninsula, Aleutian Islands, and Chignik meeting, the Alaska Board of Fisheries (board) made changes to the *South Unimak and Shumagin Islands June Salmon Management Plan* (5 AAC 09.365) by amending subsection (2)(a) that establishes the June fishing schedule for seine gear. The first commercial fishing period for seine gear will begin June 10 at 6:00 a.m. and run 68 hours, closing at 2:00 a.m.; the second commercial fishing period will begin 76 hours later at 6:00 a.m. and close after 66 hours at 11:59 p.m.; the third commercial fishing period will begin 32 hours later at 8:00 a.m. and close after 88 hours at 11:59 p.m.; the final commercial fishing period in June will begin 32 hours later at 8:00 a.m. and close after 88 hours at 11:59 p.m.

Additionally, the board added a new subsection (h) to the *South Unimak and Shumagin Islands June Salmon Management Plan* (5 AAC 09.365) such that if chum salmon harvest equals or exceeds 300,000 fish by June 18, based on fish ticket information, the commissioner shall reduce commercial fishing time in the South Unimak and Shumagin Islands by 44 hours during each of the remaining fishing periods in June for purse seine gear. If chum salmon harvest equals or exceeds 450,000 fish by June 23, based on fish ticket information, the commissioner shall close the South Unimak and Shumagin Islands June commercial salmon fishery for the remainder of June for purse seine gear. No closures or reductions in fishing time occurred in 2023 as the chum harvest was below harvest triggers.

The board amended 5 AAC 09.330. *Gear*, subsection (c) to close the Sanak Island Section of the Unimak District to commercial salmon fishing for all gear types from June 1 through June 30 (Figure 2). Due to the actions taken by the board during the 2023 Alaska Peninsula, Aleutian Islands, and Chignik meeting on South Unimak and Shumagin Islands June fisheries, enforcement was greatly increased by the Alaska State Troopers (AST) during the month of June. While patrolling the fishing grounds AST issued several citations for the failure to retain salmon and cases are currently pending.

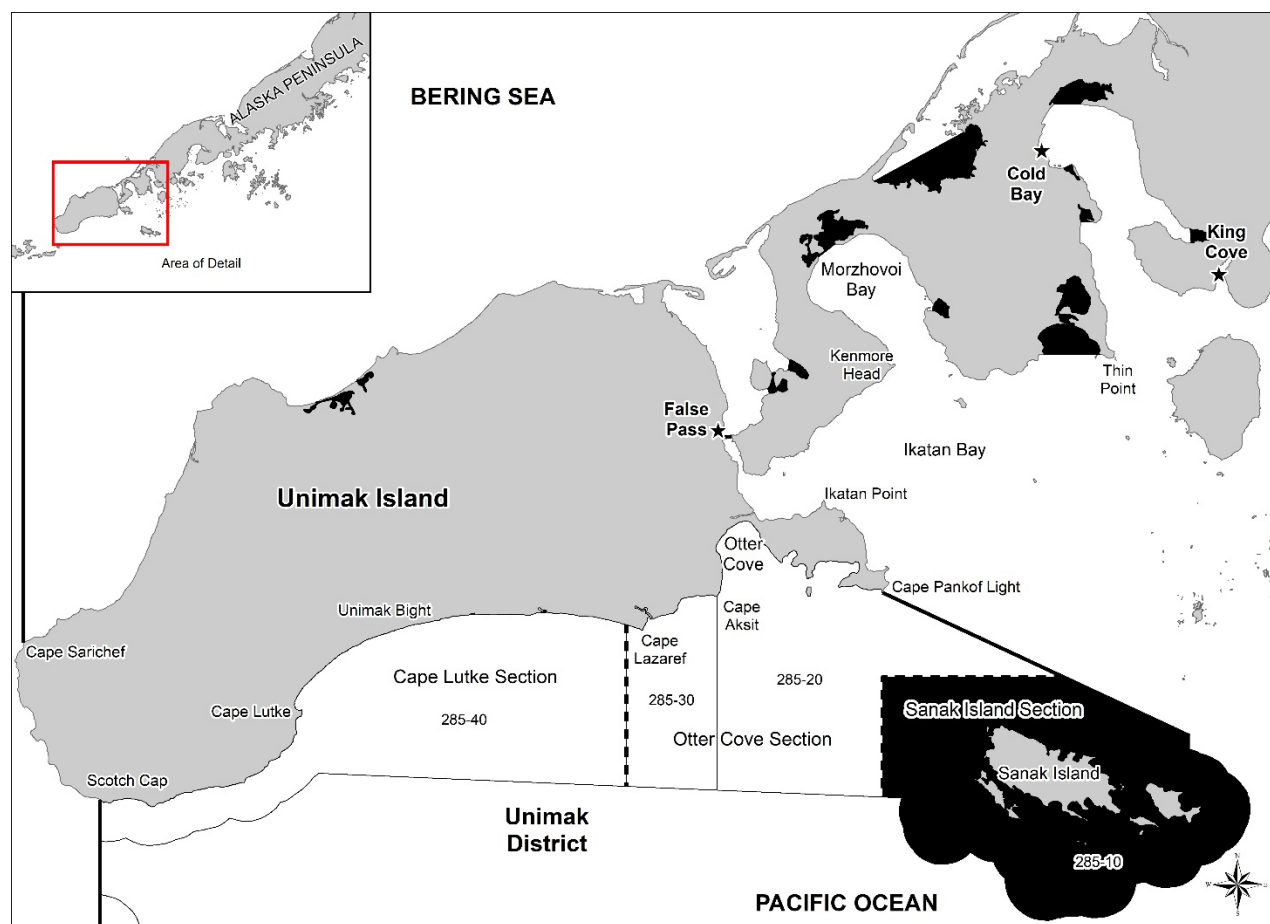


Figure 2.– Closed waters of the Sanak Island Section to all gear types during the South Unimak and Shumagin Islands June fishery.

In addition to the scheduled fishing periods during the month of June, the harvest of sockeye salmon in the “Dolgoi Island area” as described by the Western Alaska Salmon Stock Identification Program (WASSIP) was monitored through fish ticket information. By regulation, once the harvest of sockeye salmon reaches 191,000 fish, the waters of the West Pavlof Bay Section south of Black Point and the waters of the Volcano Bay Section close to commercial salmon fishing for the remainder of the June fishery and through July 25 (Figure 3). Commercial fishermen operating in the South Central and Southwestern Districts during June are advised that short notice closure of the designated “Dolgoi Island area” will occur in the likely event the harvest of sockeye salmon approaches the 191,000 fish. The department will, to the extent practical, give a minimum of 6 hours’ notice of closure to all gear types. In 2019, the board closed the “Dolgoi Island area” to purse seine gear in June. The harvest limit was not reached in the June fishery in 2023. A total of 8,920 sockeye salmon were harvested in the “Dolgoi Island area” in June and a total of 95,037 sockeye salmon were harvested from July 1 through July 25.

Due to concerns of low forecasted chum salmon returns to systems within the Arctic-Yukon-Kuskokwim (AYK) region, test fisheries were conducted on June 8, 9, and 10 by the commercial purse seine fleet in the Unimak District and Shumagin Islands Section of the Southeastern District. The purse seine fleet voluntarily stood down during the first day of the commercial opening on June 10 to conduct the test fishery and reduced fishing time in

subsequent openings during June to ensure that the chum salmon harvest was near or below the historical harvest of during the South Unimak and Shumagin Islands June fishing periods.

In 2023, the seine fleet and processors attempted to curtail their overall harvest of chum salmon through continuous communication that enabled the fleet to relay catch information to one another in real time. The fleet communicated daily with the Alaska Department of Fish and Game (Department) on a regular basis to inform the Department of seine fleet closures. Except for the 50% reduction of the fishing periods that were implemented to conserve Chignik River early run sockeye salmon on June 16 (33 hrs. vs. 66 hrs.) and on June 20 (44 hrs. vs. 88 hrs.), all other reductions in fishing time within the regulatory fishing periods were voluntarily instituted by the fleet (Table 5). There were two forms of closures; there were mandatory closures for either the Shumagin Islands Section and/or the entire South Unimak area, which encompasses waters within the Southwestern and Unimak Districts, and there were area specific standdowns by the fleet. It is the Department's understanding that the mandatory closures were enacted to reduce the fleet's overall harvest of chum salmon and to stay below the triggers that would reduce fishing in all areas by 50% for seine gear if the first trigger was met on June 18, and close the South Alaska Peninsula for seine gear if the second trigger was met on June 23. The area specific standdowns, was a method that the fleet used to react quickly when a high abundance of chum salmon was in the area and attempted to keep harvest of sockeye to chum above the 2:1 ratio.

Table 5. –South Unimak and Shumagin Islands June regulatory fishing period start date and number of hours per period for seine gear; number of hours that were mandatory closures in the Shumagin Islands Section and South Unimak (includes Unimak and Southwestern Districts); and voluntary standdown hours in the Shumagin Islands, East Anchor, Cape Laref, and Cape Lutke.

Period Start	Regulatory Hours	Full Fleet Closure Hours		Area Specific Standdown Hours			
		Shumagins	South Unimak	Shumagins	East Anchor	Cape Lazaref	Cape Lutke
10-Jun	68	12	13.5	6.5	–	8	3
16-Jun	66	38 <sup>1</sup>	7.5	–	–	12.3	10.3
20-Jun	88	55.5 <sup>2</sup>	–	–	–	22.25	11.1
25-Jun	88	–	–	8	13.5	–	8.5
Total	310	105.5	21	14.5	13.5	42.55	32.9

<sup>1</sup> Shumagin Islands Section 50% reduction to 33 hours for conservation of Chignik early-run sockeye salmon

<sup>2</sup> Shumagin Islands Section 50% reduction to 44 hours for conservation of Chignik early-run sockeye salmon

The commercial salmon harvest for the June fishery consisted of 1,824 Chinook, 857,150 sockeye, 272 coho, 221,605 pink, and 205,522 chum salmon (Table 6). The sockeye and chum salmon harvest in the South Unimak and Shumagin Islands June fisheries were below the most recent 10-year average of 1,582,765 sockeye salmon and 523,443 chum salmon.

Table 6. –Total salmon harvests in numbers of fish for the South Unimak and Shumagin Islands June fisheries, excluding home pack and the department test fishery, 2023.

	Number of Salmon					Total
	Chinook	Sockeye	Coho	Pink	Chum	
South Unimak June	1,268	529,263	145	89,634	102,552	722,862
Shumagin Islands June	556	327,887	127	131,971	102,970	563,511
Total	1,824	857,150	272	221,605	205,522	1,286,373

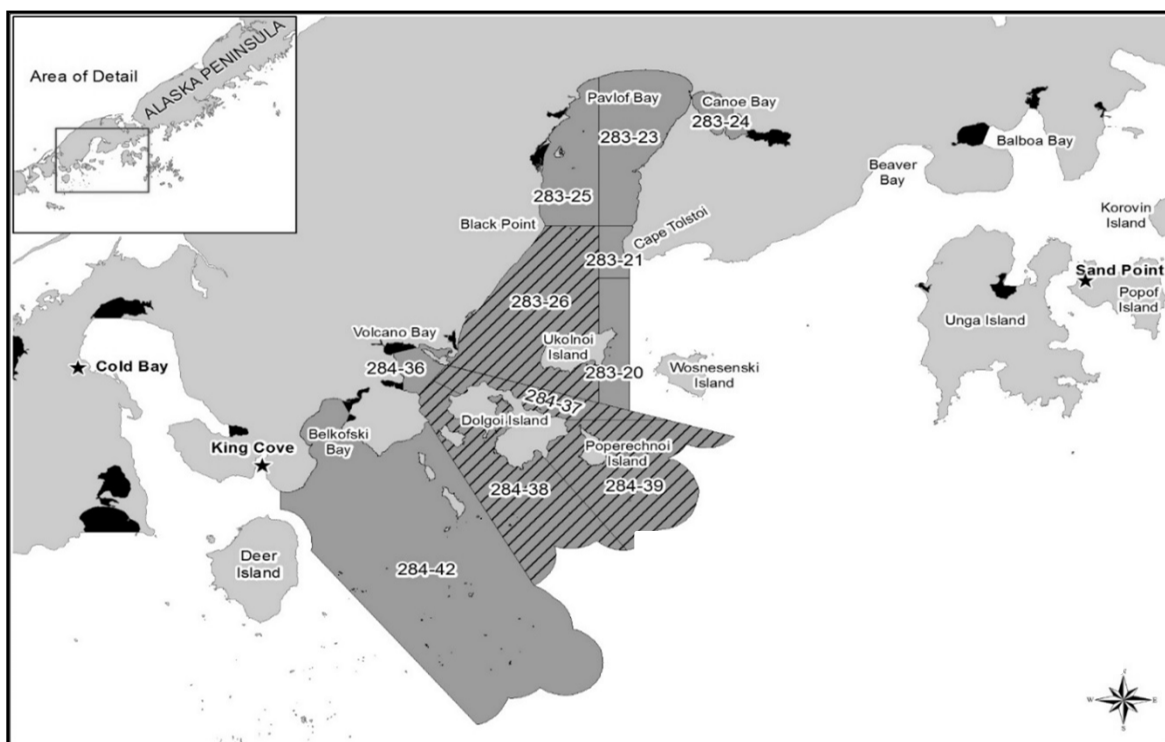


Figure 3. – Map depicting to the “Dolgoi Island area” for the June Management Plan and the areas that close after 191,000 sockeye salmon have been harvested. This area is closed to seine gear in June as per the 2019 BOF regulatory changes.

### Southeastern District Mainland Fisheries

From June 1 to July 25, the Southeastern District Mainland (SEDM; excluding the Northwest Stepovak Section (NWSS) beginning July 1) is managed based on the strength of the Chignik sockeye salmon run. During years in which it appears that sockeye salmon harvest will be greater than 600,000 fish in the Chignik Management Area (CMA), and the first run begins to develop as anticipated, followed by a commercial salmon opening in the CMA, commercial salmon fishing can be allowed in the East Stepovak, Stepovak Flats, Northwest Stepovak, Southwest Stepovak, Balboa Bay and Beaver Bay Sections of the SEDM. However, in 2023, the early run for sockeye salmon returning to Chignik River developed late and harvest over 600,000 fish did not occur before the allocation period ended on July 25<sup>th</sup>. The only fishing opportunity that occurred in SEDM during the allocation period occurred in the Northwest Stepovak Section.

Beginning July 1, the NWSS of SEDM is managed on the strength of the Orzinski Lake sockeye salmon run. In 2023, the overall escapement of sockeye salmon into Orzinski Lake was sufficient with 19,512 fish escaping past the weir. This passage was within the range of the sustainable escapement goal (SEG) of 14,000–28,000 sockeye

salmon. The sockeye salmon escapement into Orzinski Lake allowed for several fishing periods in the NWSS between July 13 and July 31. From August 3 until August 8, only the waters of Orzinski Bay were opened to protect pink and chum salmon bound for systems in NWSS.

From July 26 through August 31, the SEDM is managed based on the abundance of local salmon stocks. Commercial salmon fishing in SEDM began on July 26 with a 36-hour fishing period for set gillnet and seine gear. The second fishing period was for 36 hours beginning on July 30. The next fishing period (except inside Orzinski Bay) was from August 17 to August 21 after aerial surveys indicated adequate escapement. After additional aerial surveys were conducted, SEDM was extended to the full fishing period that is permitted during this timeframe. By regulation, there shall be at least one closed 36-hour period within a seven-day period in the SEDM (5 AAC 09.360 (I)(2)). Commercial salmon fishing closed for 36 hours at 8:00 p.m. August 22 and was reopened at 8:00 a.m. August 24 for 132 hours. This was the last fishing period in the SEDM as processors ceased purchasing salmon.

Table 7. –Preliminary Southeastern District Mainland salmon harvest, excluding home pack and the department test fishery, 2023.

Location	Number of Salmon				
	Chinook	Sockeye	Coho	Pink	Chum
June 1-June 30	0	0	0	0	0
July 1-July 25 SEDM <sup>a</sup>	0	0	0	0	0
Total SEDM harvest in allocation	0	0	0	0	0
July 1-July 25 NWSS	3	12,969	178	1,858	1,052
July 26 - September 30	886	111,342	15,545	2,538,840	106,256
Total	889	124,311	15,723	2,540,698	107,308

<sup>a</sup> Southeastern District Mainland (excluding Northwest Stepovak Section).

### South Peninsula Post-June Fishery

For the Post-June fishery, from July 6 through July 31, there was one 33-hour fishing period, followed by a 63-hour closure, followed by six 36-hour fishing periods, separated by 60-hour closures.

Prior to the South Peninsula post-June fishery, the department conducts a test fishery to determine immature salmon abundance in the Shumagin Islands. The test fisheries that occurred on July 2, 3 and 5 resulted in an average of 167.0, 4.0, and 507.0 immature salmon per set, respectively. The average number of immature salmon per set was above the regulatory threshold of 100 immature salmon gilled, and the Shumagin Island Section remained closed to purse seine gear for the July 6 commercial salmon fishing period. The next test fisheries occurred on July 8 and July 9, and resulted in an average of 253.0 and 175.4 immature salmon per set, respectively. The Shumagin Island Section remained closed to purse seine gear for the July 10 commercial salmon period. The next test fisheries occurred on July 12 and 13 and resulted in an average of 570.0 and 22.5 immature salmon per set, respectively. The Shumagin Island Section opened for the July 14 fishing period.

During August, the post-June fishery is managed based on the abundance of local pink and chum salmon stocks. In September and October, management focuses on coho salmon returns, though the status of late pink and chum salmon returns may also be taken into consideration. Adequate pink and chum salmon escapement was observed and allowed for commercial fishing periods beginning August 7. By mid-August it was apparent the majority of

pink salmon and chum salmon systems were at, or exceeding escapement objectives and the fishery was extended from August 17 until the end of the season. The last delivery occurred on August 30. The total commercial harvest for the South Peninsula post-June fishery (including the SEDM from July 26–October 31) was 9,240 Chinook, 870,588 sockeye, 197,206 coho, 16,873,928 pink, and 914,289 chum salmon (Table 8).

Table 8. –Post-June South Peninsula commercial salmon harvest, excluding home pack and the department test fishery, 2023.

Location	Number of Salmon				
	Chinook	Sockeye	Coho	Pink	Chum
South Peninsula Post-June harvest (excludes July 1-25 NWSS harvest)	8,354	759,246	181,661	14,335,088	808,033
Post-June SEDM harvest (July 26-October 31)	886	111,342	15,545	2,538,840	106,256
Total Post-June Harvest	9,240	870,588	197,206	16,873,928	914,289

### South Peninsula Escapement

The South Peninsula sockeye salmon escapement of 69,811 fish (Table 9) was within the management objective range of 48,200–86,400 fish. Escapement into Orzinski Lake of 19,512 sockeye salmon was within the SEG of 14,000–28,000 fish. Escapement into Mortensen’s Lagoon (5,100 sockeye salmon) was within its SEG range of 1,400–5,700 fish. Escapement into Thin Point Lagoon (35,270 sockeye salmon) was above the SEG range of 8,850–19,000 fish. Pink salmon total indexed escapement of 5,914,600 fish (Table 9) was above the SEG range of 1,750,000–4,000,000 fish. Chum salmon total escapement of 912,410 fish (Table 9) was above the cumulative district escapement goal range of 330,400–660,800 fish. Escapement into chum salmon index streams was above the goal of 218,300–410,600 with a peak index escapement of 544,200 chum salmon. Coho salmon surveys were conducted during the last week of August. These surveys do not represent peak aerial survey counts, and due to poor weather conditions throughout the entire salmon season, surveys were not conducted later into September as they were in 2022. Any coho salmon survey counts would be considered a minimum at best. A lack of escapement information for coho salmon is due to the departure of management staff from the South Peninsula region prior to peak coho salmon runs and poor weather conditions preventing aerial surveys from being conducted during peak coho salmon runs.

Table 9.–South Peninsula salmon escapement by species and year, 2013–2023.

Year	Number of Salmon				
	Chinook	Sockeye	Coho	Pink	Chum
2013	0	37,386	no surveys	2,320,790	502,600
2014	0	37,670	9,050	1,340,380	313,545
2015	0	96,110	2,320	7,820,800	906,420
2016	0	120,170	no surveys	1,038,160	626,776
2017	0	113,042	5,100	5,663,637	1,773,626
2018	0	15,617	no surveys	732,422	344,830
2019	0	31,667	no surveys	4,236,700	672,475
2020	0	34,169	no surveys	3,209,750	415,570
2021	0	59,699	no surveys	4,388,100	483,200
2022	0	56,723	26,375	5,177,350	398,302
2023	0	69,811	no surveys	5,914,600	912,410
2013–2022 average	0	57,795	5,490	3,592,809	643,734



## Aleutian Islands Fishery and Escapement

The Aleutian Islands Area may open to commercial salmon fishing by emergency order if adequate escapement is observed and there is interest from the fishing industry. No surveys were flown in 2023 and no commercial salmon fishing occurred. The McLees River weir, located northwest of Dutch Harbor, is used to monitor sockeye salmon returning to McLees Lake and to manage the local subsistence fishery. The McLees River weir had an escapement of 26,945 sockeye salmon, which is above the escapement goal of 10,000 fish.

## NORTH ALASKA PENINSULA

### Commercial Harvest

In 2023, 158 Area M permit holders participated in commercial salmon fisheries along the North Alaska Peninsula (Figure 4). The North Alaska Peninsula has an overlap area which allows Area T (Bristol Bay) permit holders to fish in areas that they historically did prior to statehood during certain times of the year. There was no effort by Area T permit holders. The number of Area M permit holders participating in 2023 was similar to the most recent 10-year average of 165 but was below historical numbers observed during the 1990s which peaked at 364 permits in 1992.

The North Alaska Peninsula fishery is predominantly a sockeye salmon fishery; although, depending on market conditions, directed Chinook, coho, and chum salmon fisheries occur in some locations.

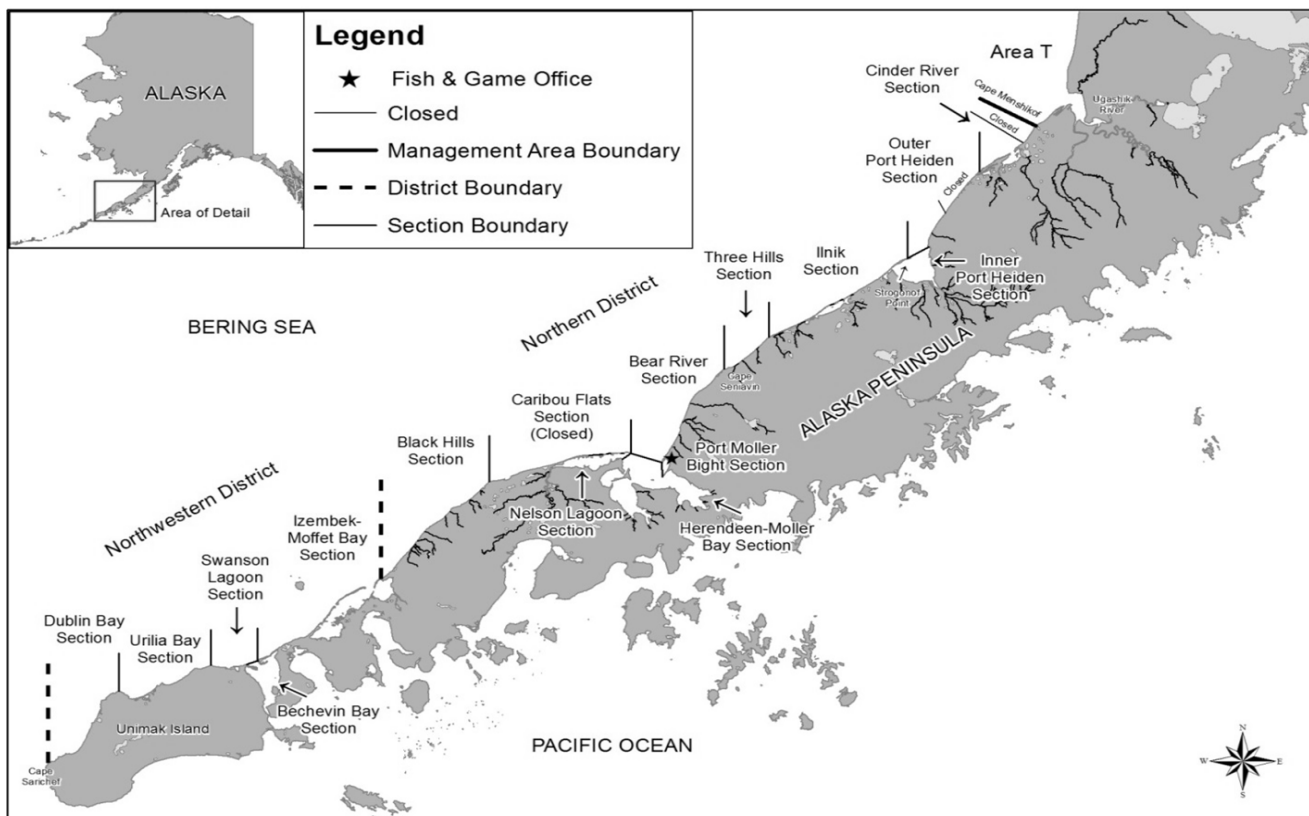


Figure 4. – Alaska Peninsula with North Alaska Peninsula commercial salmon fishing districts depicted.

In 2023, the harvest of 1,152,719 million sockeye salmon on the North Alaska Peninsula was below both the projected harvest and the 10-year average of 2.4 million and 2.6 million fish, respectively (Table 10). The harvest of 6,419 coho salmon was below both the projected harvest and the 10-year average of 50,000 and 46,000,

respectively. The harvests of Chinook, pink, and chum salmon were all below both the projected harvests and the 10-year averages (Table 10).

Table 10.—The total 2023 North Alaska Peninsula commercial salmon harvest, excluding home pack and department test fishery, and 2023 projected harvest and 2013–2022 average harvest.

	Number of salmon				
	Chinook	Sockeye	Coho	Pink	Chum
2023 season total	1,401	1,152,719	6,419	24,590	92,429
Projected harvest	2,000	2,609,000	46,000	134,000	98,000
2013-2022 average	1,814	2,418,653	49,872	70,000	127,436

### Northwestern District

In the Northwestern District, during the 2023 commercial salmon fishery, approximately 0 Chinook, 91,309 sockeye, 71 coho, 19,589 pink, and 77,887 chum salmon were harvested (Table 11). A total of 15 permit holders participated in the fishery, consisting of five purse seiners and ten drift gillnetters.

Table 11.—Northwestern District commercial salmon harvest, excluding home pack by section, all gear combined, 2023.

Location	Number of Salmon				
	Chinook	Sockeye	Coho	Pink	Chum
Dublin Bay Section	0	0	0	0	0
Urilia Bay Section	0	78,348	0	116	65
Swanson Lagoon Section	0	0	0	0	0
Bechevin Bay Section	0	79	2	16,257	1,087
Izembek-Moffet Bay Section	0	12,882	69	3,216	76,735
2023 Northwestern District total	0	91,309	71	19,589	77,887
2013–2022 NW District average	14	40,007	7,364	39,859	89,065

In the Northwestern District, the chum salmon escapement of 67,200 fish (Table 12) was well below the chum salmon SEG of 100,000–215,000 fish. This escapement estimate represents a minimum; the actual escapement was likely greater, but survey conditions were poor throughout the season in one of the significant chum salmon-producing streams (the Joshua Green River) in the Northwestern District. The sockeye salmon escapement for 2023 in the Northwestern District was within the escapement objective range of 52,600–106,000 fish, with a total escapement of 94,955 fish (Table 12).

Table 12.—Northwestern District salmon escapement by species and section, 2023.

Location	Number of Salmon				
	Chinook	Sockeye	Coho	Pink	Chum
Urilia Bay Section	0	79,600	0	0	0
Swanson Lagoon Section	0	5	0	0	0
Bechevin Bay Section	0	50	0	26,000	16,200
Izembek-Moffet Bay Section	0	15,300	0	4,300	51,000
Northwestern District total	0	94,955	0	30,300	67,200

\* No coho salmon survey information due to departure of department staff prior to coho salmon arrival in streams.

## Black Hills Section

Harvest effort in the Black Hills Section usually occurs when other sections are not open. Due to fishing opportunities in the Ilnik Section and Outer Port Heiden Section of the Northern District, effort by the drift gillnet fleet in the Black Hills Section (Figure 4) was limited and occurred primarily during late July. Approximately 454 sockeye salmon (Table 13) were harvested in the Black Hills Section in 2023. Weekly fishing periods occurred throughout the season in the Black Hills Section. North Creek is the only system in the Black Hills Section with a sockeye salmon escapement goal. The 2023 North Creek salmon escapement of 11,200 sockeye salmon exceeded the escapement goal of 7,500–10,000 fish.

Table 13.—North Alaska Peninsula sockeye salmon commercial harvest, excluding home pack and department test fishery, by statistical area or combination of statistical areas, 2023.

Area <sup>a</sup>	Sockeye salmon harvest	Percent of total
Northwestern District		
311-20 Dublin Bay, 311-32 Uria Bay, 311-52 Swanson Lagoon	78,348	6.80%
311-60 Bechevin Bay	79	0.01%
312-20 Izembek Lagoon, and 312-40 Moffet Bay	5,018	0.44%
311-58, 312-10 Outside Izembek-Moffet	7,864	0.68%
Northwestern District total	91,309	7.92%
Northern District		
313-10 Black Hills Section	454	0.04%
313-30 Nelson Lagoon Section	101,659	8.82%
314-20, 314-30 Herendeen-Moller bays <sup>a</sup>	0	0.00%
314-12, 315-11 Bear River and Port Moller Bight	27,836	2.41%
315-20 NE Bear River	14,260	1.24%
Bear River total (314-12,315-11,315-20)	42,096	3.65%
316-10 Three Hills Section	6,710	0.58%
316-20 Ilnik SW of Unangashak Bluffs	292,067	25.34%
316-25 Ilnik NE of Unangashak Bluffs	308,362	26.75%
Ilnik Section total (316-20,316-22,316-25)	600,429	52.67%
317-20 Inner Port Heiden Section	573	0.05%
317-10 Outer Port Heiden Section	303,139	26.30%
318-20 Cinder River Section <sup>b</sup>	6,350	0.55%
Northern District total	1,061,410	92.08%
North Peninsula total	1,152,719	100.00%

<sup>a</sup> Some statistical areas are combined because the low number of participants makes the information confidential.

<sup>b</sup> No commercial salmon fishing effort in this area.

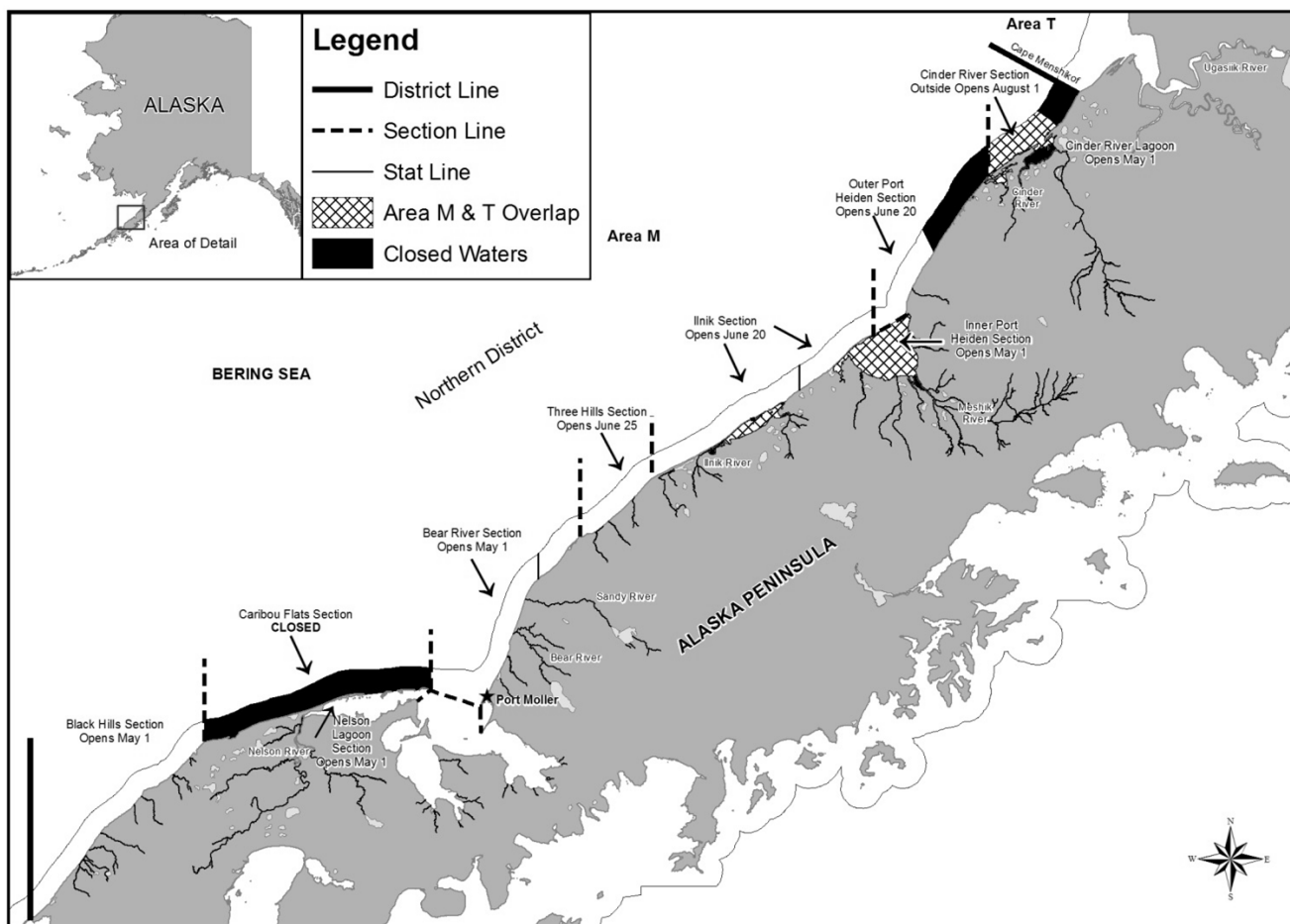


Figure 5.—Northern District commercial salmon fishing sections with earliest opening dates depicted.

### Nelson Lagoon Section

The Nelson Lagoon Section was opened for all weekly fishing periods and was open continuously starting on June 26 during the 2023 season. The Nelson (Sapsuk) River (Figure 5) total run of 351,872 sockeye salmon (includes harvest and escapement) was well above the estimated forecast of 177,000 sockeye salmon. From the total run, 101,659 sockeye salmon were harvested in Nelson Lagoon (Table 13), and 250,213 fish escaped (Table 14) into the Nelson River. The harvest in Nelson Lagoon was well below the historical 10-year average of roughly 192,000 sockeye salmon, but sockeye salmon escapement into Nelson River was well above the biological escapement goal (BEG) of 97,000–219,000 fish (Table 14).

Beginning August 15, the Nelson Lagoon Section is managed based on local coho salmon runs. Approximately 5,000 coho salmon were observed in Nelson River, below the Nelson River SEG threshold of 18,000 fish. However, escapement was likely greater than observed, as poor weather conditions limited our ability to conduct aerial surveys throughout August and September. Unlike previous seasons, there was no directed coho fishery within Nelson Lagoon due to market conditions, and only a total of 11 coho salmon were harvested, which is below the recent 10-year average of 24,982 coho salmon.

Table 14.—Northern District sockeye salmon escapements and goals, 2023.

	Escapement <sup>a</sup>	Goal
Nelson (Sapsuk) River	250,213	97,000–219,000
Sandy River	48,757	37,000–69,000
Ilnik River	108,860	40,000–75,000
<i>Bear Lake early run</i>	280,626	176,000–293,000
<i>Bear Lake late run</i>	171,703	117,000–195,000
Bear Lake total	452,329	293,000–488,000
Subtotal for systems with weirs	860,159	467,000–851,000
Subtotal for systems without weirs	171,700	88,400–188,800
Northern District total	1,031,859	555,400–1,039,800

<sup>a</sup> Includes an estimate of sockeye salmon after removal of the weirs.

### Bear River and Three Hills Sections

As specified by the Northern District Salmon Fisheries Management Plan (5 AAC 09.369), the Bear River Section (Figure 5) opens to commercial salmon fishing on May 1, while the Three Hills Section opens on June 25. Both areas are managed based on the sockeye salmon run strength into Bear and Sandy Rivers. The early sockeye salmon run at Bear River was extremely weak, and weekly interim escapement objectives were not met in June and most of July. During this time, the Bear River and Three Hills Sections were closed to commercial fishing. During the first week of July, it became apparent additional management actions would be needed to increase escapement into both the Sandy and Bear Rivers, and the Ilnik Section was closed from July 8 to July 25.

The late run of sockeye salmon at Bear River, which starts on August 1, was earlier than average. Commercial harvest opportunity for late-run sockeye salmon opened on August 5, a few days earlier than in past years. No extensive closures were necessary during August, as interim escapements were met throughout the month. Approximately 42,096 sockeye salmon were harvested in the Bear River Section during 2023, and 6,710 sockeye salmon were harvested in the Three Hills Section (Table 13).

The Bear River early-run (through July 31) sockeye salmon escapement of 280,626 fish met the escapement goal of 176,000–293,000 fish (Table 14). The Bear River late-run (after July 31) sockeye salmon escapement of 171,703 fish was within the late-run sockeye salmon escapement goal of 117,000–195,000 fish. The Bear River season total sockeye salmon escapement was 452,329 fish (Table 14), which met the combined early- and late-run sockeye salmon escapement goal of 293,000–488,000 fish.

The 2023 Sandy River sockeye salmon escapement of 48,757 fish (Table 14) met the escapement goal range of 37,000–69,000 fish. Heavy rains and snowmelt caused the Sandy River weir to wash out on July 22, and the final escapement includes an estimate of sockeye that were holding downriver before the washout. A late-season aerial survey of spawning areas in Sandy Lake and Sandy River was conducted to verify estimated weir counts, and approximately 45,000 sockeye salmon were observed.

### Ilnik Section

In 2023, the Ilnik River system sockeye salmon escapement through the weir was 108,860 fish (Table 14), above the Ilnik River escapement goal of 40,000–75,000 fish. By regulation, the Ilnik Section can open to commercial salmon fishing on June 20. Sockeye salmon escapement into Ilnik River was above interim escapement objectives during both June and July. However, the Ilnik Section was closed from July 8 to July 25 due to poor escapement into the Bear and Sandy Rivers. Approximately 600,429 sockeye salmon were harvested in the Ilnik Section, below the recent ten-year average of 1.1 million fish (Table 13).

Beginning August 15, the Ilnik Section is managed for coho salmon runs into Ilnik Lagoon. However, most fishing efforts continue to target sockeye salmon during this time. During 2023, a total of 4,403 coho salmon were harvested in the Ilnik Section.

### **Inner and Outer Port Heiden Sections**

Aerial escapement surveys of the Meshik River began on June 20, and subsequent surveys occurred weekly throughout the season. The final sockeye salmon escapement into the Meshik River system was 79,100 fish, within the escapement goal of 48,000–86,000 sockeye salmon. This includes escapement into the Meshik River and tributaries, as well as Red Bluff and Yellow Bluff creeks.

Fishing time in the Outer Port Heiden Section (Figure 5) is based on Meshik River sockeye salmon abundance unless management actions are taken for the conservation of Ugashik River sockeye salmon in the Egegik District. By regulation, the Outer Port Heiden Section may open to commercial salmon fishing from June 20 to July 31. The weekly fishing periods in the Outer Port Heiden Section are scheduled from 6:00 a.m. Monday to 6:00 p.m. Wednesday. The Outer Port Heiden Section opened on June 22 and had openings of no more than 2½ days per week until the section closed on July 31. In 2023, a total of 303,139 sockeye salmon (Table 13) were harvested from the Outer Port Heiden Section. The 2023 sockeye salmon harvest in the Outer Port Heiden Section was below the 10-year average harvest of 504,512 sockeye salmon.

### **Cinder River Section**

No commercial salmon harvest effort occurred in the Cinder River Section in 2023 despite weekly commercial salmon fishing openers throughout the season. The total Cinder River (including Mud Creek) sockeye salmon escapement estimate of 59,800 fish and was within the escapement goal of 36,000–94,000 fish.

## **Northern District Escapement for Other Species**

### **Chinook Salmon**

Nelson River is the only river in Area M with a Chinook salmon escapement goal. At the Nelson River weir, a total of 4,078 Chinook salmon escaped through the weir, meeting the escapement goal of 2,400–5,000 fish. The total Northern District Chinook salmon escapement of 5,273 fish was below the recent ten-year average of 11,310 fish.

### **Coho Salmon**

Coho salmon surveys were conducted on major Northern District streams in late August, which is before the peak of the coho salmon run. However, due to weather conditions surveys were extremely limited compared with past years. Additionally, budgetary and logistical constraints do not permit coho salmon surveys to occur later in the fall. Coho salmon runs continue through September and into October, therefore escapements tabulated from aerial surveys are considered minimum estimates. The total coho salmon escapement in the Northern District during

2023 was 17,200 fish, below the 10-year average of 197,677 fish. Both the Nelson and Ilnik Rivers have coho salmon lower-bound escapement goals in the Northern District. The Nelson River escapement of 5,000 coho salmon was below the lower-bound escapement goal of 18,000 fish. The Ilnik River was surveyed twice in August, and water conditions were poor during each survey, and no coho were observed during these surveys, and it is unknown if the lower bound escapement goal of 9,000 fish was achieved. However, sport fishermen reported healthy numbers of coho within the Ilnik River. It is expected that more coho salmon entered the Ilnik and Nelson River systems during September and October. The coho salmon escapement into the Cinder River was 5,200 fish, and 6,800 coho salmon escaped into the Meshik River system (Meshik River and Landlocked Creek) as observed by aerial survey.

### **Chum Salmon**

The total chum salmon escapement in the Northern District during 2023 was 152,800 above the district-wide chum salmon escapement goal of 119,600–239,200 fish and below the most recent ten-year average of 186,874 fish. Most of the chum salmon escapement occurred in the Herendeen–Moller Bay Section (114,400 fish).

### **Pink Salmon**

There are no escapement goals for pink salmon in the Northern District. In some years, depending on market conditions, a directed pink salmon fishery may occur, however this did not happen in 2023. A total of 22,600 pink salmon were observed in the Northern District during 2023.