

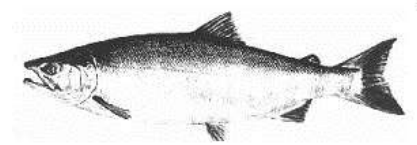
ALASKA DEPARTMENT OF FISH AND GAME

DIVISION OF COMMERCIAL FISHERIES

NEWS RELEASE



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2014 KOTZEBUE SOUND SALMON SEASON SUMMARY

COMMERCIAL SALMON FISHERY

In the Kotzebue fishery, gear is limited to set nets with an aggregate of no more than 150 fathoms per permit holder. Fishermen generally operate with one end on or near shore and also set in deeper channels in the mud flats farther out from shore. Most gear used in the district is 5-3/4 inch to 6-inch stretch mesh gillnet.

There were three major buyers in 2014, the first time since 2001 that there was more than one buyer. The Kotzebue Sound District commercial salmon fishery opened on July 10 and closed by regulation after August 31. However, declining catches the last week of August resulted in buyers terminating operations after the August 28 fishing period. One of the largest chum salmon runs on record resulted in the second largest chum salmon harvest even though commercial fishing time was often limited because of insufficient cargo space on airplanes to get the catch out to processing facilities.

During the first week of the fishery commercial fishing periods ranged from 8 to 12 hours a day starting in the afternoon with no fishing on Saturday because of insufficient plane availability. No fish processing occurred in Kotzebue and fish were flown out in the round. If there was a large harvest during a particular day then fishing often did not occur the following day. The break in fishing allowed the buyers enough time to work with cargo companies to get the fish shipped out in a timely manner to processing facilities.

During the second week of the fishery, periods were eight hours in length, and beginning the last week of July some fishing periods were reduced to six hours. The harvest during one eight-hour period on July 28 of 65,014 chum salmon resulted in nearly one-quarter of the entire month of July harvest. The July 28 fishing period was a record catch-per-unit-of-effort (CPUE) and was the greatest fishing period catch since a two-day fishing period in 1988. Fishing resumed on July 30 with periods reduced to five hours. On August 4, periods were reduced to four hours through August 10. On August 11 fishing time was increased to five hours, but another large harvest resulted in periods being reduced to three to four hours until August 21. A large contributing factor to shorter fishing periods after August 11 was due to closures of the Kotzebue airport for

maintenance that prevented sufficient plane capacity that would have allowed for longer fishing periods. From August 21–28 there were daily fishing periods ranging from five to nine hours, except for the normal Saturday closure. By August 27, the catch dropped to one-seventh of what was caught at the start of the week and fishing effort dropped by nearly two-thirds. The last two buyers that remained announced that they would close after August 28.

Ninety-four permit holders sold chum salmon in 2014. This year's participation by permit holders was the highest number since 1994 when 109 permit holders sold fish (Figure 1 and Table 1). The highest fishing effort occurred on July 28 and August 4 when 68 permit holders fished.

The commercial harvest of 636,252 chum salmon was the second highest on record. There were 65 chum salmon kept for personal use that were included in the commercial harvest total. Additionally, 20 Chinook salmon, 17 sockeye salmon, 405 pink salmon, 33 coho salmon, 620 Dolly Varden, 296 sheefish, and 30 whitefish were reported in the catch, but kept for personal use. Likely, some additional fish kept for personal use were not reported on fish tickets.

A total of 5,330,144 pounds of chum salmon (average weight 8.4 lbs) were sold at an average of \$0.54 per pound. This year's average price was the highest since the record price of \$0.85 per pound in 1988. The total exvessel value was \$2,879,016 to Kotzebue Sound fishermen. The average value for each participating permit holder was \$30,628. The total exvessel value was nearly five times above the \$593,833 historical average (Table 1).

Age, sex and length composition (ASL) was taken from commercial catch samples, but was not used to manage the fishery. The majority of the chum salmon each year are usually four- and five-year-old fish. In 2014, commercial catch samples were 70% age-0.3 fish, and 27% age-0.4 fish and 3% age-0.5 fish.

ESCAPEMENT

Primary fishery management objectives are to provide adequate chum salmon escapement throughout the duration of the commercial fishery to ensure sustainability of the fishery and to provide for the subsistence priority. A test fishery conducted on the Kobuk River provides the only inseason escapement index of the Kotzebue Sound District.

This year's test fish chum salmon CPUE cumulative index at the department test fish project on Kobuk River near Kiana was 4,150, the highest in the 22-year project history. The CPUE was over 50% higher than the previous record that occurred last year.

Kobuk River test fishery catch samples were 1% age-0.2 fish, 73% age-0.3 fish, 20% age-0.4 fish and 6% age-0.5 fish. The number of age-0.3 samples was the third highest in project history.

One aerial survey of the upper Kobuk River and Noatak River drainages occurred. The surveys of the index areas exceeded escapement goals and were the highest on record. Although conditions on the upper Kobuk River index were marginal the count of 65,653 chum salmon was a record. The following day under excellent conditions the Noatak River index area count was a record 483,939 chum salmon.

There was a noticeable die-off of chum salmon prior to spawning in the Kobuk River and low dissolved oxygen in the water was suspected to be the cause. Testing at the Fish & Game fish pathology lab in Anchorage showed the presence of algae in fish gills indicating a possible algae bloom during the warm and sunny weather this year. An algae bloom would have contributed to

suspected low dissolved oxygen resulting in fish deaths. Other fish besides salmon were reported in the die-off. However, no contaminants were observed during pathology tests.

SUBSISTENCE SALMON FISHERY

No subsistence salmon surveys are scheduled. Subsistence fishermen reported great catches during the season and remarked that 2014 was one of the best years ever for chum salmon fishing.

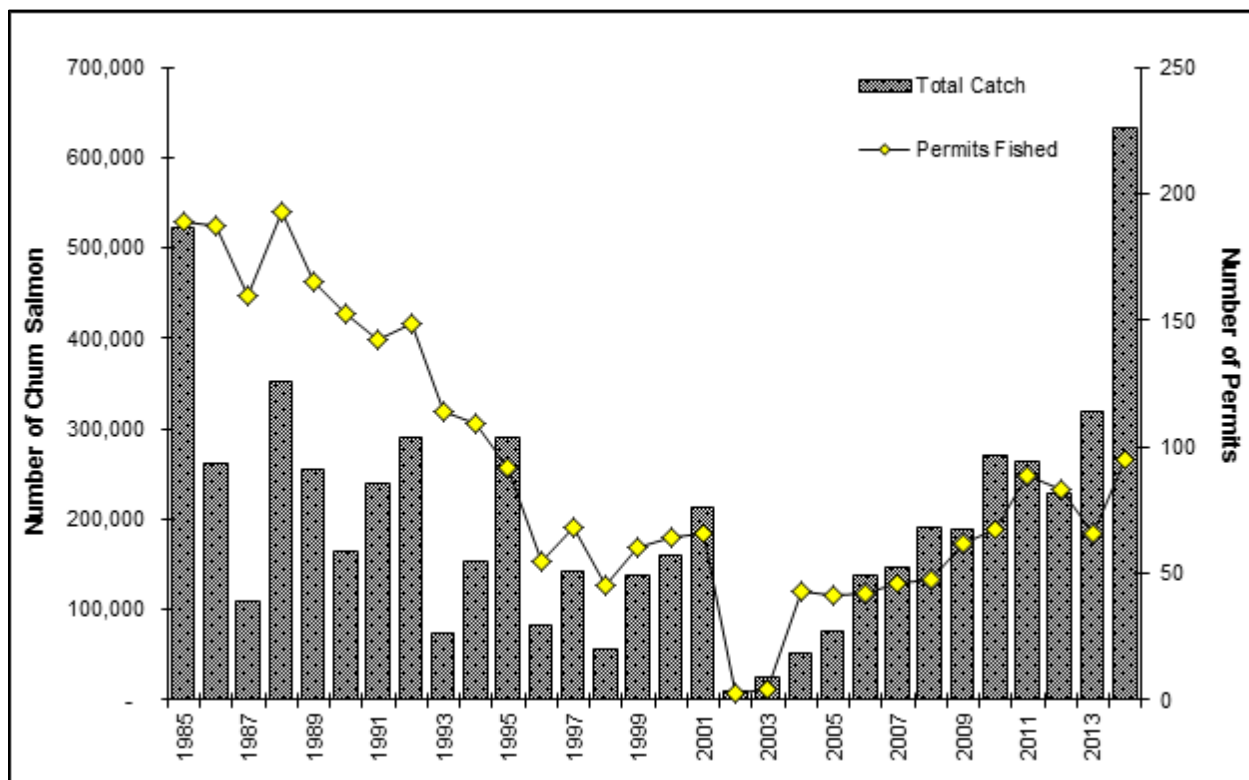


Figure 1.—Kotzebue District commercial chum salmon harvest and number of permits fished, 1985–2014.

Table 1.–Kotzebue District Chum Salmon Catch and Dollar Value, 1962–2014.

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
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
Average	201,442	109	2,042	\$593,833
2014	636,252	94	6,769	\$2,879,016

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Table 1.–Page 2 of 2.

- ^a During 1962–1966 and 1968–1971 figures represent the number of vessels licensed to fish in the Kotzebue District, not the number of fishermen.
- ^b Some estimates between 1962 and 1981 include only chum value which in figures represent over 99% of the total value. Figures after 1981 represent the chum 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.