

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



*Sam Cotten, Commissioner
Jeff Regnart, Director*



Contact:

Jeremy Botz, Management Biologist
Tommy Sheridan, Management Biologist
Steve Moffitt, Research Biologist
Phone: (907) 424-3212

Prince William Sound Area Office
401 Railroad Avenue, PO Box 669
Cordova, AK 99574-0669
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PRINCE WILLIAM SOUND HERRING ANNOUNCEMENT # 2

All commercial Pacific 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 2015 to assess herring biomass, disease prevalence, age composition, and growth. Starting 27 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 Port Gravina between St. Matthews Bay and Red Head.

Additional broad-scale searches were completed by the M/V Auklet for the Prince William Sound Science Center (PWSSC) in Port Gravina, Port Fidalgo, Galena Bay, around Naked Island, north Montague Island, and around Latouche Island. The M/V Auklet collected detailed acoustics data in Port Fidalgo and Port Gravina.

ADF&G conducted nineteen aerial surveys between 24 March and 4 May 2015. Department surveys documented spawn near Wingham and Kayak islands (24 April), in eastern PWS between St. Matthews Bay and Knowles Head (11, 17, 21–24, and 28 April); just west of Gravina Point in Sheep Bay (24 April); in Landlocked Bay (11 and 13 April); and in Boulder Bay (23 April). Preliminary spawn estimates within PWS are 13.3 mile-days (south of Knowles Head) and 5.5 mile-days (north of Knowles Head), and 5.7 mile-days on Montague Island for a total of 24.5 mile-days of spawn within PWS. This is fewer mile-days of spawn than any year in which commercial fishing occurred since 1973. No fish or spawn were documented in Fairmont Bay, Naked Island, or Knight Island. An additional 9.5 mile-days of spawn were documented on

Kayak Island on 24 April, but are not included in our assessment for PWS. PWSSC flew additional aerial surveys, and those data will be examined and added to the department's data.

Samples for age, sex, size, stock identification, and disease were collected during spring 2015 by ADF&G and PWSSC staff. Samples were collected at Gravina Point, in Landlocked Bay, Rocky Bay, and Stockdale Harbor. No age composition data are available at this time.

Herring disease assessment has been included as part of the annual age, sex, and size assessment completed each spring since 1993 and is currently funded by the Exxon Valdez Trustee Council. Disease sampling in April 2015 found no fish positive for viral hemorrhagic septicemia virus (VHSV) or viral erythrocytic necrosis virus (VENV) in 60 fish examined. Fish tissues were collected by U.S. Geological Survey staff and processed for viral prevalence by staff at the ADF&G Pathology Laboratory in Juneau. Results for the prevalence of *Ichthyophonus hoferi* are not yet available.

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