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PRESS RELEASE

For Immediate Release:
July 1, 2016

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2016 Kenai River King Salmon Sport Fishing and Upper Cook Inlet Commercial Fishing Outlook

Sport Fishing: Based on the preseason outlook, the 2016 Kenai River late-run king salmon total run is expected to be approximately 30,000 fish. Expected harvest scenarios in a run this size without fishery restrictions risks not achieving the lower end of the sustainable escapement goal. Therefore, beginning on July 1, the Kenai River sport fishery will be managed conservatively under a provision of no bait, per 5 AAC 75.003.

Kenai River king salmon stocks are recovering from a period of low productivity and have been below average run strength since 2009. The 2016 preseason forecast for late-run Kenai River king salmon is for below average total run of approximately 30,000 fish. This is approximately half of the 1986–2015 average total run of approximately 56,000 fish and is insufficient to provide harvest in an unrestricted sport, commercial, and personal use fishery without jeopardizing attainment of the sustainable escapement goal. Therefore, prohibiting bait in the sport fishery is warranted.

The department is now projecting an inriver run of Kenai River late-run king salmon greater than 22,500. This projection is based on the preseason forecast of 30,000 king salmon and subtracting a combined estimated harvest of 5,900–6,500 Kenai River late-run mainstem origin king salmon in the Upper Subdistrict commercial set gillnet fishery, Central District commercial drift gillnet fishery and Cook Inlet marine sport fishery.

The department's management strategy is to continue to take a precautionary approach to Kenai River late-run king salmon during this period of low productivity until inseason late-run data is available. Taking into account the improved performances of the early-run Kenai River and other king salmon runs around Cook Inlet, the department will closely assess the strength of the late run and act to restore the fishery to standard regulations as soon as projections of escapement indicate the run can sustain additional harvest.

Commercial Fishing: The 2016 Upper Cook Inlet preseason forecast is for a total run of 7.1 million sockeye salmon, with a total run of approximately 4.7 million sockeye salmon to the Kenai River. Based on an inriver run projection greater than 22,500 late-run king salmon, the Upper

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Subdistrict set gillnet fishery will operate under the provisions of 5 AAC 21.365 *Kasilof River Salmon Management Plan* and 5 AAC 21.360 *Kenai River Late-Run Sockeye Salmon Management Plan*. However, the department will manage the Upper Subdistrict set gillnet fishery conservatively based on the below average run of Kenai River late-run king salmon. Utilization of additional hours beyond Monday and Thursday regular 12 hour periods will be predicated upon achieving escapement objectives of both sockeye and king salmon stocks. It is highly unlikely that all of the hours available in the sockeye salmon management plans will be used until inseason escapement estimates project goals will be achieved.