

**ALASKA DEPARTMENT OF FISH AND GAME
DIVISION OF COMMERCIAL FISHERIES
NEWS RELEASE**



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Date Issued: October 24, 2012
Time: 4:00 pm

PRINCE WILLIAM SOUND HERRING ANNOUNCEMENT # 2

All herring (*Clupea pallasii*) fisheries in Prince William Sound (PWS) **between 1 July 2012 and 30 June 2013 will be closed**. This includes fall food and bait, purse seine and gillnet sac roe, spawn-on-kelp in pounds, and wild spawn-on-kelp fisheries. Preliminary Age Structured Assessment (ASA) modeling work suggest the pre-fishery run biomass for 2013 will be near the regulatory threshold. According to 5AAC 27.365(b) Prince William Sound herring management plan, no fishery may be opened if the estimated spawning biomass is projected to be below 22,000 tons. Recruit-age fish (age 3 and 4) are projected to represent 34% by weight or 48% by number. Because a majority of the biomass is projected to be recruit-age fish, and uncertainty in forecast point estimate, all herring fisheries will be closed.

Hydroacoustic surveys, net sampling, and aerial surveys were conducted in 2012 to assess herring biomass, disease prevalence, age composition, and growth. In March and April 2012, acoustic surveys of adult herring were conducted with the ADF&G vessel R/V *Solstice*. Broad scale surveys were conducted in eastern PWS up to Boulder Bay. Detailed acoustics data were collected on fish aggregations in Port Gravina, between St. Matthews Bay and Red Head, and on the south side of Port Fidalgo. The preliminary acoustics results from the ADF&G surveys will be provided when complete.

Sixteen aerial surveys were conducted between 28 March and 30 April 2012. Surveys documented spawn in eastern PWS around Gravina Point (7 to 12 April), between St. Matthews Bay and Knowles Head (13 to 18 April); between Fish Bay and Landlocked Bay (11 to 16 April); and on the east side of Tatitlek Narrows and in Virgin Bay (13 to 16 April), and on Montague Island (25 April). Preliminary spawn estimates are 19.1 mile-days (south of Knowles Head) and 18.6 mile-days (north of Knowles Head), and 1.6 mile-days (Montague Island) for a total of 39.3 mile-days of spawn. This is fewer mile-days of spawn than documented in any year in which commercial fishing occurred since 1973. No fish or spawn were documented in Fairmont Bay or Naked Island, but pilots reported some spawn on Knight Island in May.

Age composition samples varied by location and sample gear: spawning fish samples from southeast and northeast PWS were predominantly age 3 (21%), 5 (25%), and 7 (19%). Some

prespawning samples from Eastern PWS (upper Port Gravina) were predominantly younger fish (>70% age 3). No collections were made from the smaller spawning event near Montague Island.

Herring disease assessment has been included as part of the annual age, sex, and size assessment completed each spring since 1993. Disease sampling in March and April 2012 found no fish positive for viral hemorrhagic septicemia virus (VHSV) in 180 fish examined. The prevalence of *Ichthyophonus hoferi* was 40.8% in Port Gravina (60 fish) and 35.0% in Port Fidalgo (60 fish).

Additional updates on the status of the PWS herring population will be announced when new information becomes available.