

ALASKA DEPARTMENT OF FISH AND GAME

DIVISION OF COMMERCIAL FISHERIES

NEWS RELEASE



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Kuskokwim River Salmon Fishery Announcement #18 **Commercial Fishing Suspended**

This is an announcement from the Alaska Department of Fish and Game in Bethel for fishermen in the Kuskokwim Area.

Based on historical Bethel Test Fishery (BTF) data, 99% of the king salmon run is in river. Escapements of king salmon at weir projects show improvement over recent poor years. Aerial surveys for king salmon in the upper portion of the Kuskokwim River indicate several escapement goals have been achieved. The king salmon escapement goal at George River was reached on July 10, while king salmon escapements to Kogrukluuk and Kwethluk rivers are currently below recent averages.

Based on historical BTF data, 98% of the sockeye salmon run is in the river. Escapements through weir projects are varied and we are optimistic that we will achieve the Kogrukluuk River sustainable escapement goal (SEG) of 4,400–17,000.

BTF data indicates that the chum salmon run is tracking below recent 5- and 10-year averages and that historically 89% of the chum salmon run is through the lower river to date. The lower bound of the Kogrukluuk River chum salmon SEG (15,000–49,000) was achieved on July 20. Three commercial fishing periods were allowed in the lower half of District W-1 during the last quarter of the chum salmon run between July 14 and July 21. Total commercial harvest was 2,491 sockeye, 18,158 chum, and 5,229 coho salmon. Twenty-nine king salmon were reported caught but not sold. The chum salmon harvest was below the recent 5-year average of 37,400 fish through July 21.

Since coho salmon are now entering the river, following the *Kuskokwim River Salmon Management Plan* (5 AAC 07.365), the department is now managing for coho salmon escapement goals, subsistence priority, and to allow for other uses when there is a surplus.

The preseason outlook is for below average to average coho salmon run and a projected commercial harvest ranging from 80,000–140,000 fish. However, the coho salmon run will be managed with the expectation that the subsistence harvest will be larger than average because of conservation actions taken in June for king salmon. Because coho salmon are just beginning to enter the Kuskokwim River and it is too early to determine the strength of the run, commercial fishing is being suspended until run assessment indicates there is a harvestable surplus available. The department will be meeting with the Kuskokwim River Salmon Management Working Group and assessing coho salmon abundance as the run enters the Kuskokwim River as indicated by subsistence harvest reports and BTF.

Further announcements will be made from the Bethel Fish and Game office, on the State of Alaska web site (<http://www.adfg.alaska.gov/index.cfm?adfg=cfnews.main>), and local radio stations. News releases will be faxed to area villages and local fish processing companies. For additional information or questions regarding Kuskokwim Area fisheries, contact the Alaska Department of Fish and Game office in the Bethel at 543-2433 or toll free at 1-855-933-2433.