

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



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2015 PRINCE WILLIAM SOUND SALMON FISHERY INFORMATION

General Information

This outlook is provided to assist the commercial salmon industry in planning for the 2015 season in the Prince William Sound (PWS) Management Area (Area E). The forecasts for commercial common property fishery (CCPF) harvests by species are summarized in Table 1. Preseason forecasts are the basis for the information provided. Detailed Area E total run forecasts can be found on ADF&G's web site:

<http://www.adfg.alaska.gov/index.cfm?adfg=commercialbyareapws.salmon#/forecasts>

Prince William Sound Aquaculture Corporation (PWSAC) hatchery forecasts can be found on the PWSAC web site:

<http://pwsac.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/12/2015-PWSAC-Forecast.pdf>

Management of PWS commercial salmon fisheries occurs from the Cordova area office. As in past years, fishery announcements from the Cordova ADF&G office will routinely occur at 2:00 p.m. and will normally provide a minimum of 15 hours advanced notice. Announcement recordings will be available for gillnet fisheries at 907-424-7535 and seine fisheries at 907-424-7345. In addition, announcement recordings are available in Anchorage at 907-267-2843. Daily announcements are compiled and may be found on the ADF&G web site at:

<http://www.adfg.alaska.gov/index.cfm?adfg=cfnews.main>

The first announcement concerning the Copper River District will be issued between May 1 and May 8.

Gillnet Fishery

Copper River District

The 2015 CCPF harvest projections for the Copper River District are 2.2 million sockeye, 214,000 coho, and 6,000 Chinook salmon (Table 1). The 2015 inriver goal past the Miles Lake sonar is 759,000 to 1.15 million salmon. The upper Copper River sustainable escapement goal (SEG) is 360,000 to 750,000 natural sockeye salmon, and the Copper River delta SEG is 55,000 to 130,000.

The department's goal is to maintain the long-term average of 450,000 sockeye salmon in the upper Copper River spawning escapement, and 84,500 sockeye salmon in the Copper River delta spawning escapement. The components of the inriver goal are as follows:

Spawning escapement	360,000 to 750,000 sockeye
Other salmon	17,500 salmon
Subsistence	82,500 salmon
Personal Use harvest	150,000 salmon
Sport fishery	15,000 salmon
Gulkana broodstock	20,000 sockeye
Gulkana Hatchery surplus	114,000 sockeye
Total	759,000

The initial management strategy will be based on anticipated weekly sockeye and Chinook salmon harvests for the Copper River District and additional assessments of river conditions, fishing effort, harvest location, and consistency of harvest. Once the Miles Lake sonar is deployed, the inriver goal becomes one of the primary factors in management decisions. By late June, aerial estimates of Copper River Delta sockeye salmon escapement are also considered.

The standard commercial fishing schedule is two evenly spaced fishing periods per week with the first period each week starting on Mondays at 7:00 a.m. Depending upon fishing effort, harvest, and escapement trends on the Copper River Delta and at Miles Lake sonar station, a decision on a possible second weekly fishing period will be made by Wednesday at 2:00 p.m. The second period typically begins at 7:00 a.m. on Thursday. The 2015 sockeye salmon harvest forecast is the largest on record. The frequency and duration of fishing periods may need to increase to keep pace with sockeye salmon run entry. Due to the low Chinook salmon forecast it is anticipated that 'inside closure area', as defined in 5AAC 24.350(1)(B), will remain closed until mid-June and may be expanded to include waters inside the barrier islands east of Coffee Creek West (60° 14.13' N. lat., 144° 58.31' W. long.).

Beginning in early to mid-August when coho salmon harvest becomes predominant the Copper and Bering River districts will be managed for coho salmon. The standard management strategy for coho salmon is one or two 24-hour periods per week depending on escapement and harvest levels. Individuals planning to participate in subsistence fishing activities in Copper River District are required to obtain a subsistence permit through the Cordova ADF&G office. **Permits will be available during normal business hours Monday through Friday from 8:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m. and 1:00 p.m. to 5:00 p.m.** ADF&G staff will not be available to issue permits before hours, after hours, on state holidays, or on weekends.

Bering River District

The 2015 CCPF harvest projections for the Bering River District are 15,000 sockeye and 49,000 coho salmon. Bering River District is expected to open for the 2015 season only after sockeye salmon escapement is above the minimum SEG (15,000–33,000 fish). Beginning in early August, the Bering River District will be managed for coho salmon and management strategies will be similar to those used for Copper River District.

Eshamy District

PWSAC's Main Bay Hatchery forecast is 1.6 million sockeye salmon. The management strategy in 2015 will be to provide two extended periods per week in the hatchery subdistrict similar to the

strategy used in the past five years. Extended periods may also occur in the Crafton Island Subdistrict provided there are no concerns regarding harvest of wild stocks bound for other districts. Eshamy District is expected to open for the 2015 season on May 28.

Eshamy River escapement will be assessed with a video monitoring system in 2015. The wild stock sockeye salmon run to Eshamy Lake is forecast at 53,000 fish, 20,500 of which will be needed to meet the midpoint of the 13,000–28,000 biological escapement goal (BEG) range. Beginning in early to mid July, fishing time and area in Crafton Island Subdistrict will be driven by escapement of wild pink and sockeye salmon in Eshamy District, and the strength of wild pink and chum salmon runs to the Northwestern, Coghill, and Northern districts.

Coghill District

The 2015 Coghill Lake sockeye salmon forecast is 123,000 fish with an SEG of 20,000–60,000 fish with an anticipated harvest of 93,000 fish. The chum salmon run to Wally Noerenberg Hatchery (WNH) is forecast to be 1.3 million fish. PWSAC requires 812,000 chum salmon for cost recovery and broodstock, leaving 519,000 million (39%) for the CCPF. Coghill District is expected to open for the 2015 season on June 1.

Granite Bay Subdistrict will be managed to achieve PWSAC corporate escapement goals when management of Esther and Perry Island subdistricts is not adequately achieving these goals.

Area restrictions may be implemented by emergency order for the conservation of Coghill Lake sockeye salmon and Port Wells wild stock chum and pink salmon. If sockeye salmon escapement is within the anticipated range and sockeye salmon harvest rates in Coghill District indicate a strong run, the Port Wells area will be regularly opened north to the markers near Coghill Lagoon. If the Coghill River weir escapement counts exceed the escapement goal, fishing area may be expanded to the mouth of Coghill River. If the drift gillnet fleet does not appear to be able to harvest available surplus Coghill Lake sockeye salmon, the purse seine fleet may be allowed to fish north of 61° in the Coghill District.

WNH coho salmon are present in the Coghill District fishery from early August through late September. The 2015 run to WNH is expected to be 56,700 coho salmon. PWSAC will require 2,700 fish for broodstock with all remaining fish available to the common property fisheries.

Unakwik District

The 2015 wild stock sockeye salmon commercial harvest in Unakwik Inlet is forecast at 5,700 fish. During the sockeye salmon run to Miners and Cowpen lakes, the management strategy will be to provide two periods per week. This schedule is expected to begin in early June and run concurrently with openings in Coghill District. Unakwik District is expected to open for the 2015 season on June 15.

Port Chalmers Subdistrict

The drift gillnet gear group has exclusive access to the Port Chalmers Subdistrict chum salmon fishery in 2015. The CPF in Port Chalmers is anticipated to begin on Thursday, May 28 with forecast of 258,000 chum salmon.

Purse Seine Fishery

The 2015 pink salmon total run forecast for PWS is 54.1 million fish, of which 46.4 million will be available for common property harvest. This pink salmon total run forecast includes 16.8 million

wild stock fish, 15.7 million Valdez Fisheries Development Association (VFDA) fish, and 21.6 million PWSAC hatchery fish. Approximately 3.1 million (20%) of the projected 15.7 million pink salmon run to VFDA's Solomon Gulch Hatchery will be needed for cost recovery and broodstock leaving 12.6 million for common property harvest. Approximately 3.2 million (15%) of the projected 21.6 million pink salmon run to the PWSAC hatcheries will be needed for cost recovery and broodstock. The remaining 18.4 million PWSAC pink salmon will be available for common property harvest. Based on the department's wild stock pink salmon forecast of 16.8 million fish, there is a potential common property harvest of 15.4 million wild pink salmon. The department will manage for each district's escapement goal for a combined total of 1.4 million fish.

The 2015 chum salmon forecast total run in PWS is 2.4 million fish. The majority, 1.9 million (79%), are from PWSAC hatchery production, with 280,000 fish returning to the Armin F. Koernig hatchery (AFK). Based on the department's wild chum salmon forecast of 484,000 fish, there is a potential common property harvest of 284,000 wild chum salmon. The department will manage for each district's escapement goal, aiming for each district's long-term average, for a combined total of 200,000 fish.

The PWS purse seine fishery will begin on Monday, June 1 targeting the enhanced chum salmon run to the AFK hatchery. A regular schedule of two fishing periods per week is anticipated; a 60-hour fishing period, from 8:00 a.m. Monday to 8:00 p.m. Wednesday, and an 84-hour fishing period, from 8:00 a.m. Thursday to 8:00 p.m. Sunday. Anadromous stream closures and regulatory closed waters within the open area at AFK will be suspended during June and July. Areas open to the CCPF at AFK will remain open until pink salmon dominate the harvest and are sufficient to sustain sizable pink salmon cost recovery harvests. Daily 14-hour fishing periods will commence at AFK on Monday, July 13, to provide more frequent updates on chum and pink salmon harvests.

The general waters of the eight purse seine districts will be managed based on the strength of wild stocks. Hatchery subdistricts will be managed based on the strength of both wild and enhanced stocks. The 2015 pink salmon forecast is the largest on record and liberal fishing time and area is anticipated if returns are as strong as expected. Pink and chum salmon escapement trends will be evaluated during weekly aerial surveys and compared to average historical performance to determine the frequency and duration of openings. The department has used yellow salmon harvest task force (SHTF) markers in the past to close terminal wild stock areas, both for escapement and quality concerns. The coordinates for these markers are available to the public at the Cordova office, and are included in fishery news releases. Valdez Arm, Valdez Narrows, and Port Valdez will be managed for VFDA's cost recovery and broodstock needs. Openings in Valdez Arm and Port Valdez designed to target VFDA pink salmon will be based on the strength of the enhanced run and VFDA's progress towards achieving the pink salmon cost recovery goal. CCPFs targeting VFDA fish generally start during the first week of July with daily 14-hour periods (6 a.m. to 8 p.m.). In the remainder of Eastern District, openings will be based upon the strength of wild stock escapements. Port Valdez will be closed to the CCPF north of a line from Entrance Point to Potato Point beginning on August 15. Valdez Narrows Subdistrict will open on September 8 to target surplus Solomon Gulch Hatchery (SGH) coho salmon. The VFDA enhanced coho salmon forecast is 105,000 fish with an anticipated CCPF harvest of 38,600 fish.

The AFK, Cannery Creek Hatchery (CCH), and WNH pink salmon runs will be managed collectively to achieve PWSAC's cost recovery and broodstock goals. Prior to run entry sustaining consistent hatchery cost recovery harvest, the department may open the WNH, CCH, and AFK Hatchery terminal harvest areas (THAs) and special harvest areas (SHAs) to a common

property harvest to keep pink salmon quality high. Once cost recovery is initiated, PWSAC's expectation is that they will likely complete at least 70–80% of their pink salmon cost recovery harvest goal prior to recommending an opening of the CCPF in the hatchery subdistricts. PWSAC will work closely with local ADF&G management biologists to achieve the pink salmon cost recovery goal as rapidly as possible to allow for an orderly and consistent common property fishery.

The department evaluates late pink salmon run progress based on cost recovery and commercial harvest rates, broodstock collections, sex ratios, stock composition estimates, and wild stock escapement data. To further assess pink salmon run strength and timing, a Southwestern District test fishery using the R/V *Solstice* will be conducted in late July. Daily test sets made at key migration corridors provide stock composition estimates and harvest rates which provide a qualitative gauge of run strength, timing, and quality.

Table 1.—ADF&G, PWSAC and VFDA commercial common property harvest projections for the 2015 salmon fishery in the Prince William Sound and Copper/Bering River areas.

PINK SALMON - HARVEST ESTIMATE (Millions)	
Natural Stocks	15.4
Hatchery Stocks^a	
Solomon Gulch	12.6
Armin F. Koernig	6.4
Wally Noerenberg	5.3
Cannery Creek	6.7
Natural & Hatchery	46.4
CHUM SALMON - HARVEST ESTIMATE (Thousands)	
Natural Stocks	284
Hatchery Stocks^a	
Wally Noerenberg	519
Armin F. Koernig	280
Port Chalmers	258
Natural & Hatchery	1,057
COHO SALMON - HARVEST ESTIMATE (Thousands)	
PWS Natural Stocks	No Forecast
Copper River	214
Bering River	49
Hatchery Stocks^a	
Solomon Gulch	39
Wally Noerenberg	54
Natural & Hatchery	356
SOCKEYE SALMON - HARVEST ESTIMATE (Thousands)	
Copper River	2,240
Bering River	15
Coghill Lake	93
Eshamy Lake	32
PWS Hatchery Stocks^a	
Main Bay	1,553
Natural & Hatchery	3,933
CHINOOK SALMON - HARVEST ESTIMATE (Thousands)	
Natural Stocks	
Copper River	6

^a Potential hatchery contributions to the commercial common property harvest are based on the forecast of total hatchery runs minus preseason estimates of cost recovery and broodstock harvest that will be required by hatchery operators.