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Advisory Announcement
For Immediate Release: September 11,
2024

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2024 KOTZEBUE SOUND SALMON SEASON SUMMARY

COMMERCIAL SALMON FISHERY

In 2024, the commercial salmon season opened by regulation on July 10 and the last scheduled commercial fishery was conducted on August 8. There were two registered buyers for the 2024 season: Copper River Seafoods and Arctic Circle Wild Salmon.

In the Kotzebue District, commercial salmon fishing gear is limited to set gillnets with an aggregate length of no more than 150 fathoms per permit holder. Permit holders generally operate with nets anchored on/near the shore or set in deeper channels in the mud flats farther from shore. Most gear used in the district is 5-3/4 inch to 6-inch stretched mesh gillnet.

During the 2024 season, fishing schedules were reduced because of the low run. For the first 2 weeks (July 10-July 19), fishing was scheduled for daily 8-hour periods with the fishery closed on Saturdays because of transportation availability and to allow subsistence fishing with no commercial fishing effort. In the third week of the fishery (July 22-July 26), catch rates lagged long-term historical averages and fishing time was reduced to 5 8-hour periods. Catch rates continued to be well below long-term historical averages and the fishery was further reduced to 3 8-hour periods in the fourth week of the fishery (July 29-August 2). During the fourth week, inclement weather hampered commercial fishing; therefore, a 3-hour extension was granted on August 2 to gauge chum salmon abundance. Catch rates improved during week four but remained well below the long-term historical average. The final fishing periods scheduled in the Kotzebue District were reduced to 2 12-hour periods to continue gauging run strength. Catch rates for the last two commercial periods remained well below historical averages and the Kotzebue District had no additional scheduled commercial fishing periods after August 8 in 2024, 3 weeks before the regulatory closure date of August 31.

The 2024 commercial harvest of 5,392 chum salmon was below the 1962-2023 average harvest of 231,196 chum salmon and the poorest harvest since the state started managing the Kotzebue District in 1962. Additionally, 1 Chinook salmon was sold. There were 2 Chinook, 6 sockeye, 51 chum, 66 pink, 1 coho salmon, 7 Dolly Varden, and 27 sheefish kept for personal use.

There were 24 permit holders that sold fish in 2024, which is well below the 1962-2023 average of 105 permits (Figure 1 and Table 1). The highest daily fishing effort occurred on July 29 and August 7-8 when 12 permit holders fished. Chum salmon had an average weight of 7.7 pounds in 2024, near last year's average weight of 7.9 pounds.

A total of 141,793 pounds of chum salmon was sold at an average price of \$0.60 per pound. This year's average price was \$0.05 per pound less than the 2023 price of \$0.65 per pound. The total exvessel value for 2024 is \$25,091, which was the lowest value for the fishery since 2002 when limited market availability limited potential harvest (Table 1).

ESCAPEMENT

Primary commercial fishery management objectives are to provide adequate escapement throughout the duration of the chum salmon run to ensure sustainability of the fishery and to provide for the subsistence priority. Historically, a test fishery conducted on the Kobuk River provided the only inseason escapement index of the Kotzebue Sound District. In 2024, the Kobuk River test fishery was discontinued due to budget cuts.

SUBSISTENCE SALMON FISHERY

Subsistence salmon harvest is not assessed annually. Residents of the Kotzebue District were contacted by the department to gauge subsistence fishermen's success in obtaining chum salmon to meet their needs. Some fishermen reported their needs were being met while others indicated that fishing was slow and that their needs may not be met. The Kotzebue District subsistence fishery was hampered in 2024 by several periods of heavy rain that caused the river systems in the area to experience high water levels and some reports of flooding.

Table 1.– Kotzebue District chum salmon catch and dollar value, 1962–2024.

Year	Total Catch	Number of Permits ^a	Average Catch per Permit Holder	Gross Value of Catch to Permit Holders ^b
1962	129,948	84	1,547	\$4,500
1963	54,445	61	893	\$9,140
1964	76,449	52	1,470	\$34,660
1965	40,025	45	889	\$18,000
1966	30,764	44	699	\$25,000
1967	29,400	30	980	\$28,700
1968	30,212	59	512	\$46,000
1969	59,335	52	1,141	\$71,000
1970	159,664	82	1,947	\$186,000
1971	154,956	91	1,703	\$200,000
1972	169,664	104	1,631	\$260,000
1973	375,432	148	2,537	\$925,000
1974	627,912	185	3,394	\$1,822,784
1975	563,345	267	2,110	\$1,365,648
1976	159,796	220	726	\$580,375
1977	195,895	224	875	\$1,033,950
1978	111,494	208	536	\$575,260
1979	141,623	181	782	\$990,263
1980	367,284	176	2,087	\$1,446,633
1981	677,239	187	3,622	\$3,246,793
1982	417,790	199	2,099	\$1,961,518
1983	175,762	189	930	\$420,736
1984	320,206	181	1,769	\$1,148,884
1985	521,406	189	2,759	\$2,137,368
1986	261,436	187	1,398	\$931,241
1987	109,467	160	684	\$515,000
1988	352,915	193	1,829	\$2,581,333
1989	254,617	165	1,543	\$613,823
1990	163,263	153	1,067	\$438,044
1991	239,923	142	1,690	\$437,948
1992	289,184	149	1,941	\$533,731
1993 ^c	73,071	114	641	\$235,061
1994	153,452	109	1,408	\$233,512
1995	290,730	92	3,160	\$316,031
1996	82,110	55	1,493	\$56,310
1997	142,720	68	2,099	\$187,978
1998	55,907	45	1,242	\$70,587
1999	138,605	60	2,310	\$179,781
2000	159,802	64	2,497	\$246,786
2001	211,672	66	3,207	\$322,650
2002	8,390	3	2,797	\$7,572
2003	25,763	4	6,441	\$26,377
2004	51,077	43	1,188	\$64,420
2005	75,971	41	1,853	\$124,820
Average				
1962-2023	232,662	105	2,448	\$728,025

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Table 1–Page 2 of 2

Year	Total Catch	Number of Permits ^a	Average Catch per Permit Holder	Gross Value of Catch to Permit Holders ^b
2006	137,961	42	3,301	\$229,086
2007	147,087	46	3,198	\$243,149
2008	190,550	48	3,970	\$385,270
2009	187,562	62	3,025	\$376,554
2010	270,343	67	4,035	\$860,125
2011	264,321	89	2,970	\$867,085
2012	227,965	83	2,747	\$567,664
2013	319,062	66	4,834	\$689,163
2014	636,187	94	6,768	\$2,879,016
2015	305,383	105	2,908	\$867,583
2016	400,417	86	4,656	\$1,123,248
2017	463,749	98	4,732	\$1,839,637
2018	695,153	95	7,317	\$2,279,477
2019	494,593	92	5,376	\$1,559,260
2020	149,808	68	2,203	\$542,308
2021	96,492	52	1,856	\$332,064
2022	475,624	65	7,317	\$2,107,610
2023	141,781	54	2,626	\$733,061
2024	5,392	24	225	\$25,091
Average 1962-2023	231,196	105	2,451	\$728,106

^a During 1962–1966 and 1968–1971 figures represent the number of vessels licensed to fish in the Kotzebue District, not the number of permit holders.

^b Some estimates of fishery value between 1962 and 1981 include only chum salmon (and typically represents over 99% of the total value). Figures after 1981 represent the chum salmon value as well as incidental species such as Dolly Varden, whitefish, and other salmon.

^c Includes 2,000 chum salmon and \$3,648 from the Sikusuilaq Springs hatchery terminal fishery.

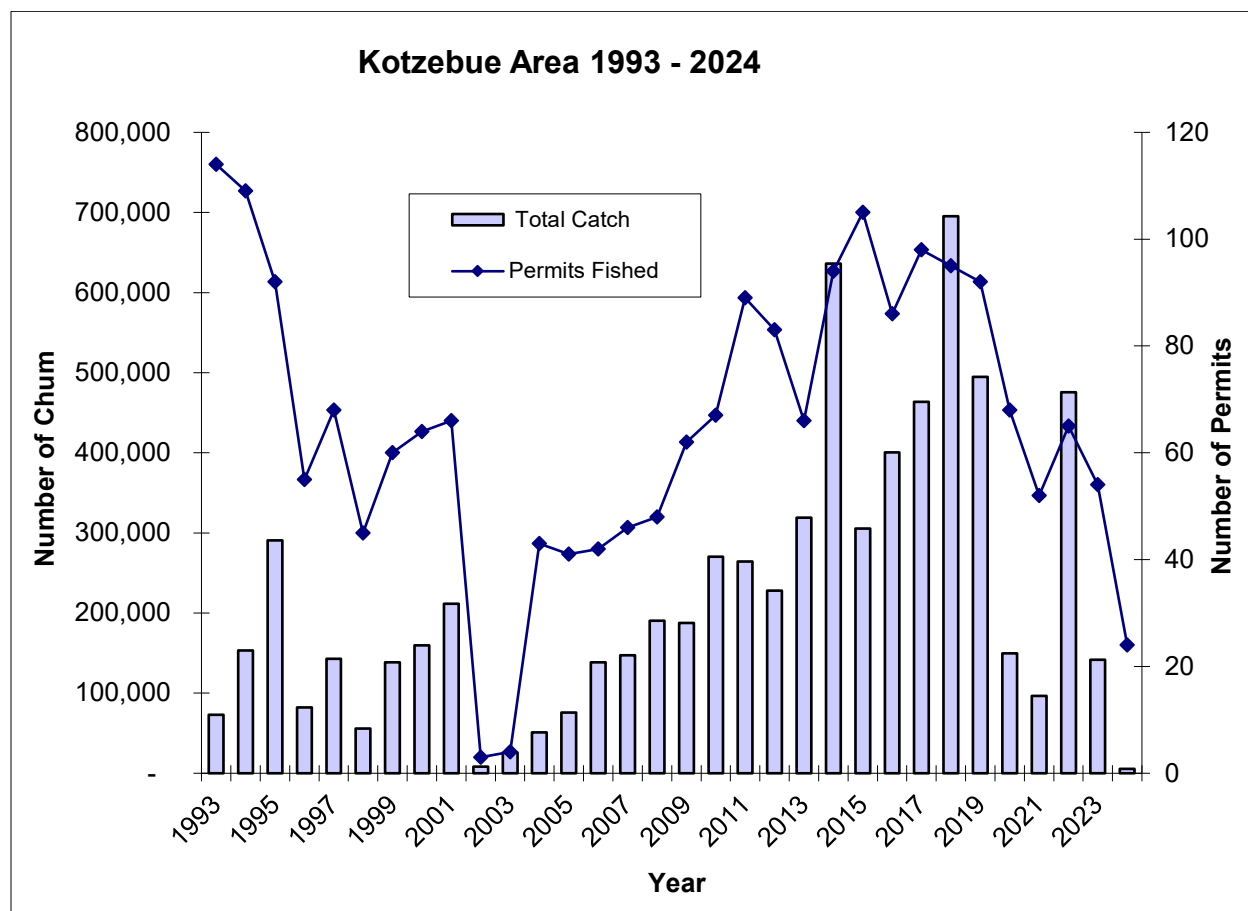


Figure 1.—Kotzebue District commercial chum salmon harvest and number of permits fished, 1993 - 2024.