

ALASKA DEPARTMENT OF FISH AND GAME

DIVISION OF COMMERCIAL FISHERIES

NEWS RELEASE



Sam Cotten, Commissioner
Scott Kelley, Director



Contact:

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

Norton Sound Area Office
Pouch 1148
Nome, AK, 99762
Date Issued: May 27, 2016
Time: 4:45 p.m.

CHINOOK SALMON SUBSISTENCE RESTRICTIONS START JUNE 6

Another early arrival of Chinook salmon is expected this season and the department will need to implement restrictions to subsistence fishing beginning June 6 based on a below average Chinook salmon run forecast for eastern Norton Sound. However, runs are expected to continue to improve from the record low levels of abundance observed as recently as 2013. Consequently, restrictions will be necessary to achieve Chinook salmon escapement needs, although unlike previous years, Chinook salmon runs in 2016 are expected to provide a small amount of harvestable surplus for utilization by subsistence users.

The Alaska Department of Fish and Game held community meetings in the villages of Koyuk, Shaktoolik, and Unalakleet the past few weeks. The primary purpose of these meetings was to inform residents of run outlooks and potential restrictions and obtain feedback from residents on preferred management strategies. The department will be implementing management measures that reflect this feedback specific to each affected community. Although the management approaches differ slightly, all of the strategies adopted should be effective at conserving Chinook salmon for escapement needs. Additionally, the fishing periods and schedules implemented during the month of June will provide an increase in opportunity to target Chinook salmon for subsistence purposes.

Norton Bay Subdistrict

Effective 6:00 p.m. Monday, June 6, all flowing waters draining the Inglutalik and Ungalik Rivers, and all marine waters of the Norton Bay Subdistrict, will be placed on a subsistence gillnet fishing schedule of two 48-hour periods per week. Periods will be from 6:00 p.m. Mondays to 6:00 p.m. Wednesdays, and from 6:00 p.m. Fridays to 6:00 p.m. Sundays. During the Monday to Wednesday period, subsistence users will be restricted to set gillnets with a stretched measure size of 6 inches or less. For the weekend 48-hour openings from Fridays to Saturdays, there will be no restrictions on mesh size. This schedule will remain in place until midnight Sunday evening, July 3. The Koyuk River drainage is not affected by this action and will remain open to subsistence fishing with no restrictions in place. Additionally, the use of beach seines, dipnets, and cast nets is open continuously by regulation in all waters of Norton Bay Subdistrict, but any Chinook salmon incidentally captured in these gear types must be immediately released alive and unharmed.

Shaktoolik & Unalakleet Subdistricts

Effective 6:00 p.m. Monday, June 6, all marine waters and all flowing waters of the Shaktoolik Subdistrict will close to subsistence salmon fishing. For the remainder of the month of June, the Shaktoolik River will remain closed to the use of set gillnets with a stretch mesh measure greater than 4 inches. In the Shaktoolik Subdistrict marine waters, the department will incrementally increase subsistence fishing time throughout the month of June and mesh size restrictions are not anticipated for periods opened by emergency order during this time. For the week of June 6th, there will be one 24-hour fishing period followed by one 36-hour period for the week of June 13. If mid-June Chinook salmon abundance indices and subsistence fisher catch reports are consistent with the forecast, the department plans to authorize two 24-hour periods per week for the final two weeks of June. The department will endeavor to schedule fishing openings in the Shaktoolik Subdistrict during periods of favorable fishing weather.

Effective 6:00 p.m. Monday, June 6, all marine waters and all flowing waters of the Unalakleet River will close to subsistence salmon fishing. For the remainder of the month of June, the Unalakleet River will remain closed to the use of set gillnets with a stretch mesh measure greater than 4 inches. In the Unalakleet Subdistrict marine waters, the department will incrementally increase subsistence fishing time throughout the month of June with periods and mesh size restrictions established by emergency order. From June 6–19, set gillnet mesh size in the marine waters will be restricted to 6 inches or less with one 48-hour period for the week beginning June 6 and two 36-hour periods for the week beginning June 13. If mid-June Chinook salmon abundance indices and subsistence fisher catch reports are consistent with the forecast, the department plans to authorize two periods per week from June 20–July 3 with one 24-hour period with no mesh size restrictions, and one 48-hour period with set gillnets restricted to 6 inches or less.

The department will evaluate early season run timing and abundance of Chinook salmon using ground based escapement indices and fishermen reports from the Shaktoolik and Unalakleet Subdistricts. Inseason assessments of Chinook salmon run abundance may indicate the need for additional conservation measures or that run abundance warrants a relaxation of subsistence fishing restrictions. The department will also consider setting fishing periods allowing the use of beach seines to target other salmon species in freshwater areas. Additionally, dipnets and castnets are now designated legal subsistence gear throughout Norton Sound. However, subsistence fishers will be required to immediately release any Chinook salmon incidentally captured in beach seines, dipnets, or castnets alive and unharmed.

Other Eastern Norton Sound Coastal Waters

Effectively 12:01 a.m. Monday, June 6, all marine waters from the western tip of Cape Denbigh east to Point Dexter and all marine waters from Black Point south to Wood Point, east of St. Michael will close to subsistence salmon fishing through June 30. On July 1, subsistence salmon fishing in these marine waters will revert back to 24 hours a day, 7 days a week with no restrictions. For all waters from Wood Point west to Point Romanof, subsistence salmon fishing is open 7 days a week.