

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



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2018 PRINCE WILLIAM SOUND SALMON SEASON SUMMARY

The following is an overview of the 2018 Prince William Sound (PWS) Area commercial salmon season. Please note that numbers in the narrative are rounded for simplicity and all data are preliminary.

The 2018 PWS Area commercial salmon harvest was 29.19 million fish (Table 1). Harvest was composed of 8,100 Chinook, 1.30 million sockeye, 509,000 coho, 23.94 million pink, and 3.44 million chum salmon. The 2018 harvest included 24.90 million (85%) commercial common property fishery (CCPF), and 4.29 million (15%) hatchery cost recovery and broodstock fish.

The estimated value of the combined commercial salmon harvest, including hatchery sales, was approximately \$92.99 million. During the 2018 season, 509 drift gillnet, 31 set gillnet, and 245 purse seine permit holders fished in at least one fishing period. Drift gillnet exvessel harvest value was an estimated \$35.83 million (average permit earnings of \$70,400); set gillnet exvessel harvest value was an estimated \$2.41 million (average permit earnings at \$77,700); and purse seine exvessel harvest value was an estimated \$38.32 million (average permit earnings at \$156,000). Revenue generated for hatchery operations was approximately \$15.47 million.

GILLNET FISHERIES

COPPER RIVER DISTRICT

The 2018 preseason commercial harvest forecast for the Copper River District was 13,000 Chinook, 942,000 sockeye, and 226,000 coho salmon. Gulkana Hatchery was projected to contribute 71,000 sockeye salmon to the CCPF harvest. A conservative management strategy was implemented due to an exceptionally weak sockeye salmon run. The district was open for three 12-hour fishing periods in May with an average harvest of 8,660 sockeye salmon per period. This level of harvest was 80% below semi-weekly harvest projections for this time period. With weak early-season harvest and Miles Lake sonar passage well behind the management objective, the commercial fishery was shut down for six consecutive weeks. Even with the commercial fishery closed, the Miles Lake sonar count did not climb above the minimum management objective until early July. Copper River Delta sockeye salmon escapement indices were below objectives through early July and only within the lower end of

the target range for the remainder of the season. Miles Lake sonar counts supported commercial fishing starting July 9, but low delta sockeye salmon escapement only supported a once-a-week fishing schedule through the start of coho salmon season in mid-August. Total fishing time through mid-August (96 hours fished) was 87% below the recent 10-year (2008-2017) average (750 hours fished). The Copper River sockeye salmon harvest of 44,400 fish was 97% less than the recent 10-year harvest average of 1.29 million sockeye salmon and the second lowest harvest in the last 100 years. The average sockeye salmon weight of 5.1 pounds per fish was the second smallest on record. The number of wild sockeye salmon in the Copper River District CCPF harvest was 38,300 fish (87%) while Gulkana Hatchery contribution to the sockeye salmon commercial harvest was 5,900 fish (13%). Over 99% of CCPF harvest of 7,200 Chinook salmon occurred in the first three fishing periods of the season. Season total harvest was the lowest since statehood. The season total coho salmon commercial harvest of 302,000 fish was well above the recent 10-year harvest average of 225,000 coho salmon. The 2018 preliminary sonar inriver estimate was 701,577 salmon and was within the inriver goal range of 644,000–1.03 million salmon. Spawning escapement to Copper River Delta index systems based on aerial survey peak counts was 58,500 sockeye salmon, within the sustainable escapement goal (SEG) range of 55,000–130,000 fish. Copper River Delta coho salmon spawning escapement monitoring is ongoing, but peak escapement counts are within the SEG range of 32,000–67,000 fish. Preliminary estimates of inriver Chinook salmon abundance are not available at this time.

BERING RIVER DISTRICT

The recent 10-year average CCPF harvests for the Bering River District are 3,000 sockeye and 59,000 coho salmon. There was no sockeye salmon directed commercial fishery in the Bering River District in 2018. The coho salmon commercial harvest of 120,000 was double the previous 10-year harvest average. Commercial fishing effort in the coho salmon fishery was high due in part to the poor sockeye salmon fishery. The aerial escapement index of 14,600 sockeye salmon was below the SEG range of 15,000–33,000 fish. Bering River District coho salmon spawning escapement monitoring is ongoing, but peak escapement counts are within the SEG range of 13,000–33,000 fish.

COGHILL DISTRICT

Prince William Sound Aquaculture Corporation (PWSAC) forecast a 2018 run of 3.12 million chum and 87,000 coho salmon to Wally Noerenberg Hatchery (WNH) and required 656,000 (21%) chum and 2,700 (3%) coho salmon for cost recovery and broodstock. The CCPF drift gillnet harvest of chum salmon in the Coghill District was 1.80 million fish. The proportion of wild chum salmon in the Coghill District CCPF harvest was 2%. PWSAC harvested 456,000 chum salmon for cost recovery and broodstock. The total chum salmon return to WNH was 2.39 million fish and was 23% below forecast. The CCPF drift gillnet harvest of sockeye salmon in the Coghill District was 187,000 fish, 29% above the recent 10-year average (2008–2017). The proportion of wild sockeye salmon in this Coghill District CCPF harvest was 54%. Pink salmon CCPF drift gillnet harvest in the Coghill District was 283,000 fish, 25% of the recent 10-year average. The proportion of wild pink salmon in the Coghill District CCPF harvest was 32%. The CCPF drift gillnet harvest of coho salmon in the Coghill District was 4,240 fish, 95% below forecast.

The 2018 Coghill Lake sockeye salmon total run forecast was 183,000 fish. The Coghill River weir passed 30,954 sockeye salmon, which is within the SEG range of 20,000–60,000 fish. The

weir washed out during two separate flood events, resulting in no passage estimates for the periods of June 17–29 and July 9–27. The historical peak passage period was enumerated, but passage during the time period without weir coverage likely represents enough fish to place actual escapement near the upper end of the goal.

ESHAMY DISTRICT

PWSAC forecast a run of 763,000 Main Bay Hatchery enhanced sockeye salmon in 2018. The CCPF harvest of sockeye salmon in the Eshamy District was 1.0 million fish, 31% above the forecast. The proportion of wild sockeye salmon in the Eshamy District CCPF harvest was 9% (88,800 fish). PWSAC utilized approximately 10,200 sockeye salmon for broodstock and culled 2,500 jack sockeye salmon. The CCPF harvest of chum salmon was 139,000 fish. The proportion of wild chum salmon in the Eshamy District CCPF harvest was 9%. Pink salmon CCPF harvest in the Eshamy District was 334,000 fish. The proportion of wild pink salmon in the Eshamy District CCPF harvest was 63%.

UNAKWIK DISTRICT

Unakwik District CCPF drift gillnet harvest was 3,370 sockeye salmon, which was more than double the 10-year average of 1,500 sockeye salmon.

PURSE SEINE FISHERIES

CHUM SALMON

The 2018 chum salmon total run forecast was 3.45 million fish, with 3.06 million fish (89%) projected to be of PWSAC origin and a wild chum salmon CCPF forecast of 391,000 fish. Of these, 450,000 chum salmon were expected to be harvested at Armin F. Koernig Hatchery (AFK) and 150,000 were expected to be harvested at Port Chalmers by the purse seine fleet. The purse seine gear group had exclusive access to the Port Chalmers Subdistrict in 2018 under the *Prince William Sound Management and Salmon Enhancement Allocation Plan*.

Total commercial chum salmon harvest in PWS was 3.44 million fish, including 456,000 fish for WNH broodstock and cost recovery. The purse seine CCPF harvest of 1.04 million chum salmon was above the recent 10-year harvest average of 691,000 chum salmon. Purse seine chum salmon harvest in PWS was predominantly from the Southwestern, Montague, and Eastern districts. Chum salmon commercial harvest in the Southwestern District was 351,000 fish, of which 108,000 (31%) were of WNH origin. Montague District chum salmon commercial harvest was 440,000 fish, of which 345,000 (78%) were of Port Chalmers origin. Eastern District chum salmon commercial harvest was 195,000 fish, of which 176,000 (90%) were of wild stock origin.

PINK SALMON

The 2018 pink salmon total run forecast for PWS was 34.35 million fish, of which 28.31 million were estimated to be available for CCPF harvest. This estimate included 16.93 million Valdez Fisheries Development Association (VFDA) enhanced fish, 15.40 million PWSAC enhanced fish, and a CCPF forecast of 2.02 million wild fish. Approximately 3.03 million (18%) of the projected 16.93 million pink salmon run to VFDA's Solomon Gulch Hatchery were needed for cost recovery and broodstock leaving 13.90 million for CCPF. Approximately 3.01 million (20%) of the projected 15.40 million pink salmon run to the PWSAC hatcheries were needed for cost

recovery and broodstock. The remaining 12.39 million PWSAC fish expected to be available for CCPF harvest.

The CCPF harvest of 20.10 million pink salmon was 14.26 million less than the 5-year even-year average, and 29% below the 28.31 million CCPF preseason forecast. Total pink salmon harvest was 23.93 million fish, including 3.83 million fish for hatchery cost recovery, broodstock, and raceway sales (2.25 million for PWSAC and 1.58 million for VFDA). Pink salmon otolith contributions estimate CCPF harvest contributions of 9.9 million Solomon Gulch Hatchery fish, 9.03 million PWSAC fish, and 5 million wild fish. The VFDA pink salmon run was 42% (7.03 million) below the preseason forecast of 16.93 million fish. The PWSAC pink salmon run was 42% (6.37 million) below the preseason forecast of 15.40 million fish. The wild pink salmon CCPF harvest of 5 million fish was the second largest even year harvest since 1998. The number of active permits fished in the Prince William Sound purse seine fishery was the highest number since 1991 at 245 permits.

Inseason pink salmon escapement estimates were below thresholds in most districts during the early part of the 2018 season but developed quickly mid-season and escapements were met in most districts. This allowed for expanded time and area for fishing effort targeting surplus wild pink salmon. The area-under-the-curve estimate of pink salmon escapement is not yet available, but considering inseason escapement indices were above projected counts, overall escapements were likely within or above the even-year SEG ranges for all districts.

COHO SALMON

The VFDA coho salmon run was forecast to be 85,000 fish. Total CCPF harvest of coho salmon in PWS (excluding Copper River and Bering River districts) was 78,800 fish.

Table 1.–Preliminary Area E salmon harvest, 2018.

District	Chinook	Sockeye	Coho	Pink	Chum	Total
Bering River	5	32	120,407	3	0	120,447
Copper River	7,178	44,366	302,071	10,479	3,148	367,242
Eastern	45	4,930	23,565	10,303,769	195,479	10,527,788
Northern	4	2,641	3,366	2,613,756	8,276	2,628,043
Coghill	476	189,435	10,683	981,573	1,807,386	2,989,553
Northwestern	5	4,171	1,022	180,428	7,433	193,059
Eshamy	140	1,000,607	4,000	333,666	139,244	1,477,657
Southwestern	88	47,039	41,709	4,878,879	351,347	5,319,062
Montague	155	4,984	1,527	353,244	440,312	800,222
Southeastern	7	207	678	443,469	28,941	473,302
Unakwik	0	3,371	3	34	14	3,422
CCPF Total	8,103	1,301,783	509,031	20,099,300	2,981,580	24,899,797
Hatchery						
Solomon Gulch	0	0	108	1,587,348	0	1,587,456
Cannery Creek	0	0	0	389,399	0	389,399
Wally Noerenberg	0	0	0	1,056,739	456,218	1,512,957
Main Bay	0	0	0	0	0	0
Armin F. Koernig	0	0	0	804,559	5	804,564
Hatchery Total ^a	0	0	108	3,838,045	456,223	4,294,376
PWS Total Harvest	8,103	1,301,783	509,139	23,937,345	3,437,803	29,194,173

^a Hatchery sales harvest for operating costs and broodstock harvest.