

ALASKA DEPARTMENT OF FISH AND GAME

DIVISION OF COMMERCIAL FISHERIES

NEWS RELEASE



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UPPER COOK INLET **2016 OUTLOOK FOR COMMERCIAL SALMON FISHING**

SOCKEYE SALMON

A run of approximately 7.1 million sockeye salmon is forecasted to return to Upper Cook Inlet (UCI) in 2016, with a harvest by all user groups of 5.3 million. The commercial fishery harvest in 2016 is expected to be approximately 4.1 million sockeye salmon, which is 1.2 million fish greater than the most recent 10-year average annual commercial sockeye salmon harvest of 2.9 million fish.

The run forecast for the Kenai River is approximately 4.7 million fish, which is 1.0 million fish greater than the 20-year average annual run of 3.7 million. In 2016, the predominant age classes are projected to be age 1.3 (65%), age 1.2 (8%), age 2.2 (5%) and age 2.3 (21%). The 10-year mean absolute percent error (MAPE) for the set of models used for the 2016 Kenai River sockeye salmon forecast is 20%. The department uses the European salmon aging system. One digit is placed to the left of the decimal point to indicate freshwater age (not including the year spent in the gravel during egg incubation and hatching – referred to as the gravel year), and another digit is placed to the right of the decimal point to indicate ocean age. For example, an age 1.3 sockeye salmon spent two years in freshwater and three years rearing in the ocean. A salmon of this age is referred to as a five year old fish, with the total age starting from the year of egg deposition.

The Kasilof River sockeye salmon run forecast is 861,000 fish, which is 13% less than the 20-year average annual run of 987,000. The predominant age classes in the 2016 run forecast are age 1.2 (31%), age 1.3 (25%), age 2.2 (30%), and age 2.3 (10%). The 10-year MAPE for the set of models used for the 2016 Kasilof sockeye salmon run forecast is 17%.

The Susitna River sockeye salmon run forecast is 372,000 fish, which is 12% less than the 10-year average annual run of 421,000 fish. This forecast was derived using mean return per spawner by age class for brood years 2006–2011 and mark–recapture estimates of spawner abundance in 2010–2012. Sonar estimates of spawner abundance were not used because mark–recapture studies

showed the Yentna River sonar project underestimated sockeye salmon escapement, causing estimates of adult returns to also be underestimated. The 3-year MAPE for this forecast method is 21%. The predominant age classes in the 2016 Susitna River sockeye salmon run forecast are age 1.2 (11%) and age 1.3 (67%).

The Fish Creek sockeye salmon run forecast is 110,000 fish, which is 31% greater than the 20-year average annual run of 84,000. The predominant age classes in the 2016 Fish Creek run forecast are age 1.2 (57%) and age 1.3 (29%). The 10-year MAPE for the Fish Creek sockeye salmon run forecast is 62%.

Forecast runs to individual freshwater systems are as follows:

System	Run	Goals ^a
Fish Creek	110,000	20,000–70,000
Kasilof River ^{b,c}	861,000	160,000–340,000
Kenai River ^{b,d}	4,731,000	1,100,000–1,350,000
Susitna River	372,000	
Larson Lake	N/A	15,000–50,000
Chelatna Lake	N/A	20,000–65,000
Judd Lake	N/A	25,000–55,000
Unmonitored Systems ^e	1,039,000	N/A
Total	7,113,000	

^a Goals listed here are as follows: Fish Creek: Sustainable Escapement Goal (SEG); Kasilof River: Biological Escapement Goal (BEG); Kenai River: Inriver; and Susitna River: SEG (weir goals).

^b Kasilof and Kenai rivers escapement goals are now DIDSON-based.

^c Kasilof River optimal escapement goal is 160,000–390,000 sockeye salmon.

^d Kenai River optimal escapement goal is 700,000–1,400,000 sockeye salmon.

^e Unmonitored systems are estimated to be 15% of monitored systems.

2016 FISHING STRATEGY

Northern District Set Gillnet

- Since 2011, management actions in the Northern District directed king salmon set gillnet fishery have included area closures, time restrictions, and/or regularly scheduled fishing period closures in order to reduce the harvest of northern Cook Inlet king salmon. King salmon escapements have improved in the Northern District over the last couple of years. This has resulted in a relaxation of some sport fish restrictions on the Deshka and Little Susitna rivers. Harvest and escapement data over recent years in combination with recent strength of age class relationships derived from data collected at the Deshka and Little Susitna weirs indicate that additional harvest over 2013–2015 levels is sustainable for these systems only. Therefore, the Northern District directed king salmon commercial fishery will start the 2016 season fishing regularly scheduled 12-hour fishing periods. There will be four fishing periods in the 2016 season (in the previous three years, 2013–2015, there were five regular periods per year); those being May 30, and June 6, 13, and 20. In addition, the area from the wood chip dock to the Susitna River will remain closed to commercial king salmon fishing. This area closure is estimated to reduce the overall commercial harvest of king salmon by approximately 50%. Escapement of king salmon into the Deshka River will be closely monitored during the 2016 season. Additional

restrictions or closures to commercial fishing periods will be based upon inseason assessment of king salmon escapement at the Deshka River.

- Beginning Monday, June 27, the entire Northern District set gillnet fishery will be managed per the provisions of 5 AAC 21.358. *Northern District Salmon Management Plan*. This plan provides for two 12-hour weekly fishing periods with a full complement of gear and a normal separation between nets of at least 600 feet.
- Susitna River sockeye salmon remain a stock of yield concern. As a result of this designation, restrictive actions on fisheries that harvest this stock were retained in regulation at the 2014 Alaska Board of Fisheries (board) meeting. According to 5 AAC 21.358. *The Northern District Salmon Management Plan*, the department may reduce the legal complement of gear in the Northern District set gillnet fishery to no more than one net per permit from July 20 through August 6 to conserve Susitna River sockeye salmon. However, in that portion of the General Subdistrict south of the Susitna River, the department may allow the use of no more than two nets per permit after July 30. In 2016, five different fishing periods could be affected by a reduction of gear. All areas in the Northern District will return to a full complement of gear beginning on Monday, August 8.

Central District Fisheries

Upper Subdistrict Set Gillnet Fishery – Overview

The 2016 Kenai River late-run king salmon forecast projects a total run of approximately 30,000 fish. Because the inriver run is expected to exceed 22,500 fish management strategies for the 2016 Upper Subdistrict set gillnet fishery will deviate from the past two seasons and return to management based primarily on the 5 AAC 21.360. *Kenai River Late-Run Sockeye Salmon Management Plan*. Fishing time allowed will be based on inseason assessment of sockeye salmon abundance, while ensuring adequate king salmon escapement relative to the SEG of 15,000–30,000 Kenai River late-run king salmon.

According to the *Kenai River Late-Run Sockeye Salmon Management Plan* (5 AAC 21.360 (b)), the Kenai River late-run sockeye salmon commercial, sport, and personal use fisheries shall be managed to:

- (1) meet an optimum escapement goal (OEG) range of 700,000–1,400,000 late-run sockeye salmon;
- (2) achieve inriver goals as established by the board and measured at the Kenai River sonar counter located at river mile 19; and
- (3) distribute the escapement of sockeye salmon evenly with the OEG range, in proportion to the size of the run.

All three of these management objectives are complementary to each other. Inriver harvest during the season is unknown (although it is estimated for projection purposes); therefore, the inriver goal is the primary inseason management objective. The OEG is a postseason assessment determined after inriver sport and federal subsistence harvest is accounted for. Achievement of the inriver goal leads towards achieving the two objectives of meeting the OEG and distributing the escapement of sockeye salmon evenly within the OEG range, in proportion to the size of the run.

Upper Subdistrict Set Gillnet Fishery – Management

Kasilof Section Prior to July 8

- The Kasilof Section opens on the first regular period on or after June 25, unless the department estimates that 50,000 sockeye salmon are in the Kasilof River prior to that date, at which time the commissioner may open the fishery by emergency order (EO), however, the fishery may not open earlier than June 20. From the beginning of the season through July 7, this fishery will be open for regular 12-hour periods on Mondays and Thursdays and must close for 36 consecutive hours per week, which is to begin between 7:00 p.m. Thursday and 7:00 a.m. Friday. Additionally, the department may allow up to 48 hours of additional fishing time per week (Sunday through Saturday).

Kenai, Kasilof and East Forelands Sections

- The Kenai and East Forelands sections fishing season opens on or after July 8.
- Management of the Kenai, Kasilof, and East Foreland sections (Upper Subdistrict) set gillnet fishery will be based on the projected run size of Kenai River sockeye salmon and passage levels of sockeye salmon in both the Kenai and Kasilof rivers, as well as the abundance of Kenai River late-run king salmon. From July 1–31, if the inriver run of Kenai River late-run king salmon is projected to exceed 22,500 fish, management of the Upper Subdistrict set gillnet fishery is to follow the guidelines based on provisions in 5 AAC 21.360. *Kenai River Late-Run Sockeye Salmon Management Plan*. For the 2016 season, the Kenai River run projection is 4.7 million sockeye salmon. Therefore, the season will be managed following guidelines outlined below for runs greater than 4.6 million fish. The Kenai River sockeye salmon run will be reassessed after July 20 to determine inseason run strength. However, because of a below average Kenai River late-run king salmon forecast, all weekly fishing hours for sockeye salmon runs in the highest tier may not be utilized.
 - a. For runs **greater than 4.6 million Kenai River sockeye salmon**, the department may allow up to 84 hours of additional fishing time per week in the Upper Subdistrict set gillnet fishery and will close the fishery for a 36-hour period per week, which will begin between 7:00 p.m. Thursday and 7:00 a.m. Friday. If the Kenai and East Forelands sections are not fished, the department may limit regular and extra periods in the Kasilof Section to within one-half mile of shore.
- From July 1–31, if the projected inriver run of Kenai River late-run king salmon is less than 22,500 fish, management of the Upper Subdistrict set gillnet fishery will be “paired” to actions taken in the Kenai River late-run king salmon sport fishery. If the sport fishery is restricted to fishing with no bait, then the Upper Subdistrict set gillnet fishery will be managed as described in 5 AAC 21.359. *Kenai River Late-Run King Salmon Management Plan*.

From August 1–15, management of the Upper Subdistrict set gillnet fishery is largely dependent upon the projected final escapement of Kenai River late-run king salmon. If the projected escapement is less than 16,500 fish, the set gillnet fishery closes; if the escapement is projected to be 16,500–22,500 fish, then the set gillnet fishery is restricted to no more than 36 hours of total fishing time in August; if the king salmon escapement is projected to exceed 22,500 fish, then management of the set gillnet fishery falls within the provisions of the *Kenai River Late-Run Sockeye Salmon Management Plan*. The provisions of this plan do not change

in August, except for two additions. First, the set gillnet fishery closes no later than August 15, but from August 11–15, only Monday–Thursday regular 12-hour fishing periods are allowed; and second, the season may close any time after July 31, if during two consecutive fishing periods (defined as a calendar day) the sockeye salmon harvest is less than one-percent of the season total. The one-percent rule now applies separately to the Kasilof Section and the Kenai/East Foreland sections, which means one of the areas could close under the one-percent rule, while the other area remains open.

- From August 11–15, provisions within 5 AAC 31.354. *Cook Inlet Pink Salmon Management Plan* (see specifics on page 5 of this document) allow for up to two additional 12-hour fishing periods during the August 11–15 time frame.

Central District Drift Gillnet Fishery – Overview

The department manages the UCI drift gillnet fleet primarily under the guidance of 5 AAC 21.353. *Central District Drift Gillnet Fishery Management Plan*. The purpose of this management plan is to ensure adequate escapement of salmon into Northern Cook Inlet drainages and to provide the department with management guidelines. To meet these directives, there are two timeframes in July when drift fleet restrictions are implemented to pass fish through the Central District. At the 2014 board meeting, there were substantial changes made to the drift gillnet fishery. Please consult the 2014–2017 Cook Inlet Area Commercial Salmon Fishing Regulations prior to fishing.

Central District Drift Gillnet Fishery – Management

- The drift gillnet fishery opens the third Monday in June or June 19, whichever is later.
- From July 9 through July 15:
 - a. Drift gillnet fishing is restricted for both regular fishing periods to the Expanded Kenai and Expanded Kasilof sections (Figure 1), and Drift Gillnet Area 1 (Figure 2) described below.
 - b. In runs of over 2.3 million Kenai River sockeye salmon, there may be one additional 12-hour period in the Expanded Kenai and Expanded Kasilof sections, and Drift Gillnet Area 1.
 - c. All additional fishing time is allowed only in the Expanded Kenai and Expanded Kasilof sections.
- From July 16 through July 31:
 - a. In runs greater than 4.6 million Kenai River sockeye salmon, fishing during one 12-hour fishing period per week will be restricted to the Expanded Kenai, Expanded Kasilof, and Anchor Point sections (Figure 4). There are no mandatory restrictions on the remaining 12-hour regular fishing period. All additional fishing time outside regular fishing periods is allowed only in one or more of the following: the Expanded Kenai, Expanded Kasilof, and Anchor Point sections.
- From August 1 through August 15:
 - a. Two one-percent rules apply during this time period, the Upper Subdistrict set gillnet one-percent rule and the Central District drift gillnet one-percent rule (see 5 AAC 21.310(b)(2)(C)(iii) and 5 AAC 21.353(e)).

- From August 11–15:
 - a. Provisions within 5 AAC 31.354. *Cook Inlet Pink Salmon Management Plan* (see specifics below) allow for up to two additional 12-hour fishing periods in the regular (narrow) Kenai Section only.
- From August 16 until closed by EO:
 - a. Drift Areas 3 and 4 (Figure 5) are open for regular periods.
 - b. Chinitna Bay may be opened by EO if chum salmon escapement objectives are achieved in Clearwater Creek.

5 AAC 31.354. Cook Inlet Pink Salmon Management Plan: This plan was modified at the 2014 UCI board meeting. Based upon the number of pink salmon that are harvested by Upper Subdistrict set gillnetters from August 6–10, in even years only, a pink salmon fishery may be opened for up to two fishing periods from August 11–15. If opened, the pink salmon fishery is only provided to setnetters in the Upper Subdistrict and to drift gillnetters in the Kenai Section (narrow Kenai corridor). The second fishing period may only be opened if more than 50,000 pink salmon and less than 2,500 coho salmon are harvested by setnetters during the first fishing period. Set gillnetting is no longer limited to more than 600 feet from shore during the pink salmon fishery, but both set and drift gillnets must still use nets with a mesh size no larger than 4¾ inches.

SEASON OPENING DATES

Season opening dates in 2016 for the various fisheries around the inlet are as follows:

- *Northern District King Salmon Fishery:* May 30. As explained earlier in this document, there are four regular Monday fishing periods in the 2016 fishery that occur beginning Monday, May 30, and include June 6, 13, and 20. The area from a point at the wood chip dock to the Susitna River remains closed for the directed king salmon fishery in 2016.
- *Big River Fishery:* June 1 and continuing through June 24, unless the 1,000 king salmon harvest limit is reached prior to that date. Weekly fishing periods are Mondays, Wednesdays, and Friday from 7:00 a.m. to 7:00 p.m.
- *Western Subdistrict Set Gillnet Fishery:* June 16.
- *Drift Gillnet Fishery:* June 20.
- *All remaining set gillnet fisheries, except the Upper Subdistrict:* June 27.
- *Upper Subdistrict Set Gillnet Fishery:* June 27 for the Kasilof Section (that portion south of the Blanchard Line), unless opened earlier by EO (based on an inriver estimate of 50,000 Kasilof River sockeye salmon before the June 25 opener), but will not open before June 20. The Kenai and East Forelands sections (that portion of the Upper Subdistrict north of the Blanchard Line) will open on *Monday, July 11*. All Sections of the Upper Subdistrict will close for the season on or before August 15.

SET NET REGISTRATION AND BUOY STICKERS

All Cook Inlet setnet fishermen are required to register prior to fishing for one of three areas of Cook Inlet: 1) the Upper Subdistrict of the Central District; 2) the Northern District; or, 3) all

remaining areas of Cook Inlet (Greater Cook Inlet). Once registered for one of these three areas, fishermen may fish only in the area for which they are registered for the remainder of the year. No transfers will be permitted. Set gillnet permit holders fishing in the Northern District or the Greater Cook Inlet area can register at ADF&G offices in Soldotna, Homer, or Anchorage or by mail. Forms are available at area offices or on the department's homepage at:

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

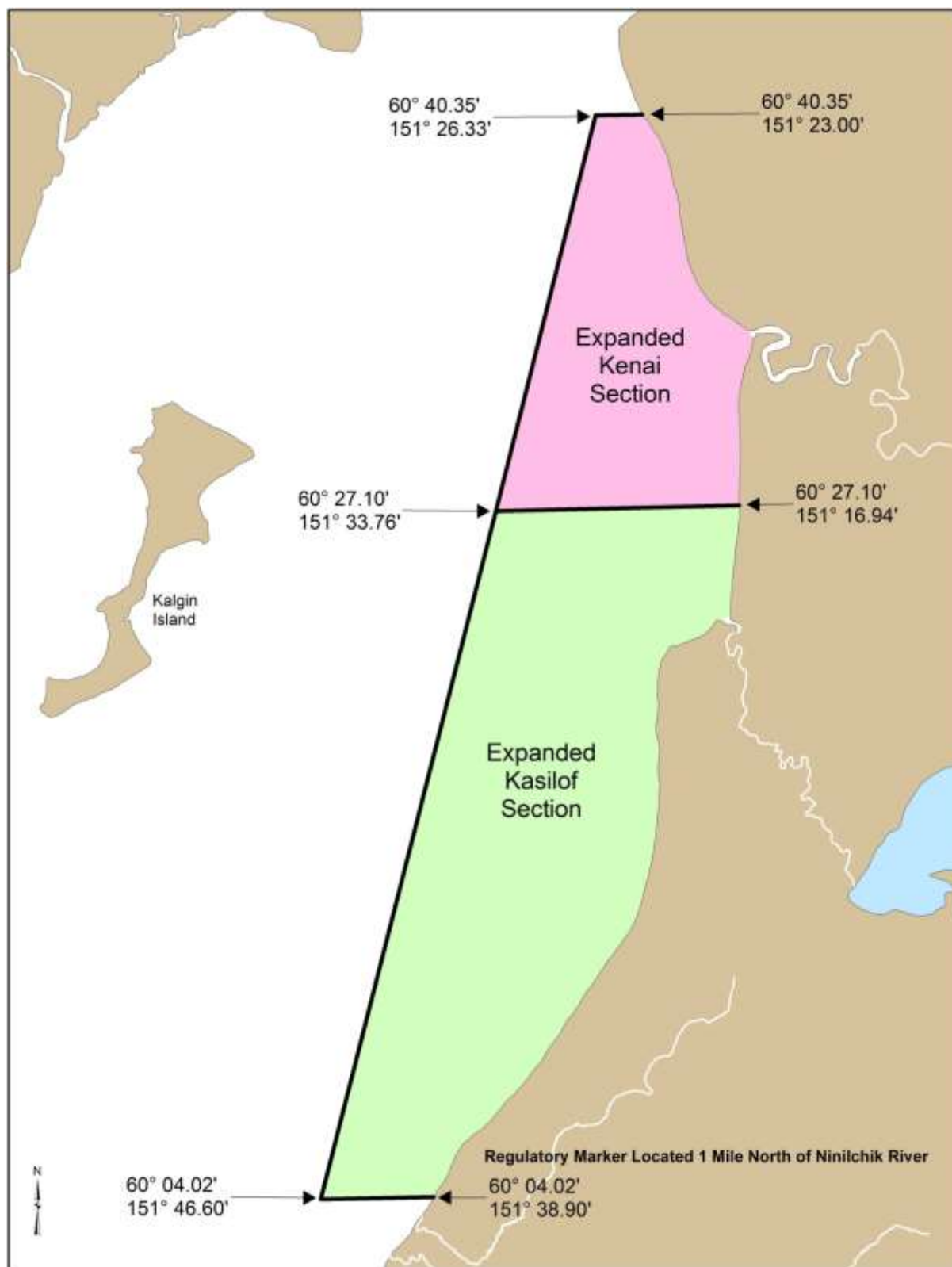
Fishermen wishing to register in person for the Upper Subdistrict must register in the **Soldotna ADF&G office only** and must purchase buoy stickers at the time of registering. Electronic registration with the option to pay for buoy stickers online may be accessed at <http://www.adfg.alaska.gov/uciera/>. Electronic registration is available for all three set gillnet fishing areas in UCI.

GENERAL INFORMATION

The UCI commercial fisheries information line will again be available by calling 262-9611. The most recent EO announcement is always available on the recorded message line and catch, escapement and test fishing information is included whenever possible. The same recording may be accessed at <http://www.adfg.alaska.gov/index.cfm?adfg=commercialbyareauci.main> and clicking on the UCI Commercial Fisheries Information Recording player.

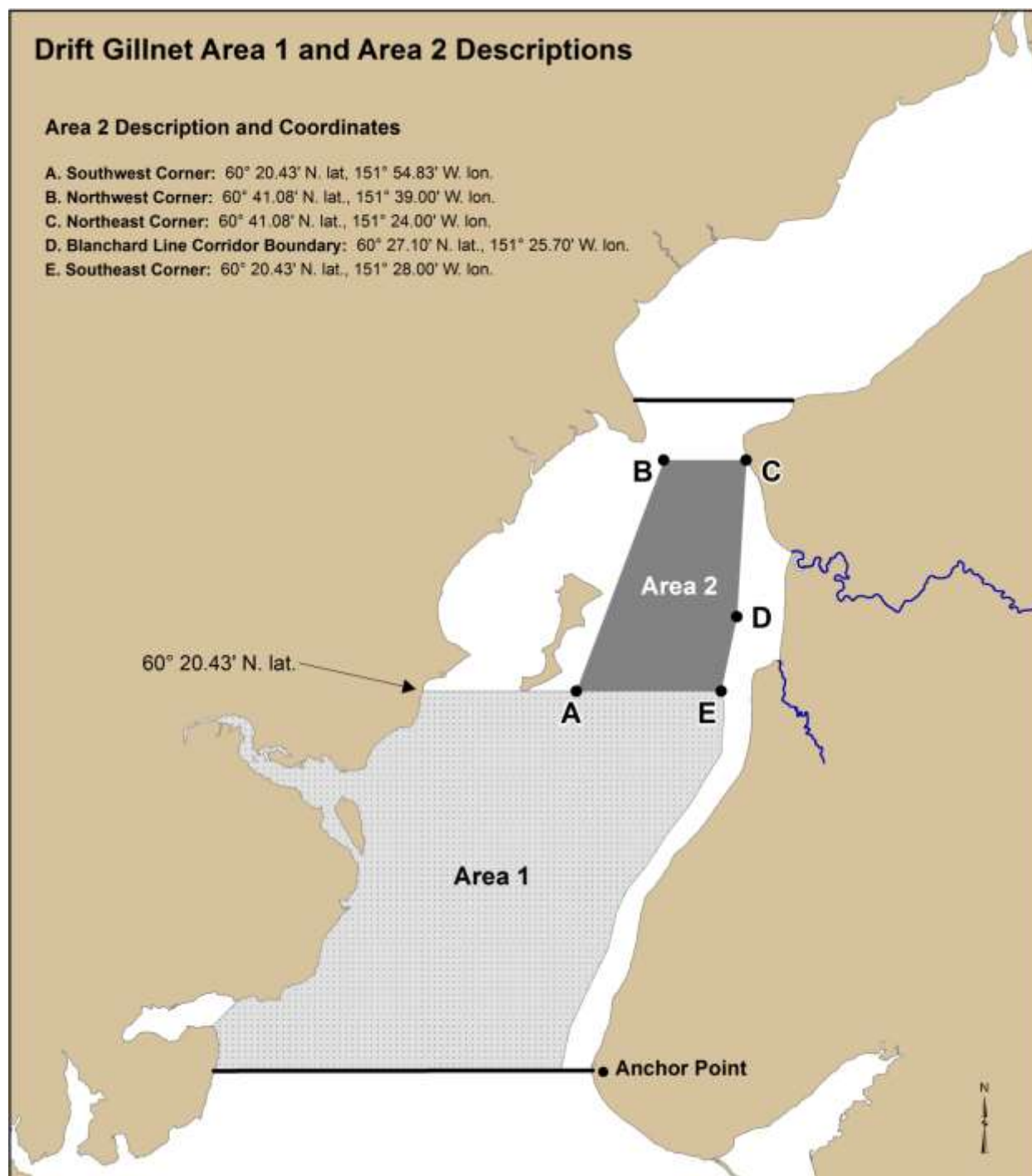
All EO announcements are also faxed or emailed to processors as quickly as possible and posted at <http://www.adfg.alaska.gov/index.cfm?adfg=commercialbyareauci.salmon>. For very general information, we invite you to visit the Commercial Fisheries web page on the Internet at <http://www.adfg.alaska.gov/index.cfm?adfg=fishingCommercial.main>.

If, during the summer, fishermen have information or questions concerning the commercial fishery, the Soldotna Division of Commercial Fisheries staff can be reached by phone at 262-9368, by fax at 262-4709, or by mail at 43961 Kalifornsky Beach Road, Suite B, Soldotna, 99669.



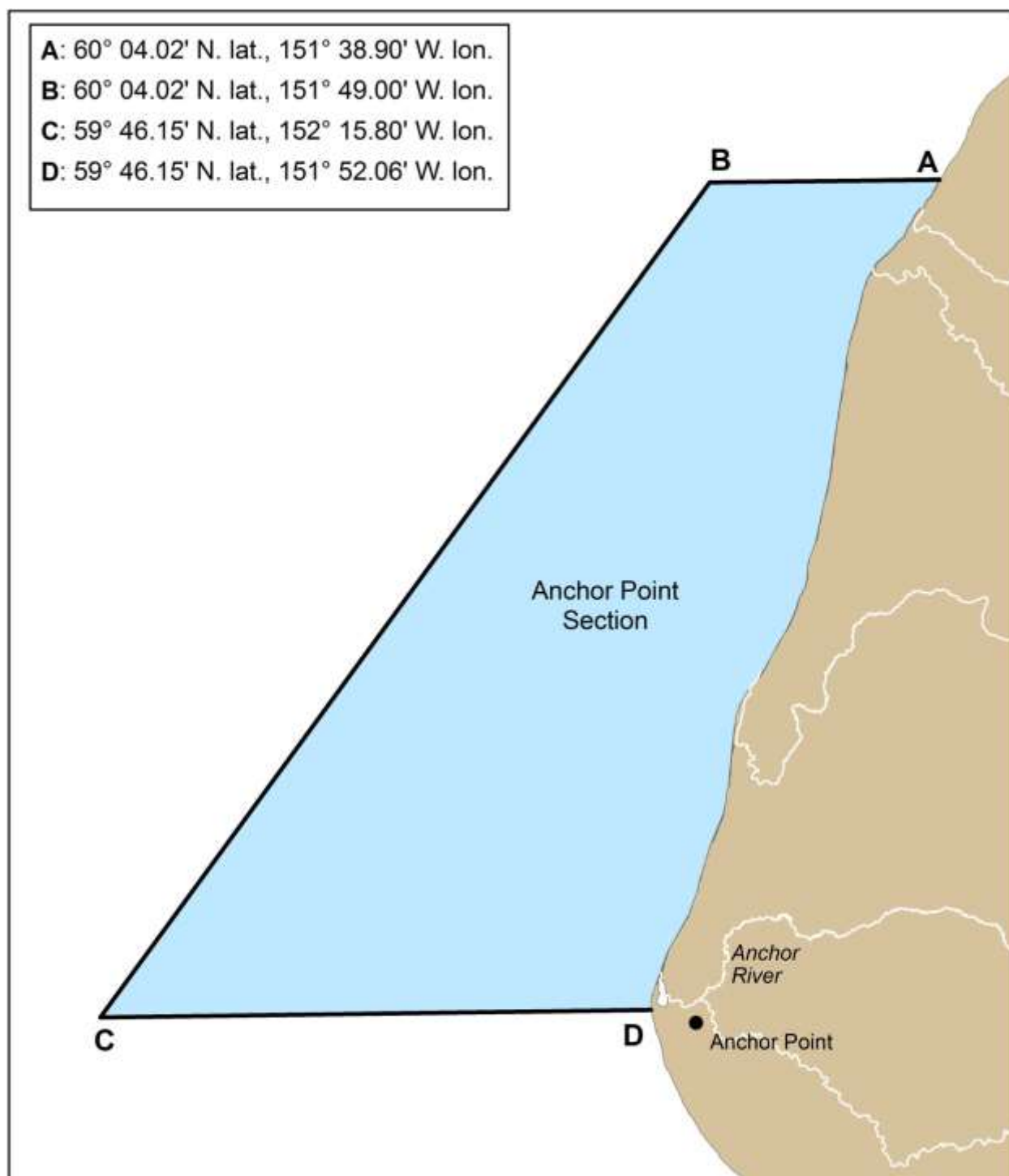
Latitude and Longitude are based on the North American Datum of 1983 (NAD 83), equivalent to the World Geodetic System 1984 (WGS 84).

Figure 1.—Map of the Expanded Kenai and Expanded Kasilof sections with waypoint descriptions.



Latitude and Longitude are based on the North American Datum of 1983 (NAD 83), equivalent to the World Geodetic System 1984 (WGS 84).

Figure 2.—Map of drift gillnet fishing areas one and two.



Latitude and Longitude are based on the North American Datum of 1983 (NAD 83), equivalent to the World Geodetic System 1984 (WGS 84).

Figure 3.—Map of the Anchor Point Section with waypoint descriptions.

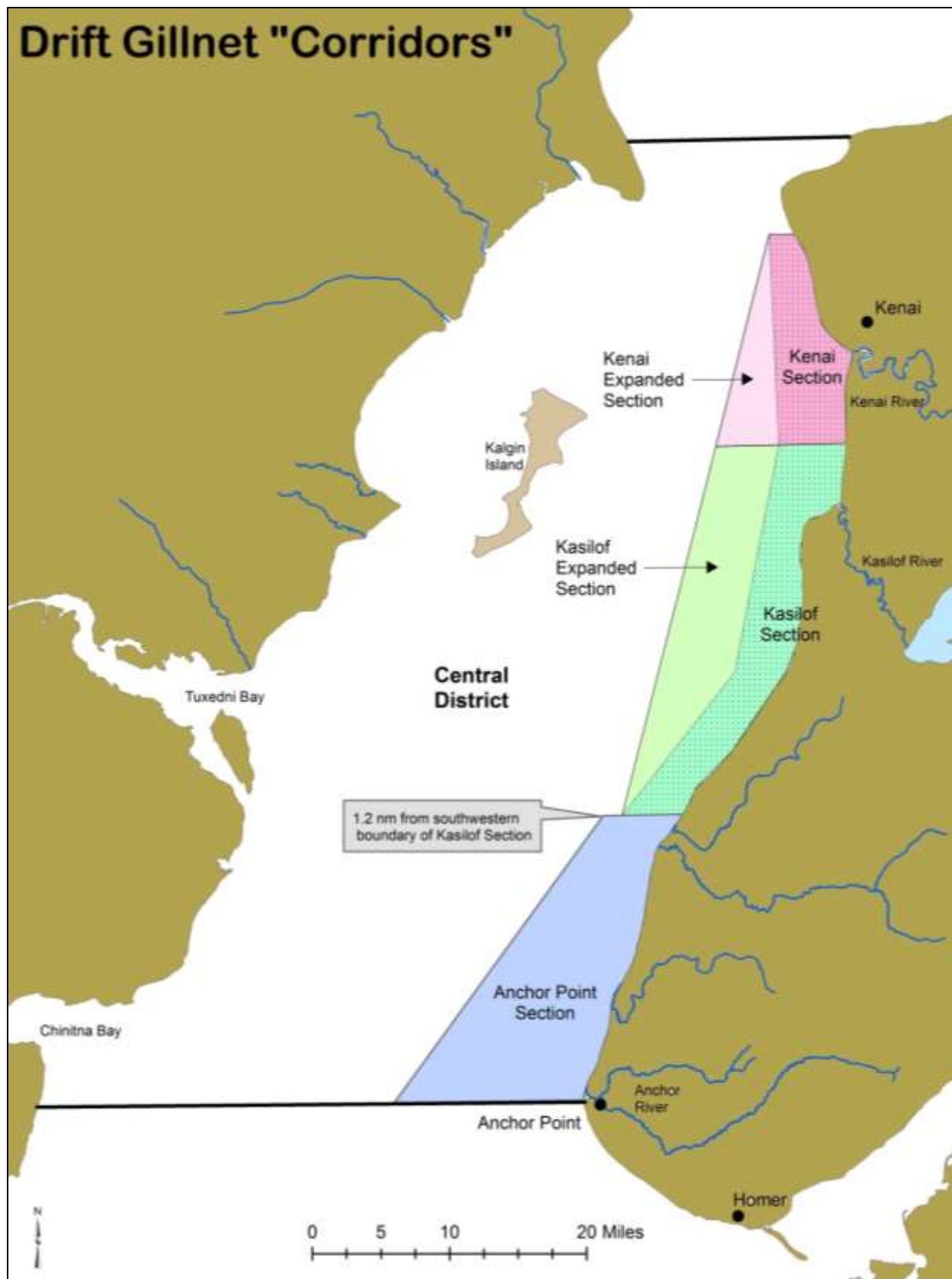
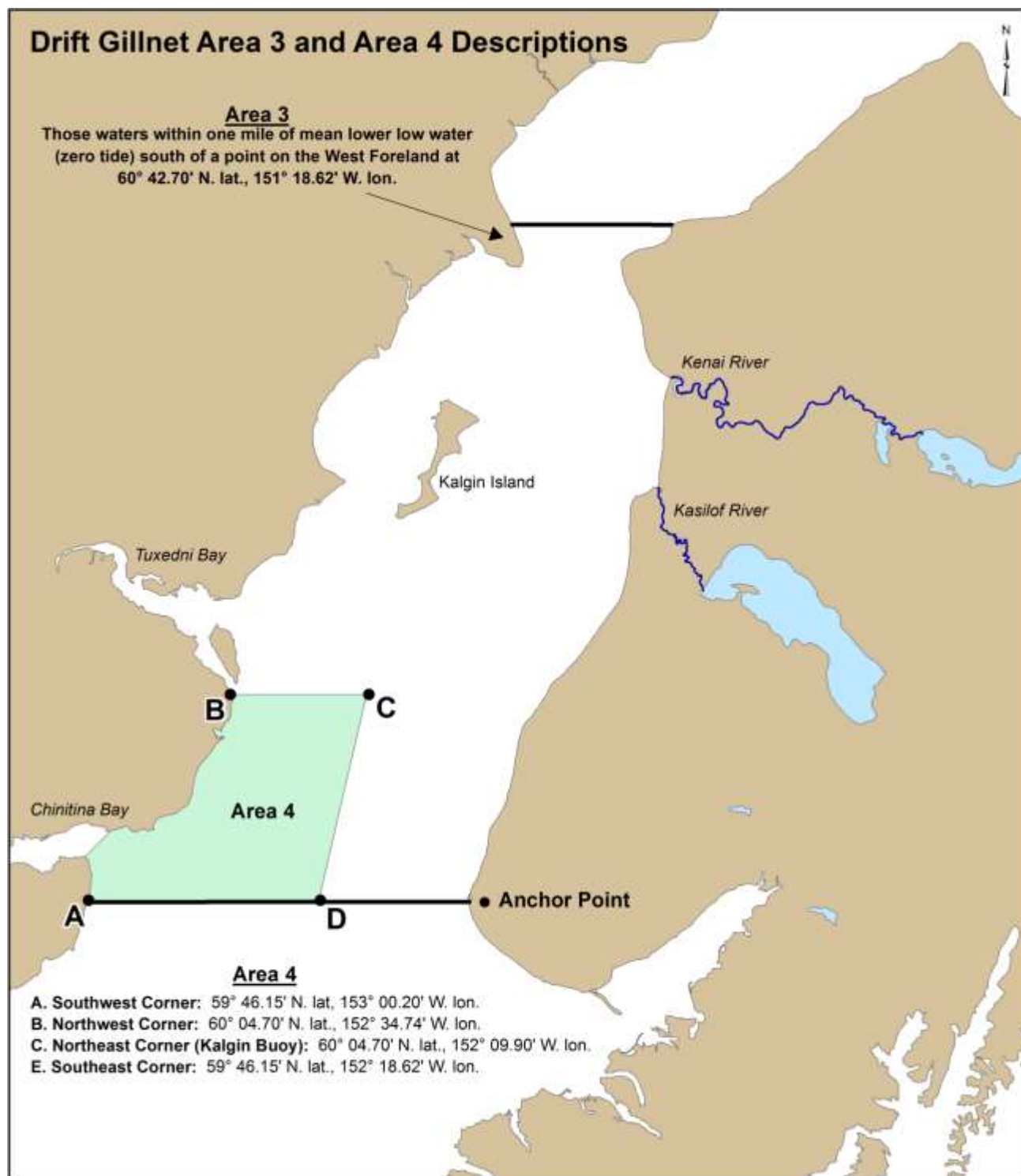


Figure 4.—Map of all drift gillnet “corridors” in Upper Cook Inlet.



Latitude and Longitude are based on the North American Datum of 1983 (NAD 83), equivalent to the World Geodetic System 1984 (WGS 84).

Figure 5.—Map of the drift gillnet areas open beginning August 16.