



# KUSKOKWIM AREA NEWS RELEASE



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*FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE*

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## 2012 Kuskokwim Area Salmon Fishery News Release #1 2012 Kuskokwim Area Salmon Outlook and Management Strategy

### KUSKOKWIM RIVER

#### 2012 KUSKOKWIM RIVER SALMON OUTLOOK

The 2012 Chinook salmon forecast is for a return of 197,000 fish (range 158,000 to 236,000). Broad expectations are developed based on parent-year escapements and recent year trends for sockeye, chum, and coho salmon abundance which is expected to be similar to 2011. Anticipated available surpluses for commercial harvest will range from 0 to 3,000 Chinook; 10,000 to 30,000 sockeye; 100,000 to 200,000 chum; and 100,000 to 200,000 coho salmon. Markets and processing capacity are expected to be similar to last year.

#### 2012 KUSKOKWIM RIVER PRELIMINARY MANAGEMENT STRATEGY

State and federal fishery management staff will continue to follow guidelines outlined in the Kuskokwim River Salmon Management Plan **5 ACC 07.365**, to the extent possible, to meet escapement goals, provide for subsistence use, and allow commercial fishing on available harvestable surpluses. A subsistence fishing schedule will not be in effect at the start of the 2012 season.

Preseason management actions similar to those enacted in 2011 will be taken and jointly recommended by ADF&G and USFWS in an attempt to conserve and meet Chinook salmon escapement goals. After public input, a separate news release in May will describe the final 2012 Chinook salmon management strategy. Additional inseason management actions may be implemented in response to weaker than anticipated return to the Kuskokwim River drainage.

#### Subsistence Fishery

Subsistence fishing is anticipated to be open 7 days per week with the exception of closures 6 hours before, during, and 3 hours after each commercial fishing period, **unless superseded by Emergency Order**. In District 1, when one subdistrict is open to commercial fishing, subsistence fishing will be allowed in the majority of the other subdistrict. During closed periods,

subsistence fishing for species other than salmon will be allowed with gillnets not exceeding 60 feet in length and a mesh size of 4 inches or less.

Subsistence hook and line fishing for any species of salmon will be allowed 7 days per week, **unless superseded by Emergency Order** under **5AAC 01.295**, Aniak River bag and possession limits, from June 1 through August 31 when subsistence fishing with hook and line attached to a rod or pole, in that portion of the Aniak River drainage upstream of Doestock Creek: The bag and possession limit is as specified by species in **5AAC 71.010** except the bag and possession limit for king salmon is two fish with no size or annual limit.

## **Commercial Fishery**

### District 1

As directed by the Kuskokwim River Salmon Management Plan, a commercial fishery may be prosecuted in June and July if salmon abundance is above the amounts necessary to meet escapement goals and subsistence use. Processing capacity will limit commercial openings in District 1 to alternating subdistrict openings. Commercial openings may be announced when no large scale buyers are available to provide opportunity for permit holders operating as catcher/sellers or catcher/processors. Contact the ADF&G office in Bethel for more information about the catcher/seller or catcher/processor programs.

All commercial fishing periods will be limited to gillnets with 6-inch or smaller mesh size. As in 2011, there is the potential for opening the Lower Section of Subdistrict 1B for two additional hours during commercial openings, dependent on salmon abundance and processor capacity.

Chinook salmon abundance, escapement and subsistence needs may limit commercial harvest of chum and sockeye salmon in late June early July. A commercial fishery directed at coho salmon is anticipated in late July and August.

## **Sport Fishery**

Within the management plan, the sport fisheries for Chinook and chum salmon are to be managed based on abundance. It is anticipated that preseason management actions on sport fishing will be taken to conserve Chinook salmon.

Additional inseason restrictions may be implemented in response to weaker than anticipated salmon runs in other Kuskokwim River tributaries as necessary. In the Kuskokwim River drainage, the Chinook salmon sport fishing season will close by regulation on July 26.

## **Inseason Assessment and Research**

Inseason indicators of salmon run strength include the Bethel Test Fishery, subsistence catch reports, commercial catch statistics, aerial surveys, sonar, weirs, and additional tributary escapement monitoring projects operated by an assortment of partnerships between State, Federal, and Tribal organizations. Staff from Orutsarmiut Native Council will survey Bethel Area subsistence fishermen to assess salmon run timing and abundance.

## **KUSKOKWIM BAY**

### **2012 KUSKOKWIM BAY OUTLOOK**

The Kuskokwim Bay has no formal forecast for salmon returns. Broad expectations are developed based on parent-year escapements and recent year trends. It is expected that salmon harvest in 2012 will be similar to 2011. Anticipated available surpluses for commercial harvest are expected to range from 10,000 to 17,000 Chinook; 40,000 to 80,000 sockeye; 75,000 to

150,000 chum; and 40,000 to 80,000 coho salmon. Harvest may be affected by salmon abundance, participation, market conditions, and processor capacity.

## **2011 KUSKOKWIM BAY MANAGEMENT STRATEGY**

### **Subsistence Fishery**

Department staff will be in contact with Kuskokwim Bay subsistence fishermen to determine if subsistence needs will be met. Subsistence fishing will be allowed 7 days per week prior to the commercial salmon fishing season. Once the commercial fishing season begins, subsistence fishery closures will be reduced by emergency order from 16 hours before, during, and 6 hours after, to 8 hours before, during, and 4 hours after each commercial fishing period.

### **Commercial Fishery**

#### District 4

The Department intends to meet with Quinhagak residents prior to the commercial fishing season. The District 4 commercial fishery will be managed in accordance with the District 4 Salmon Management Plan **5 ACC 07.367**. By regulation, the commercial salmon fishery is to open prior to June 16. Commercial fishing periods are established by emergency order. The department shall allow for at least one 12-hour period per week unless a serious conservation problem develops. Additional commercial fishing periods may be announced if salmon abundance warrants. District 4 will open under Chinook salmon directed management. Once the sockeye salmon catch comprises more than 50% of the combined sockeye and Chinook salmon commercial catch, the district will be managed based on sockeye salmon abundance. A coho salmon management directed fishery is anticipated to occur late July through August given adequate run strength. Due to late Chinook salmon run timing and low abundance in recent years the first commercial period might be postponed.

#### District 5

The Department intends to meet with Goodnews Bay area residents prior to the commercial fishing season. It is anticipated the District 5 commercial fishery will open during the last week of June, given adequate Chinook salmon abundance. Commercial fishing periods are established by emergency order and it is anticipated the Department will allow for a minimum of one 12-hour period per week. Additional fishing periods may occur provided adequate abundance and processor capacity.

### **Sport Fishery**

Within the District 4 Salmon Management Plan, sport fisheries are managed based on abundance and commercial fishery performance. If necessary, inseason restrictions will be implemented in accordance with District 4 Salmon Management Plan. Sport fishing daily bag and possession limits for Chinook salmon is 3 per day with only 2 over 28 inches. The Kuskokwim Bay Chinook salmon sport-fishing season will close by regulation on July 26.

### **Inseason Assessment and Research**

Inseason indicators of salmon run strength include weir escapement projects, verbal subsistence catch reports, commercial catch statistics, and aerial escapement surveys. Weirs will be operated on the Kanektok and the Middle Fork Goodnews rivers to monitor salmon escapements and collect biological data. Kanektok River weir will cease operations in mid-August to address operational concerns caused by high water events common in August and September.

For more information contact:

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