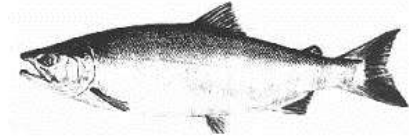


**ALASKA DEPARTMENT OF FISH AND GAME
DIVISION OF COMMERCIAL FISHERIES
NEWS RELEASE**



*Sam Cotten, Commissioner
Scott Kelley, Director*



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Date Issued: April 11, 2017
Time: 11:30 a.m.

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**BRISTOL BAY
2017 OUTLOOK FOR COMMERCIAL
SALMON FISHING**

INTRODUCTION

This document provides general information to fishermen, processors, and the public, concerning the 2017 Bristol Bay salmon season. Included is the general framework for management of each of the five major districts and the 2017 salmon forecast.

During the season, Bristol Bay salmon fishing announcements are broadcast on marine VHF Channel 07A. Current fishing announcements are aired on local radio stations – KAKN and KDLG. As conditions in the fishery change, for the most current information, fishermen should stand by at regular announcement times: 9:00 a.m., 12:00 noon, 3:00 p.m., 6:00 p.m., and 8:00 p.m., unless otherwise stated. Information is also available via telephone; for east-side fisheries (Naknek-Kvichak, Egegik, and Ugashik), dial 246-INFO (4636), for west-side fisheries (Nushagak and Togiak) dial 842-5226. Fishermen are asked to note office hours at the Dillingham fish and game office will be 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. Monday thru Friday from June 1–June 16, and again beginning Monday July 24. From June 17 to July 16 weekday office hours will be the same as above, but weekend office hours will be from 8:00 a.m. until 12:00 noon. In King Salmon the office hours are as follows: June 1 to June 16 and after July 17: 8:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m., and 1:00 p.m. to 4:30 p.m., closed for lunch and weekends. From June 17 to July 16: 8:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. 7 days per week.

Regarding district registration cards: set gillnet permit holders are only required to fill out and return set net registration cards if they fish in the Nushagak District. Drift gillnet permit holders must fill out and return district registration cards prior to commercial fishing in any district in Bristol Bay. District registration cards will be available at the Anchorage, King Salmon, and Dillingham offices beginning May 1. In addition, PDF files of district registration cards are posted on the ADF&G Bristol Bay homepage and can be printed, completed, mailed to the address on the printout, or submitted to Anchorage, King Salmon, or Dillingham office personnel. District registration for drift gillnet permit holders can also be accomplished online at:

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

Fishery updates, announcements, escapements, catches, and Port Moller Test Fishery genetic stock composition estimates will be available at:

<http://www.adfg.alaska.gov/index.cfm?adfg=commercialbyareabristolbay.salmon>

The Port Moller Test Fishery daily catch updates and interpretations of the data will be posted at the following web site once the project becomes operational on June 10:

http://www.bbedc.com/?page_id=1405

Fishermen and processors should be aware of the reporting requirements in **5 AAC 06.377 (b)** that state:

“Each commercial fisherman shall report, on an ADF&G fish ticket, at the time of landing, the number of Chinook and coho salmon taken but not sold.”

Additionally, reporting requirements found in **5 AAC 39.130 (c)(2) and (17)** require that **when fishing as a dual permit operation, both CFEC permit numbers and signatures of the permit holders will be recorded on fish tickets when fish are delivered.** The new version of elandings has been updated to capture the dual permit number and the dual permit holder’s signature on electronic fish tickets.

Alaska Wildlife Troopers – Summer 2017 Outlook – Bristol Bay

Enforcement Priorities:

- A continued strong focus on fishing district lines and open period enforcement, particularly in the Naknek-Kvichak and Egegik districts using all available assets to include aircraft, rotorcraft, large and small enforcement vessels, and undercover fishing vessels.
- Routine boardings of drift gillnet and processor vessels to verify licensing and permitting regulations are met. Fishermen and processors are reminded that at the time of delivery of fish, a fish ticket must be generated and must include the signature of a company representative and the full name and signature of the CFEC permit holder (**BOTH permits if dual operation**). The permit holder must be present at the time of delivery in order to sign the fish ticket. Crew members cannot sign fish tickets for permit holders.
- Increased enforcement of state boating safety laws in cooperation with the US Coast Guard.
- Increased Alaska Wildlife Troopers (AWT) presence in the Ugashik and Togiak Districts.
- Added enforcement and educational outreach regarding potential conflicts between resource users and marine mammals in cooperation with National Marine Fisheries Service.

SALMON OUTLOOK

BAYWIDE

The 2017 Bristol Bay sockeye salmon run is forecasted to be approximately 41.5 million fish. Based on the forecast and using the mid-points of the lower or upper portion of escapement goal ranges, depending on forecasted run size, 27.5 million fish are potentially available for commercial inshore harvest (Table 1). The department manages fisheries based on inseason information regarding abundance. The inseason management approach uses a suite of tools to provide information on

abundance in each district as each run develops and that information is used by the department to determine fishing opportunity.

The commercial salmon season in Bristol Bay opens June 1 by regulation. Fishing in eastside districts and Togiak will be allowed using a weekly schedule that will vary by district. The schedules are in place to balance fishing opportunity with escapement in the early part of the season, particularly for Chinook salmon. As each run develops and sockeye salmon run characteristics become defined within individual districts, fishing time will be adjusted accordingly. In the Nushagak District, management of the Chinook salmon fishery will govern fishing time in the early part of the season, followed by directed sockeye salmon management as abundance dictates.

NAKNEK-KVICHAK DISTRICT

A run of approximately 16.1 million sockeye salmon is expected for the Naknek-Kvichak District in 2017. Based on the forecast, the projected harvest in the Naknek-Kvichak District is approximately 8.3 million sockeye salmon: 3.5 million from the Kvichak River, 1.8 million from the Alagnak River, and 3 million from the Naknek River (Table 1). Sockeye salmon returning to the Naknek-Kvichak District are predicted to be 37% age-1.2, 30% age-1.3, 27% age-2.2, and 7% age-2.3 fish.

The Naknek River escapement goal range is 800,000 to 2.0 million sockeye salmon. The Kvichak River escapement goal range is 2.0 million to 10.0 million sockeye salmon. Escapements will be managed within the lower or upper portions of the escapement goals proportional to the run size based on the preseason forecast and inseason assessment of run size.

Fishing in the Naknek-Kvichak District will be open 4 days per week from 9:00 a.m. Mondays to 9:00 a.m. Fridays, beginning 12:01 a.m. Thursday, June 1 and ending 9:00 a.m. Friday, June 23. Drift gillnet gear will be restricted to fishing in the Naknek Section only, while set gillnet gear will be allowed to fish in the entire Naknek-Kvichak District. From June 23 until July 17 fishing periods will be based on sockeye salmon escapements, abundance in the district, and gear group harvest percentages. District test fishing for inseason management may be conducted periodically depending on run characteristics. As in previous years, some openings could occur on short notice.

A mesh size restriction of 5.5 inches or less will be in effect beginning 12:01 a.m. Thursday, June 1 until 9:00 a.m. Friday, July 21, to help in the conservation of Chinook salmon.

EGEGIK DISTRICT

A run of approximately 10.7 million sockeye salmon is expected for the Egegik River in 2017 (Table 1). The escapement goal range is 800,000 to 2.0 million sockeye. Based on the forecast, the expected surplus potentially available for harvest in the Egegik District is 8.6 million fish. Approximately 41% of the run is expected to be age-2.2 fish, followed by age-1.3 (34%), age-2.3 (17%), and age 1.2 (7%).

The season will start with a 3 day per week schedule that will be in effect through June 16. The primary reason for the 3 day per week schedule is to provide for Chinook salmon escapement. By emergency order, commercial fishing will be allowed in the Egegik District from 9:00 a.m. Monday until 9:00 a.m. Wednesday and from 9:00 a.m. Thursday until 9:00 a.m. Friday. This schedule will begin at 9:00 a.m. Thursday, June 1 and run through 9:00 a.m. Friday, June 16 for drift and set gillnet gear. After June 16, additional fishing time for both gear groups will be scheduled according to sockeye salmon run strength. As in previous years, some openings could occur on short notice. Periods will be adjusted to allocate harvest between drift and set gillnet gear groups. Fishermen are reminded that regulation directs the department to avoid “to the extent practicable”, continuous

fishing with set gillnet gear in the Egegik District, therefore Egegik set gillnet fishermen should expect breaks in fishing.

In addition, subsistence fishing will be permitted in the waters of the Egegik commercial district from 12:01 a.m. Thursday, June 1 until 11:59 p.m. Friday, June 16. The department will consider additional directed subsistence openings, but will wait until inseason to announce the timing of those openings.

UGASHIK DISTRICT

The Ugashik River sockeye salmon run forecast is 5.5 million fish (Table 1). The escapement goal range is 500,000 to 1.4 million sockeye. Based on the forecast, 4.1 million fish are potentially available for harvest in the Ugashik District. Approximately 52% of the run is expected to be age-1.3 fish, 31% age-1.2, 8% age-2.3, and 9% age-2.2 fish.

Beginning 12:01 a.m. Thursday, June 1, commercial fishing in the Ugashik District will be allowed on a 9:00 a.m. Monday to 9:00 a.m. Friday schedule through 9:00 a.m. Friday, June 16. Additional fishing time after June 16 will depend on fishery performance and run strength indicators. As in previous years separate gear openings and adjusting length of commercial periods will be used to address allocation between gear groups in 2017.

A mesh size restriction of 5.5 inches or less will be in effect beginning 12:01 a.m. Thursday, June 1 until 11:59 p.m. Saturday, July 22, to help in the conservation of Chinook salmon.

In addition, subsistence fishing will be permitted in the waters of the Ugashik commercial district from 12:01 a.m. Thursday, June 1 until 11:59 p.m. Thursday, June 22. The department will consider additional directed subsistence openings, but will wait until inseason to announce the timing of those openings.

It is unknown at this time whether the walrus will return to the Cape Greig area. If they do then the department will use the adjusted line from 2016. If they do not return, the district boundaries will revert to those in regulation **5 AAC 06.200(d)**. The first announcement of the 2017 season will clarify which boundary line will be in place for the season.

At the March 2013 meeting the board made changes to when Area T permit holders may fish in the inner portion of the Cinder River Section (river and lagoon) and Inner Port Heiden sections. The board adopted proposals that would allow Area T permit holders to fish within the inner portion of the Cinder River Section and Inner Port Heiden Section during all months when open by regulation. For further information contact ADF&G in Port Moller at 907-375-2716. Area T permit holders who fish the Cinder River and Port Heiden sections and deliver their catch in the Ugashik District are reminded to report the section of catch on the appropriate fish tickets and note that transporting fish from the sections mentioned above to deliver in the Ugashik District is not permitted during July.

NUSHAGAK DISTRICT

Nushagak River Chinook salmon are managed according to the *Nushagak-Mulchatna King Salmon Management Plan (5 AAC 06.361)*. This plan directs the commercial fishery to be managed for an inriver goal of 95,000 Chinook salmon. The department will closely monitor Chinook salmon escapement to evaluate the potential for any directed Chinook salmon openings in 2017.

The Nushagak District sockeye salmon forecast is 8.6 million fish; 2.2 million for escapement and 6.1 million potentially available for harvest in the Nushagak District commercial salmon

fishery (Table 1). The total run by river system is Wood River 5.5 million (escapement goal range 700,000 to 1.8 million), Igushik River 1.25 million (escapement goal range 150,000 to 400,000), and Nushagak River 1.87 million (escapement goal range of 370,000 to 900,000). Approximately 41% of the forecasted run is expected to be age-1.2 sockeye salmon, < 1% age-2.2, 55% age-1.3, and < 1% age-2.3 fish.

Management strategies for 2017 include: 1) directed Chinook salmon openings only if warranted by escapement, 2) Igushik Section sockeye salmon openings are likely to begin in the second week of June and will likely be set gillnet only until escapement or strong harvests dictate otherwise, and 3) begin fishing in the regular district around June 20 with short openings. Openings will be scheduled based on sockeye salmon escapement levels in the Nushagak and Wood rivers. Mesh size will be limited to 5.5 inches or smaller unless Chinook salmon escapement is above expectations. If the Nushagak River sockeye salmon escapement decreases relative to expected escapements the department may first warn and then impose the 4.75 inch mesh restriction in the Nushagak District. Based on changes made by the Board of Fisheries in December 2015 the department would also open the Wood River Special Harvest Area (WRSHA) at this time. Subsequently, if Nushagak River sockeye salmon escapement falls below the expected 370,000 fish curve, then the department may limit fishing to only the WRSHA to protect Nushagak River sockeye salmon. Commercial openings in the district may follow as allowed by escapement levels in the Nushagak River. With the large forecast this year the department will try to provide early season opportunity in the Nushagak District. Contingent upon sockeye and Chinook salmon escapement, the department plans to begin fishing once Wood River sockeye salmon escapement exceeds 30,000 fish.

Permit holders are reminded that there were significant changes made to the WRSHA management plan at the December 2012 Board of Fisheries meeting. The changes require separate gear type openings, and allocation will be done by a ratio of openings (3:1) for the different gear types. Other changes include restrictions regarding where and how set gillnets may be fished and the amount of gear allowed on board set or drift gillnet vessels. Please be sure you understand all regulations before participating in any fishing activities. Additionally the board changed a boundary line above the Muklung River at the 2015 board meeting.

Igushik River sockeye salmon will be managed independently of the Nushagak-Wood River sockeye salmon stocks. Set gillnet fishing will begin in the Igushik Section when there is a market available. Initial openings will be 8 hours per day and additional time will be added if large harvests or escapement information indicate more time is warranted. Drift gillnet openings in the Igushik Section will be added as needed to control sockeye salmon escapement. Igushik River sockeye salmon returns can be quite variable relative to forecasted run strength. Management will incorporate a readiness to respond with increasing early set gillnet openings, and an attempt to maintain the 6% sockeye harvest allocated to the Igushik Section set gillnet group by only adding drift gillnet openings as needed.

The department will switch to coho salmon management around July 23, when sockeye salmon harvest decreases. Fishery performance and run strength indicators will be used to make management decisions regarding pink and coho salmon fishing opportunity.

District test fishing for inseason management may be conducted periodically depending on run characteristics. Permit holders interested in test fishing in the Nushagak District should contact Tim Sands in Dillingham at (907) 842-5227.

TOGIAC DISTRICT

The 2017 total run of Togiak River sockeye salmon is forecast at 660,000 fish. Based on the forecast, approximately 480,000 sockeye salmon will potentially be available for commercial harvest. The escapement goal range is 120,000 to 270,000 sockeye. Approximately 18% of the run is expected to be age 1.2, 3% of the run is expected to be age 2.2, 74% is expected to be age 1.3 and 3% is expected to be age 2.3. Unlike other fishing districts in Bristol Bay that require emergency orders to announce fishing periods, Togiak District follows a regular weekly schedule that allows fishing in: Togiak Bay four days per week, fishing in Kulukak Section two and a half days per week, and fishing in Matogak, Osviak, and Cape Peirce Sections five days per week. Following the Togiak District Salmon Management Plan, permit holders are restricted from fishing in the Togiak District until July 27 if they have fished in any other district in Bristol Bay, and conversely, restricts permit holders from fishing in any other district until July 27 if they have fished in the Togiak District. A 2015 Board of Fisheries action now requires vessel transfers to be restricted in Togiak District similarly to the restriction of permit transfers. Other recent regulation changes prevent drift gillnet fishing effort near the Togiak River mouth through July 15, and restrict mesh size to 5.5 inches or smaller between June 15 and July 15 for the conservation of Chinook salmon.

Chinook salmon run strength in the Togiak River has been considered below average for several years. Anticipating another poor Chinook salmon run, permit holders can expect emergency orders to reduce the weekly fishing schedule in the last two weeks of June and a mesh size restriction through all of July.

Harvest of coho and pink salmon will be dependent on market presence. If a market for coho salmon is present, a conservative harvest strategy will be utilized due to the lack of information about the returning coho salmon run.

Table 1.-Forecast of total run, escapement and harvest of sockeye salmon returning to Bristol Bay River systems in 2017.

Millions of Sockeye Salmon							
DISTRICT River	Total Run Forecast by Age Class				Total	Escapement	Inshore Harvest ^a
	1.2	2.2	1.3	2.3			
NAKNEK-KVICHAK							
Kvichak	2.42	2.92	2.00	0.42	7.76	4.00	3.47
Alagnak	1.43	0.81	1.61	0.20	4.04	2.09 ^b	1.81
Naknek	2.08	0.60	1.16	0.44	4.27	1.10	3.01
Total	5.92	4.33	4.77	1.05	16.07	7.19	8.29
EGEGIK	0.77	4.38	3.63	1.87	10.65	1.70	8.56
UGASHIK	1.69	0.45	2.86	0.47	5.46	1.18	4.09
NUSHAGAK							
Wood	2.97	0.15	2.33	0.05	5.50	1.53	3.77
Igushik	0.34	0.01	0.89	0.02	1.25	0.21	0.99
Nushagak	0.25	0.00	1.52	0.02	1.87	0.50	1.30
Total	3.55	0.16	4.74	0.09	8.62	2.24	6.06
TOGIAC	0.12	0.02	0.49	0.02	0.66	0.16	0.48
BRISTOL BAY	12.05	9.35	16.50	3.50	41.47	12.46	27.47

^a The projected harvest accounts for the inshore run of Bristol Bay sockeye salmon, excluding harvest in the South Peninsula commercial salmon fisheries. The South Peninsula harvest has averaged 3.7% of the total Bristol Bay sockeye production during the last five years and is forecasted to be 1.53 million in 2017.

^b The escapement to the Alagnak was estimated based on exploiting the Alagnak stock at the same level as the Kvichak River stock.