

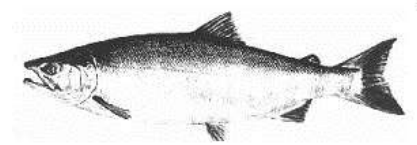
ALASKA DEPARTMENT OF FISH AND GAME

DIVISION OF COMMERCIAL FISHERIES

NEWS RELEASE



Sam Cotten Commissioner
Jeff Regnart, Director



Contact:

Jim Menard, Area Management Biologist
Scott Kent, Assistant Area Management Biologist
Phone: (907) 443-5167
Fax: (907) 443-5893

Nome Area Office
103 East Front Street
Nome, AK 99762
Date Issued: October 12, 2015

2015 KOTZEBUE SOUND SALMON SEASON SUMMARY

COMMERCIAL SALMON FISHERY

In 2015, the Kotzebue Sound District commercial salmon fishery had two buyers, Copper River Seafoods (CRS) and Maniilaq dba Arctic Circle Wild Salmon. Great Pacific Seafoods did not return this year after buying for 11 previous seasons.

In the commercial salmon 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.

The commercial salmon season opened on July 12 and closed by regulation after August 31. However, the major buyer, CRS last purchased salmon on August 21. Maniilaq made two small purchases from a single permit holder to test fish quality in August and then purchased fish from 36 permit holders during the final fishing period on August 23. Several days of poor weather after the August 23 fishing period resulted in Maniilaq deciding they would no longer buy.

The 2015 harvest was the third highest in over 25 years and would have easily finished in the top 10 harvests all-time, but because of capacity concerns CRS restricted daily deliveries for the most of the season to 1,500 pounds per permit holder.

Throughout the season, except for the last opening on August 23, fishing periods started at 10 a.m. The first two openings on July 12 and 13 were 12-hour fishing periods and CRS requested the department reduce the next openings to 8-hour fishing periods. Buying was then suspended for three days, but the following week the fishery was open for six consecutive days for 8-hour fishing periods. During the first five fishing periods of the second week of the fishery CRS placed a 3,000 pound limit on daily deliveries by permit holders and beginning July 24 the limit was reduced to 1,500 pounds daily per permit holder for the remainder of the season. Furthermore, on July 24, CRS requested that fishing periods be reduced to 6 hours daily for the remainder of the season. The last week of July had four fishing periods and during the next three weeks in August there were five fishing periods each week.

No fish processing occurred in Kotzebue and fish were flown out in the round, except for the last opening on August 23 when Maniilaq required fishermen to gill and gut their catch.

CRS required permit holders to sign up if they intended to fish the following fishing period and dependent on effort CRS would notify the department if they did not intend to purchase fish for the following opening.

There were 103 permit holders that sold chum salmon in 2015. 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 August 11 when 72 permit holders fished. This was the greatest number of permit holders to participate during one fishing period since 1994. One difference was that period length in 1994 was 36 hours.

The preliminary commercial harvest figure of 306,174 chum salmon was the twelfth highest in the 54-year history of the fishery. There were 100 chum salmon kept for personal use that were included in the commercial harvest total. Additionally, 5 Chinook salmon, 6 sockeye salmon, 27 pink salmon, 6 coho salmon, 62 Dolly Varden, and 22 sheefish were reported in the catch, but kept for personal use. Likely, additional fish kept for personal use were not reported on fish tickets.

A total of 2,589,104 pounds of chum salmon (average weight 8.6 lbs.) was sold at an average of \$0.33 per pound. A total of 36,824 pounds of chum salmon was purchased that was gilled and gutted and this total included 2,029 pounds of roe from the August 23 fishing period. This year's average price was a drop of nearly 40% from last year's price of \$0.54 per pound. The total exvessel value was \$825,500 and although less than a third of last year's exvessel value it was still the fourth highest in over 20 years. The historical average ex-vessel value of fishery was \$636,950 without adjusting for inflation (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 2015, commercial catch samples were 5% age-0.2 fish, 34% age-0.3 fish, 59% age-0.4 fish and 2% age-0.5 fish. The age composition was similar to previous years.

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 2,535 and was the fourth highest in the 23-year project history.

Kobuk River test fishery catch samples were 3% age-0.2 fish, 39% age-0.3 fish, 54% age-0.4 fish and 4% age-0.5 fish. The age composition was similar to previous years.

No aerial surveys were conducted in 2015.

There was a small die-off of approximately 100 fish comprised of chum salmon and sheefish prior to spawning reported near Shungnak on the Kobuk River in July. Last year a much larger die-off occurred and low dissolved oxygen in the water was suspected to again be the cause because of hot July temperatures.

Testing at the Fish & Game fish pathology lab in Anchorage in 2014 showed the presence of algae in fish gills indicating a possible algae bloom during the warm and sunny weather that 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.

Although no tests were conducted in 2015 the test fish crew in Kiana reported similar hot July temperatures and sluggish fish in the test net during this time.

SUBSISTENCE SALMON FISHERY

No subsistence salmon surveys are scheduled. Subsistence fishermen reported great catches during the season and remarked that 2015 was another good year for chum salmon fishing.

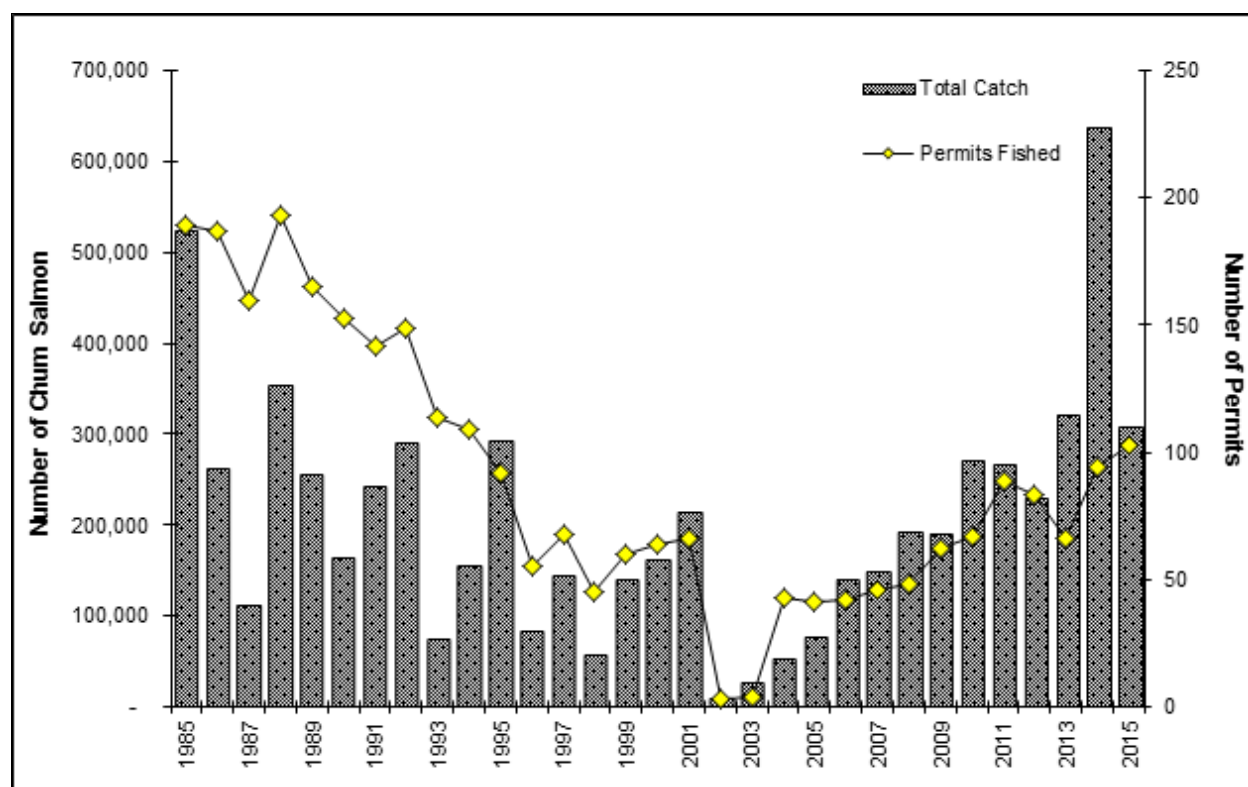


Figure 1. Kotzebue District commercial chum salmon harvest and number of permits fished, 1985-2015.

Table 1.—Kotzebue District chum salmon catch and dollar value, 1962–2015.

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
2014	636,187	94	6,768	\$2,879,016
Average	209,645	109	2,132	\$636,950
2015	306,174	103	2,973	\$825,500

^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.