

ALASKA DEPARTMENT OF FISH AND GAME

DIVISION OF COMMERCIAL FISHERIES

NEWS RELEASE



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PRINCE WILLIAM SOUND HERRING ANNOUNCEMENT # 1

All commercial herring *Clupea pallasii* fisheries in Prince William Sound (PWS) between 1 July 2014 and 30 June 2015 remain closed. This includes: fall food and bait, purse seine and gillnet sac roe, spawn-on-kelp in pounds, and wild spawn-on-kelp fisheries. The PWS herring prefishery spawning biomass is estimated to be below the minimum spawning biomass threshold of 22,000 short tons. According to 5 AAC 27.365(b) Prince William Sound Herring Management Plan, no fishery may be opened if the spawning biomass is projected to be below 22,000 short tons. Age structured assessment modeling was used to project the 2015 biomass of herring at approximately 19,700 short tons.

Hydroacoustic surveys, net sampling, and aerial surveys were conducted in 2014 to assess herring biomass, disease prevalence, age composition, and growth. The 2014 Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ADF&G) acoustics estimate of the spawning biomass (corrected for age composition and maturity) is 19,500 short tons. Starting 26 March, acoustic surveys of adult herring were conducted with the ADF&G vessel R/V *Solstice*. Broad scale surveys were conducted in eastern PWS from Sheep Bay through to Port Fidalgo. Detailed acoustics data were collected on fish aggregations in Sheep Bay, near Gravina Point, Port Gravina, between St. Matthews Bay and Knowles Head, and in Port Fidalgo, near Snug Corner Cove.

Additional acoustics surveys were conducted by the Prince William Sound Science Center (PWSSC). A survey of northern Montague Island (22–25 April) provided an estimated 1,100 to 3,300 short tons. A gillnet sample collected in Stockdale Harbor on 24 April included only adult, prespawning fish.

ADF&G conducted sixteen aerial surveys between 23 March and 1 May 2014. Surveys documented spawn on Wingham and Kayak islands (3 and 7 April), in eastern PWS between St. Matthews Bay and Knowles Head (14 and 16–18 April); around Gravina Point (17–19 April); in Landlock Bay (17–19, 21 and 24 April); and in Boulder Bay (24 April). Spawn estimates within PWS are 34.9 mile-days (south of Knowles Head) and 1.7 mile-days (north of Knowles Head) for a total of 36.6 mile-days of spawn within PWS. This is fewer mile-days of spawn than in any year in which commercial fishing occurred since 1973. No fish or spawn were documented in

Fairmont Bay, Naked Island, or Knight Island. Some schools were documented on northern Montague Island, but no spawn was observed. An additional 6.8 mile-days of spawn were documented on Kayak Island on 3 and 7 April, but are not included in our assessment for PWS. The PWSSC funded additional surveys and those data were examined and added to the department's data.

Age composition samples collected during spring 2014 varied by location and sampling gear. Fish samples from southeast PWS, northeast PWS, and Montague Island (collected by PWSSC) were predominately (60–66%) 5, 7, and 8 year old fish. A gillnet sample from one of the Kayak Island spawn events (collected by Warren Chappell) was predominately 8 (23%), 9 (40%), and 10 (22%) year old fish.

Herring disease assessment has been included as part of the annual age, sex, and size assessment completed each spring since 1993. Disease sampling in April 2014 found no fish positive for viral hemorrhagic septicemia virus in 175 fish examined; however, 1 sample of a pooled group of fish tested positive. In adult herring, the prevalence of *Ichthyophonus hoferi* was 23.3% in Sheep Bay (14 of 60 fish), 33.3% in Port Gravina (20 of 60 fish), and 21.7% in Snug Corner Cove (13 of 60 fish) representing a decrease in prevalence from samples collected in 2011, 2012, and 2013.

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