

ALASKA DEPARTMENT OF FISH AND GAME

DIVISION OF COMMERCIAL FISHERIES

NEWS RELEASE



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2018 TOGIAC HERRING OUTLOOK

The 2018 Togiak District herring biomass is forecast to be 136,756 tons, very similar to the recent 10-year average spawning biomass. This forecast is based on an age-structured analysis (ASA) model that has been used since 1993, except for 2017. Herring ages 4–6 are expected to comprise 15% of the projected biomass, ages 7–10 are expected to make up 51% while the remaining 34% will be age 11+ fish.

The commercial fishery and spawn timing is largely related to water temperatures experienced by herring on the spawning grounds. Additional factors related to timing include sea surface temperature and sea ice trends across the southeastern Bering Sea in the weeks prior to spawning. We track the average sea surface temperature and Bering Sea ice coverage in February and March, as we consider these variables a useful index of timing for maturing herring ultimately bound for spawning grounds in and around the Togiak District. Currently sea surface temperatures are much higher than we would expect at this time of year and the region of the Bering Sea that we believe has predictive power is ice free. Currently these conditions are so far from normal, we have little confidence in our ability to accurately forecast timing this year. Ice and sea surface temperature conditions are most similar to 2016. The department uses a sea surface temperature model (SST) based on temperatures near Unalaska to predict Togiak herring run timing. Based on this model the fishery could commence as early as the third week of April.

The Bristol Bay Herring Management Plan (**5 AAC 27.865**) sets a maximum 20% exploitation rate for the Togiak District stock. Based on the forecast of 136,756 tons, 27,351 tons of herring will be available for harvest in 2018. Harvest allocation, in accordance with the management plan will be:

Fishery	Harvest Allocation
Spawn-on-Kelp	1,500 tons
Dutch Harbor Food and Bait	1,810 tons
Togiak Sac Roe	24,042 tons
Purse Seine (70%)	16,829 tons
Gillnet (30%)	7,212 tons

SAC ROE FISHERY

The management strategy for the Togiak herring fishery is designed to provide for maximum sustained yield. In 2018, sac roe fisheries will again be managed to maximize product quality through long openings which allow permit holders to make smaller sets and harvest the highest quality fish. Long openings also allow processors to have flexible control of harvest volume so that holding time between harvest and processing is optimal. Based on a preseason poll, processing capacity is expected to be approximately 2,200 tons per day. The preseason poll also indicates that 4 processors will participate in the Togiak sac roe herring fishery with a fleet size of 3 gillnet and 19 purse seine vessels. For the last decade, the department has opened the herring fishery as soon as the threshold biomass of 35,000 tons has been documented and will use this strategy again in 2018. This strategy allows individual companies to maximize their processing capacity and decide what quality fish is suitable for their individual market.

The department has secured funding for the 2018 herring season sufficient to fly aerial surveys and process herring for age, sex, and length samples. This will allow staff to resume the use of the ASA model for forecasting herring biomass.

Purse Seine

For at least the last decade, the seine fishery has operated as individual processor-controlled fleets. Indications are that this will be the case again in 2018 and therefore, fishing time and area will be very liberal. This should allow purse seine vessels to locate high quality herring and fill their company's daily needs. This approach should result in fresher, higher quality roe, thereby maximizing product quality and value. The department will not be coordinating any test fishing efforts. As always, the department will work with processors that want to make test sets to monitor roe quality prior to the threshold biomass being documented. Based on a preseason poll, there are 19 purse seine vessels expected to participate in the 2018 Togiak sac roe herring fishery.

Gillnet

Management of the gillnet fishery will be similar to past years. Ample fishing time and area will be allowed in an effort to take as much gillnet herring as possible. At the December 2015 Alaska Board of Fisheries meeting the board removed language from the Togiak herring management plan that tied purse seine and gillnet harvest together for the first 50% of the quota. With that language removed each gear type will be able to fish freely until their respective quotas are harvested. In 2018, the department will primarily focus the gillnet fleet in the area east of Right Hand Point. The department will consider opening areas west of Right Hand Point to the gillnet fleet if weather conditions are unfavorable in the eastern section. As in past years, the plan is to open the gillnet area to fishing when threshold biomass is documented. Processors and fishermen may organize test fishing to monitor product quality once the area is open to determine when to begin fishing for production. Until it is determined that commercial quality fish are present, participants should test cautiously with a small portion of gear to reduce waste. Based on a preseason poll, there are 3 gillnet vessels expected to participate in the 2018 Togiak sac roe herring fishery.

ADF&G OPERATIONS 2018

Beginning in mid-April, current fishery information will be available by calling the telephone recorder in Dillingham at (907) 842-5226. Recordings will be updated regularly throughout the season as information becomes available. The department will conduct aerial surveys of Togiak District beginning in mid-April, depending on weather conditions. The department will monitor marine VHF channel 7 from Dillingham and be available at the phone number listed at the top of this document. Fishing announcements and regular fishery updates will be communicated directly to each processor, published on the web, and distributed by fax and email. The harvest will be sampled from Naknek shore plants. The department will seek to coordinate directly with plant managers as the season progresses to meet our sampling needs.

Visit <http://www.adfg.alaska.gov/index.cfm?adfg=cfnews.main> to subscribe to herring fax and/or email updates and announcements. Harvest and fishery opening information will also be available at the Commercial Fisheries website at:

http://www.adfg.alaska.gov/index.cfm?adfg=commercialbyareabristolbay.herring_announcements