

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



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2015 Togiak Herring Season Summary

The following is a summary of the 2015 herring sac roe and spawn-on-kelp fisheries in the Togiak District, Bristol Bay. Herring are harvested for sac roe using gillnets and purse seines, while herring spawn on wild kelp is harvested by hand. In July, a food and bait fishery occurs near Dutch Harbor primarily on the Togiak herring stock with the allocation based on the forecasted biomass of Togiak herring. The Dutch Harbor fishery is summarized separately. All data in this summary are preliminary.

STOCK ASSESSMENT

Biomass Estimation

Togiak District aerial surveys began April 16, 2015 after fish were reported in the district by a local pilot on April 15. Department staff observed some fish on April 16 but could not confirm they were herring. A second survey on April 21 did not result in any fish being observed. Another pilot report on April 24 again indicated fish present in the Togiak District. Department staff observed 11,154 tons of herring on the grounds during a survey on April 26. On April 27, 63,382 tons of herring was documented, exceeding the threshold biomass of 35,000 and prompting the opening of the fishery at 8:00 p.m. Peak biomass was documented on May 4 when 115,487 tons of herring and 2.7 miles of spawn were documented. Over 63 miles of spawn and more than 500,000 combined tons of biomass were documented. The last survey was flown on May 18 when nearly 101,000 tons of herring were still on the grounds and spawn still occurring.

AGE COMPOSITION

Herring were sampled for age and sex composition during 2015. Preliminary analysis indicates that approximately 25% of the biomass was age-6 or younger, while 70% of the biomass was between age-7 and age-10 and 5% of the biomass was age-11 or older. A complete analysis and summary will be published in the 2015 Bristol Bay Annual Management Report.

COMMERCIAL FISHERY

Togiak District herring fisheries are managed in accordance with the **BRISTOL BAY HERRING MANAGEMENT PLAN (5 AAC 27.865)**, which specifies a maximum allowable exploitation rate of 20% and allocates the harvestable surplus among all the fisheries harvesting the Togiak herring stock. The 2015 preseason biomass forecast was 163,480 tons. The projected harvest guideline for each fishery was as follows: 1,500 tons herring equivalent or 350,000 lbs. of product for the spawn-on-kelp fishery, 2,184 tons for the Dutch Harbor food and bait fishery, and the remaining 29,012 tons for the sac roe fishery. The management plan further specifies that the department will manage the sac roe fishery so that 70% of the harvest is taken by purse seine (20,309 tons in 2015) and 30% of the harvest is taken by gillnet (8,704 tons in 2015).

The **BRISTOL BAY HERRING MANAGEMENT PLAN** and other regulations direct the department to conduct an orderly, manageable fishery and strive for the highest level of product quality with a minimum of waste. In recent years, the seine fleet has been comprised of processor-organized cooperatives. For the 2015 season, management staff allowed long duration seine openings over a large area of the district and let processors limit harvest for their individual fleets based on processing capacity.

Department staff polled processing companies prior to the 2015 season to assess processing capacity and to inquire about additional concerns or issues. The poll indicated that five companies intended to participate in the 2015 Togiak herring fishery. Two companies indicated they planned to buy both gillnet and purse seine fish and three companies planned to buy only purse seine fish. The processing capacity for 2015 was estimated to be 1,880 tons per day.

Purse Seine

The Togiak purse seine fishery opened at 8:00 p.m. on April 27. The department initially opened the purse seine fishery for 74 hours. Commercial quality fish were available on April 29 when 1,895 tons of herring were harvested by the purse seine fleet. Herring continued to be of marketable quality for the remainder of the purse seine fishery and the department extended the fishery on April 30, May 2, 4 and 6 for 48 hours. The fishery was extended for 24 hours on May 8 and 9 and the final 14-hour extension was made on May 10. Excellent weather prevailed throughout the season and the purse seine fleet steadily harvested the quota at a pace of about 1,500 tons per day with a couple slow days of 555 tons on day 10 and the last day (day 13). The peak harvest of 2,682 tons occurred on the second day. The final harvest of 19,874 tons of herring coupled with an estimated deadloss of 500 tons, brings the total harvest to 20,374 tons. The total harvest exceeded the quota by 65 tons after the estimated deadloss was included. Purse seine participation was documented at 16 vessels, down from 17 in 2014.

Gillnet

The Togiak gillnet fishery opened at 8:00 p.m. April 27 until further notice with no prior test fishing. In 2015, two companies participated in the Togiak sac roe gillnet fishery, a decrease from five in 2014. Fishermen participation was significantly lower than 2014, when 24 vessels participated; only six gillnet vessels were involved in the 2015 fishery. Six gillnet vessels represents the lowest participation in the fishery since its inception in 1967. With only two companies participating in the gillnet fishery, the daily harvest is confidential. Due to the low participation by the gillnet fleet, the department determined that the requirements of the allocation plan were being met as long as the gillnet fleet that was on the grounds was not

restricted by industry. Daily gillnet harvest was low throughout the fishery and there were no indications that the gillnet fleet was constrained by industry. Therefore, the department did not take action to restrain the purse seine fleet. The season officially closed at 12:00 noon on May 11, however, the gillnet fleet stopped fishing on May 9. In general, the daily gillnet harvest was lower than expected and the total harvest was 1,220 tons, representing 14% of the 8,704 ton quota.

Spawn on Kelp

No companies registered to buy herring spawn-on-kelp in 2015, therefore there were no openings and no commercial harvest.

EXPLOITATION

The 2015 Togiak herring fisheries were managed for a maximum exploitation rate of 20% of the preseason biomass estimate. The purse seine harvest was 20,374 tons with a reported average weight of 404 grams and an average roe percentage of 11.2%. The gillnet harvest was 1,220 tons with a reported average weight of 438 grams and an average roe percentage of 12.2%, making the combined harvest 21,594 tons with an average weight of 406 grams and an average roe percentage of 11.3%. The Dutch Harbor food and bait fishery has not occurred at this time. If the Dutch Harbor fishery harvest is equal to the quota of 2,184 tons, then the total harvest for 2015 would be estimated at 23,778 tons. Based on the preseason biomass estimate of 163,480 tons, the 2015 exploitation rate would be approximately 14.5%.

EXVESSEL VALUE

The projected exvessel value of the 2015 Togiak herring fishery is approximately \$1.08 million. This is based on a grounds price estimate of \$50 per ton for seine caught fish and \$50 per ton for gillnet caught fish and does not include any postseason adjustments.