



Advisory Announcement

For Immediate Release: November 14, 2024

Time: 4:00 p.m.

CONTACT:

Kuskokwim Area Biologists

Sam Decker (907) 459-7295

Sean Larson (907) 267-2174

Kuskokwim River Salmon Fishery Announcement #5

2024 Preliminary Kuskokwim Management Area Season Summary

This is an announcement from the Alaska Department of Fish and Game (Department) for fishers in the Kuskokwim Management Area.

Kuskokwim Area Management

Kuskokwim River salmon fisheries were managed according to the *Kuskokwim River Salmon Management Plan* (5 AAC 07.365). The Kuskokwim Bay salmon fisheries were managed according to the *Districts 4 and 5 Salmon Management Plan* (5 AAC 07.367).

Kuskokwim River

Preseason Forecast

The 2024 Kuskokwim River Chinook salmon forecast was for a range of 108,000 to 160,000 fish. The drainage-wide Chinook salmon escapement goal is 65,000–120,000 fish. If the run came back as projected, the drainage-wide and tributary escapement goals were expected to be achieved with a limited subsistence harvest. The 2024 season was managed in accordance with the *Kuskokwim River Salmon Management Plan* (5 AAC 07.365) with input from the Kuskokwim River Salmon Management Working Group (Working Group). It was the intent of the department to manage all Kuskokwim River salmon stocks in a conservative manner, consistent with the *Policy for the Management of Sustainable Salmon Fisheries* under 5 AAC 39.222, to meet escapement goals and the subsistence priority.

In-season Subsistence Management

Beginning in 2011 *emergency* federal special actions (FSA) have been requested by the public and granted by the Office of Subsistence Management, which have allowed for 60 days of Yukon Delta National Wildlife Refuge (Refuge) management of navigable waters adjacent to the refuge. In 2024 the Refuge requested and was granted a *temporary* FSA which allowed for 90 days of management of Chinook, chum, and coho salmon runs. Between June 1 and August 17, fishing for Chinook, chum, and coho salmon was restricted to federally qualified users. The Refuge manager, in consultation with the Kuskokwim River Intertribal Fish Commission, managed subsistence fishing and escapement in waters adjacent to the Refuge lands. The Refuge will publish reports detailing their in-season management decisions.

The Kuskokwim River Subsistence Sections 1-3 were managed by the state until June 1 and then again after the FSA was lifted on August 17, Sections 4 and 5 were state managed at all times of the year, as are the rivers in Kuskokwim Bay (Districts 4 and 5). The State uses the regulations determined by the Alaska Board of Fisheries and its public process to guide management decisions. “Front-end closures”, designed to ensure the escapement of early season upriver-bound Chinook salmon from harvest, began June 7 in Section 4 and 5 and consisted of

2024 Kuskokwim Management Area Season Summary

restricting mainstem fishing to selective gears to allow for non-salmon harvest (primarily sheefish and whitefish). With the gillnet closure came additional restrictions, including mandating release of Chinook salmon caught in selective gears and tributary closures. Subsequently, at 12:01 a.m. June 12, fishing with gillnets was opened in Sections 4 and 5, with gillnets restricted 6-inch or less mesh size and no longer than 25 fathoms. Retention of all species was then allowed with selective gear in state waters.

Chinook salmon remained a conservation concern in 2024 therefore Kuskokwim Bay management also restricted mesh size to 6 inch or less. Additionally, there is a regulation in District 4 that restricts fishing on Sundays between June 1 and July 15 and limits gear to 1 50-fathom per boat, not exceeding 45 meshes in depth. District 5 had no restrictions.

On August 16 at 11:59 p.m., the USFWS rescinded the FSA and returned management of Sections 1-3 to the State of Alaska. The Bethel Test Fishery (BTF) cumulative coho salmon catch-per-unit-effort (CPUE) on August 14 was 1,721 (2,321, 20-year average). This was likely an under estimation due to weather causing missed shifts and subsistence fishers reported coho salmon being smaller this year and sizing down their mesh to target them. Additionally, coho salmon passage at the sonar on its last day of operation (July 25) was 20,439, which was above the 2018–2023 average of about 13,000 fish for this date. On average, approximately 75% of the coho salmon run has passed through Bethel on August 15. On average 100% of the Chinook and sockeye salmon runs, along with 99% of the chum salmon run, will have passed through the Bethel area by this time. The BTF and sonar data indicated that the coho salmon escapement goals at the Kwethluk River and Kogruklu River weirs would likely be met. Also Working Group members reported that subsistence fishing efforts would be very low at this time of year. Based on this in-season run assessment data, the department determined that allowing unrestricted subsistence fishing in the Kuskokwim River and its tributaries was warranted and on August 17, ADF&G subsequently opened subsistence fishing with gillnets until further notice from the mouth of the Kuskokwim River upstream to its headwaters.

Postseason subsistence harvest surveys are presently being conducted. An assessment of subsistence salmon harvest in 2024 will not be available until Spring 2025 after postseason harvest surveys have been completed, data have been analyzed, and preliminary harvest estimates are produced.

2024 District 1 Commercial Fishery

There were no commercial buyers or processors operating in the Kuskokwim River districts. Therefore, commercial fishing opportunities were limited to individuals registered with the department as catcher/sellers who had secured their own markets. A single catcher/seller applied for and received a commissioner's permit to harvest salmon with drift gillnet gear. A total of five commercial gillnet fishing periods directed at coho salmon were provided in Subdistrict 1-A of the Kuskokwim River between August 17–30. When there are fewer than three fishers State of Alaska confidentiality requirements prohibit release of the harvest data; however, the department expects that the 2024 commercial coho salmon harvest will be well below the historical average.

In-season Assessment Overview

In addition to recommendations and input from the Working Group, the department mainly utilized two lower Kuskokwim River assessment projects to inform in-season management decisions: BTF and Kuskokwim River Sonar. The BTF provided information about salmon species CPUE, species ratios, and run timing, while the sonar provided daily and cumulative passage estimates for salmon and other species.

Bethel Test Fishery

The BTF operated June 1–August 14. A series of drifts were conducted to determine daily CPUE of salmon species an hour after each posted high tide. The area fished has not changed since its inception in 1984; however, gillnet mesh material changed beginning 2008. From the start of the early season to July 15, BTF used 8" and 5 3/8" mesh gillnets (each 50 fathoms in length) for assessment purposes. After July 15, only the 5 3/8" mesh gillnet was used because most of the Chinook salmon run had migrated upriver past the project site and the primary

2024 Kuskokwim Management Area Season Summary

focus of assessment shifted to sockeye, chum, and coho salmon. During the 2024 BTF season, there were 19 one-tide days and 11 drift sessions canceled due mainly to hazardous weather conditions. As a result, 2024 BTF cumulative CPUE values likely underestimate salmon run strength in the Kuskokwim River.

Kuskokwim River Sonar

The Kuskokwim River Sonar operated from June 3–July 25. The sonar provided timely information about the abundance of salmon and whitefish species as they migrated up the Kuskokwim River. They operated a test fishery for species apportionment using a series of six gillnet mesh sizes: 8 1/2", 7 1/2", 6 1/2", 5 1/4", 4", and 2 3/4" mesh. The sonar program generated daily species-specific passage estimates using species apportionment and sonar counts. The sonar did not provide total abundance or escapement estimates since some spawning occurs below the sonar and harvest occurs both downriver and upriver from the sonar.

CPUE, Run Timing, and Passage Estimates

Chinook Salmon

The cumulative Chinook salmon CPUE at the BTF was 329, which was less than the 20-year average of 600. The estimated midpoint of the Chinook salmon run was June 26 (4 days later than average). The cumulative Chinook salmon passage estimate at the sonar was 142,662 fish (95% CI = 112,504–172,820).

Sockeye Salmon

The cumulative sockeye salmon CPUE at the BTF was 598, which was lower than the 20-year average of 1,833. The estimated midpoint of the sockeye salmon run was July 4 (5 days later than average). The cumulative sockeye salmon passage estimate at the sonar was 695,724 fish (95% CI = 653,452–737,996).

Chum Salmon

The cumulative chum salmon CPUE at the BTF was 6,029, which was near the 20-year average (6,780). The estimated midpoint of the chum salmon run was July 9 (3 days later than average). The cumulative chum salmon passage estimate at the sonar was 253,825 fish (95% CI = 214,574–293,076).

Coho Salmon

The cumulative coho salmon CPUE at the BTF was 1,721, which was below the 20-year average of 2,552. It should be noted that this CPUE does not encompass the entire coho salmon run as it was still progressing after the project ceased operations on August 14. The sonar ended operations on July 25th and was unable to assess most of the coho salmon run.

Whitefish

Five species of whitefish were assessed at the Kuskokwim River Sonar (least and Bering cisco, broad and humpback whitefish, and sheefish). The cumulative cisco (least and Bering) passage estimate at the sonar was 114,304 fish (95% CI = 61,953–166,655). The cumulative broad whitefish passage estimate at the sonar was 21,517 fish (95% CI = 5,543–37,491). The cumulative humpback whitefish passage estimate at the sonar was 391,966 fish (95% CI 323,639–460,293). The cumulative sheefish passage estimate at the sonar was 36,206 fish (95% CI = 26,532–45,880).

Salmon Escapement – Kuskokwim River Drainage

Chinook Salmon

A run reconstruction model was used to estimate the preliminary total run and escapement for Chinook salmon in 2024. The preliminary Kuskokwim River total run estimate is 171,725 Chinook salmon (95% CI = 127,038–232,131) and an estimated 142,998 Chinook salmon (95% CI = 98,311–203,404) escaped Kuskokwim River fisheries, which exceeded the drainage-wide Sustainable Escapement Goal (SEG) range of 65,000–120,000 fish. Chinook salmon escapement was estimated at 1 weir in 2024 (Table 1). Escapement at the George River weir was 2,403 Chinook salmon, which fell within the SEG range of 1,800–3,300 fish. Chinook salmon escapements were not estimated at the remaining weir projects due to extended periods of missed passage due to high water. Eight

2024 Kuskokwim Management Area Season Summary

aerial surveys were carried out for Chinook salmon in 2024. The Chinook salmon aerial survey estimate at the Salmon (Pitka Fork) River was 702 fish, which fell within the SEG range of 470–1,600 fish. The results from the other aerial surveys can be found in Table 2.

Sockeye Salmon

Sockeye salmon escapement was estimated at 1 weir in 2024 (Table 3). Escapement at the Telaquana River weir was 111,183 sockeye salmon. Sockeye salmon escapement was not estimated at the Kogruklu River weir due to extended periods of missed passage. No escapement goals for Kuskokwim River sockeye salmon were assessed in 2024.

Chum Salmon

Chum salmon escapement was estimated at 1 weir in 2024 (Table 4). Escapement at the George River weir was 20,243 chum salmon. Chum salmon escapements were not estimated at the remaining weir projects due to extended periods of missed passage. No escapement goals for Kuskokwim River chum salmon were assessed in 2024.

Coho Salmon

Coho salmon escapement was estimated at 1 weir in 2024 (Table 5). Escapement at the Kogruklu River weir was 14,480 coho salmon, which fell within the SEG range of 13,000–28,000 fish. Coho salmon escapement was not estimated at the George River weir due to extended periods of missed passage.

Kuskokwim Bay

District 4 (Quinhagak)

There were no commercial salmon fishing periods in District 4 during the 2024 season due to a lack of a buyer/processor. An aerial survey was completed on the Kanektok River in 2024. The Chinook salmon aerial survey SEG of 3,900–12,000 fish was achieved with an estimate of 4,689 fish. The sockeye salmon aerial survey SEG 15,300–41,000 fish was exceeded with an estimate of 179,470 fish.

District 5 (Goodnews Bay)

There were no commercial salmon fishing periods in District 5 during the 2024 season due to a lack of processing capacity. No aerial surveys were completed on the North Fork or Middle Fork Goodnews rivers in 2024 due to hazardous weather conditions during peak salmon spawning dates.

For additional information concerning this advisory announcement:

ADF&G: Sam Decker, Kuskokwim area management biologist 907-459-7295

Sean Larson, Kuskokwim area research biologist 907-267-2174

2024 Kuskokwim Management Area Season Summary

Table 1.—Chinook salmon spawning weir escapement, Kuskokwim River Drainage, Kuskokwim Management Area 2011–2024.

Year	Chinook Salmon Escapement				Takotna	Salmon (Pitka)
	Kwethluk	George	Kogrukluk	Salmon (Aniak)		
2011	4,056	1,605	6,926	^a	149	^a
2012	^b	2,362	^b	^b	238	^a
2013	^b	1,267	1,919	711	104	^a
2014	3,191	2,988	3,726	1,722	^a	^a
2015	8,163	2,301	8,333	2,401	^a	7,156
2016	^b	2,218	7,034	^b	^a	6,371
2017	7,207	3,669	7,787	2,611	318	8,298
2018	^b	3,322	6,292	2,252	205	5,354
2019	8,505	3,828	10,301	^a	554	4,823
2020	^a	2,418	5,645	1,228	357	4,825
2021	^a	2,920	6,969	1,303	323	3,992
2022	6,808	4,318	5,837	1,620	^b	1,330
2023	^b	2,834	^b	1,228	233	4,791
2024	^c	^a	^b	^a	^b	^a
SEG	4,100– 7,500	1,800– 3,300	4,800– 8,800			
Average 2014–2023	6,775	3,082	6,775	1,796	332	5,216

^a Weir did not operate.

^b Historical run timing indicates that more than 40% of the run was missed; annual escapement was not determined.

^c Preliminary numbers subject to change.

2024 Preliminary Kuskokwim Management Area Season Summary

Table 2.—Chinook salmon spawning aerial survey index estimates, Kuskokwim River Drainage, Kuskokwim Management Area, 2011–2024.

Kuskokwim River ^a													
	Lower		Middle				Upper				Upper		
Year	Kwethluk	Kisaralik	Aniak	Kipchuk	Salmon (Aniak)	Holokuk	Oskawalik	Holitna	Gagarayah	Cheeneetnuk	Bear (Pitka)	Salmon (Pitka)	Pitka Fork
2011	b	534	b	116	79	20	26	b	96	249	145	767	85
2012	b	610	b	193	49	9	51	b	178	229	b	670	b
2013	1,165	597	754	261	154	29	38	670	74	138	64	475	b
2014	b	622	3,201	1,220	497	80	200	1,785	359	340	b	1,865	b
2015	b	709	b	917	810	77	b	662	19	b	1,381	2,016	b
2016	b	622	718	898	b	100	47	1,157	135	217	580	1,578	b
2017	b	b	1,781	889	423	140	136	676	453	660	492	687	234
2018	b	584	1,534	1,123	441	162	b	980	438	565	550	1,399	471
2019	b	1,063	3,160	1,344	950	719	638	1,377	760	1,345	542	1,918	330
2020	721	350	1,264	723	269	99	169	854	b	419	321	1,150	160
2021	b	b	b	b	b	b	b	b	b	b	b	b	b
2022	b	b	b	b	b	b	b	b	b	b	b	b	b
2023	b	b	628	b	b	660	373	b	449	645	326	671	28
2024	b	b	b	300	b	581	1,126	1,150	1,015	1,637	226	702	b
Escapement Goal Range:												470– 1,600	
Average 2014–2023	943	658	1,755	1,016	565	255	261	951	373	599	599	1,411	245

^a Estimates are from aerial surveys conducted during peak spawning periods under 'good' or 'fair' survey conditions.

^b Survey was either not flown or did not meet acceptable survey criteria.

2024 Preliminary Kuskokwim Management Area Season Summary

Table 3.—Sockeye salmon spawning weir escapement, Kuskokwim River drainage, Kuskokwim Management Area 2011–2024.

Year	Sockeye Salmon Escapement			
	Kwethluk	Salmon (Aniak)	KogrukluK	Telaquana
2011	b	a	8,079	35,099
2012	b	950	b	23,002
2013	b	966	7,793	28,058
2014	3,880	934	6,479	24,292
2015	8,998	1,504	6,647	95,570
2016	20,495	310	20,108	82,710
2017	28,806	a	24,696	145,281
2018	b	2,537	21,343	197,368
2019	42,212	a	32,116	198,485
2020	a	234	9,923	177,509
2021	a	907	13,534	123,958
2022	8,563	1,414	10,278	152,737
2023	b	2,693	b	283,014
2024	^c a	a	b	111,183
SEG	4,400–17,000			
Average 2014–2023	18,826	1,317	16,125	148,156

^a Weir did not operate.

^b Historical run timing indicates that more than 40% of the run was missed; annual escapement was not determined.

^c Preliminary numbers subject to change.

2024 Kuskokwim Management Area Season Summary

Table 4.—Chum salmon spawning weir escapement, Kuskokwim River drainage, Kuskokwim Management Area 2011–2024.

Year	Chum Salmon Escapement				
	Kwethluk	Salmon (Aniak)	George	Kogrukluuk	Takotna
2011	17,552	^a	45,257	76,649	8,562
2012	^b	^b	33,277	^b	6,039
2013	16,271	7,685	37,945	65,648	6,516
2014	17,942	2,777	17,183	30,697	^a
2015	23,071	5,511	17,554	33,091	^a
2016	31,666	1,691	19,469	45,234	^a
2017	52,202	9,754	39,971	85,793	6,557
2018	^b	18,770	48,915	52,937	6,007
2019	33,100	^b	43,072	71,006	5,618
2020	^a	1,995	8,943	19,020	^b
2021	^a	537	1,371	4,153	^b
2022	8,563	1,051	8,429	13,471	^b
2023	^b	4,040	15,253	^b	2,763
2024	^c	^a	20,243	^b	^b
SEG				15,000– 49,000	
Average 2014–2023	26,725	5,125	22,016	39,489	5,236

^a Weir did not operate.

^b Historical run timing indicates that more than 40% of the run was missed; annual escapement was not determined.

^c Preliminary numbers, subject to change.

2024 Kuskokwim Management Area Season Summary

Table 5.—Coho salmon spawning weir escapement, Kuskokwim River drainage, Kuskokwim Management Area, 2011–2024.

Year	Coho Salmon Escapement		
	Kwethluk	George	Kogrukuk
2011	^b	31,900	21,950
2012	20,627	14,844	13,462
2013	^b	14,823	23,800
2014	48,478	35,771	54,001
2015	32,124	35,790	32,900
2016	38,152	^b	^b
2017	55,722	25,338	^b
2018	^b	8,993	8,169
2019	34,561	13,277	16,470
2020	^a	21,426	^b
2021	^a	31,491	14,373
2022	8,702	9,934	^b
2023	36,035	33,439	28,132
2024 ^c	^a	^b	14,480
SEG	>19,000		13,000– 28,000
Average 2014–2023	36,253	23,940	25,674

^a Weir did not operate

^b Historical run timing indicates that more than 40% of the run was missed; annual escapement was not determined.

^c Preliminary numbers, subject to change.

2024 Kuskokwim Management Area Season Summary

Table 6.–Kanektok River salmon spawning escapement estimates, 2011–2024.

Year	Aerial Survey Escapement	
	Chinook	Sockeye
2011	a	a
2012	a	a
2013	2,277	53,002
2014	1,840	136,400
2015	4,919	39,970
2016	5,631	80,160
2017	a	a
2018	4,246	326,200
2019	7,212	349,073
2020	4,405 ^b	52,886 ^b
2021	4,115	53,690 ^c
2022	a	a
2023	6,688	90,360
2024	4,689	179,470
SEG	3,900– 12,000	15,300– 41,000
Average 2014–2023	4,882	141,126

^a Survey was either not flown or did not meet acceptable survey criteria.

^b Survey was flown outside (August 13) of the standardized peak spawning abundance date range of July 17 to August 5. Therefore, counts are underestimates of spawning escapement.

^c Survey was flown under poor weather conditions which hindered visibility in upper index regions. Therefore, counts are underestimates of spawning escapement.

2024 Kuskokwim Management Area Season Summary

Table 7.—Salmon spawning escapement estimates, Goodnews River, Kuskokwim Bay, 2011–2024.

Year	Middle Fork Goodnews R. Weir Escapement				North Fork Goodnews R. Aerial Escapement	
	Chinook	Sockeye	Coho	Chum	Chinook	Sockeye
2011	2,045	19,643	24,668	19,974	853	14,140
2012	524	29,531	11,371	9,065	378	16,710
2013	1,187	23,545	1,189	27,682	^a	^a
2014	^b 750	41,473	7,594	11,518	630	^a
2015	^b 1,494	57,809	15,084	11,517	991	38,390
2016	^c 3,767	170,574		41,815	1,120	90,060
2017	^c 6,881	179,897		54,799	^a	^a
2018	^d				^a	^a
2019	^c 6,421	167,105		38,177	2,462	162,930
2020	^d				1,098	55,110
2021	^d				2,273	95,020
2022	^d				^a	^a
2023	^d				4,336	33,020
2024	^d				^a	^a
SEG	1,500– 2,900	18,000– 40,000	>12,000	>12,000	640–3,300	9,600–18,000
Average 2014–2023	3,003	95,705	8,810	27,796	1,844	79,088

^a Survey was either not flown or did not meet acceptable survey criteria.

^b Weir operations ended Aug 31

^c Weir operation ended July 31.

^d Weir did not operate, or counts were incomplete.

-end-