

**ALASKA DEPARTMENT OF FISH AND GAME**

*Sam Cotten, Commissioner*



**DIVISION OF SPORT FISH**

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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**2017 UPPER COPPER RIVER KING SALMON FISHERIES RESTRICTIONS**

Effective May 1, all king salmon sport fisheries in the Upper Copper River drainage **will be closed**, this includes catch-and-release fishing. In addition, in **all flowing waters of the Copper River drainage, only unbaited, single-hook, artificial lures may be used.**

Effective June 1, in the Glennallen Subdistrict subsistence fishery, **a total of only 2 king salmon, taken by fish wheel or dip net, may be retained from the period June 1 through July 15.** Any king salmon over the 2-fish limit must be released immediately and returned unharmed to the water. Additionally, from June 1 through July 15 **fish wheels must be closely attended, while in operation**, in a manner that provides for the immediate release of incidentally taken king salmon.

Effective June 7, the Chitina Subdistrict personal use dip net fishery **will be closed to the retention of king salmon for the remainder of the season.** King salmon incidentally taken must be released immediately and returned to the water unharmed.

The 2017 Copper River king salmon forecast is 29,000 fish. This is the lowest forecast for king salmon on the Copper River and is only 5,000 fish over the drainagewide minimum escapement goal for king salmon. The *Copper River King Salmon Fishery Management Plan* (5 AAC 24.361) directs the department to manage the Copper River fisheries to achieve a sustainable escapement goal in the upper Copper River of 24,000 or more king salmon. Copper River king salmon returns have been below average since 2009 and spawning escapement over the last 5 years (2011-2015) has averaged 24,846 salmon and fell below the minimum escapement goal in 2010, 2014, and 2016. Escapement in 2016 was the lowest recorded, at less than 12,000 king salmon. Below average returns during previous years, past performance of fisheries within the Copper River, anticipated subsistence harvest, incidental take in the commercial fishery, and uncertainty over how returns may recover in the future justify closing the Copper River king salmon sport fisheries for the 2017 season.

The *Copper River Subsistence Salmon Fisheries Management Plans* (5 AAC 01.647), ensures that adequate escapement of salmon in the Copper River system occurs and that subsistence uses, as described in AS 16.05.258 and 5 AAC 99.010, are accommodated. Consistent with this plan, the commercial fisheries of the Copper River District will be conservatively managed to maximize the escapement of king salmon into the Copper River.

The department will monitor the 2017 Copper River king salmon run as it develops. If available indicators of abundance suggest the 2017 run is stronger than forecast, the department will reevaluate these preseason restrictions and, if justified, will relax the appropriate restrictions to provide for additional fishing opportunity.

**END**