



# ALASKA DEPARTMENT OF FISH AND GAME

## DIVISION OF SPORT FISH

### BRISTOL BAY SPORT FISHERIES

### 2017 MANAGEMENT OUTLOOK

Issued May 1, 2017

#### **The Bristol Bay Area**

This outlook covers the Bristol Bay Sport Fish Management Area (BBMA), including all waters and drainages flowing into Bristol Bay between Cape Newenham to the northwest and Cape Menshikof to the southeast. The Bristol Bay Management Area contains some of the world's most productive waters for all five species of Pacific salmon as well as rainbow trout, Arctic grayling, Arctic char, and Dolly Varden. Anglers can also find northern pike, lake trout, burbot, and several species of whitefish. Popular major drainages include the Nushagak/Mulchatna rivers, the Wood River lakes system, the Kvichak River and Lake Iliamna, the Naknek River and the Togiak River. The major rivers and lakes, as well as the many smaller tributaries, provide unparalleled angling opportunities. This outlook addresses the major Bristol Bay sport fisheries by species. Included with this fishery outlook please find two supplementary attachments:

1. Other helpful information
2. Alaska Department of Fish & Game website addresses

#### ***General***

This is a preseason advisory only. Anglers are advised to carefully consult a regulation summary before putting a line in the water. Bag limits, size limits and permitted gear vary from place to place in Bristol Bay so please take the time to become familiar with the regulations. The 2017 Southwest Alaska regulation summary booklet is available now.

Bristol Bay salmon sport fisheries are generally influenced by the conduct of the area's commercial fisheries and any meaningful discussion of Bristol Bay sport fisheries must therefore include commercial fisheries information as well.

#### ***Inseason Regulation Changes***

Sport fishing regulations are subject to inseason changes by Emergency Order. Recorded Bristol Bay Emergency Orders can be reached at **907-842-REGS (7347)** or by checking our Emergency Order and News Release website (see website attachment). Anglers are encouraged to check this recording or our website before heading to Bristol Bay. The department generally tries to avoid disrupting sport fisheries as much as possible but the seasonal variability of fish stocks mandates of regulatory management plans, and priorities established by state law require us to issue Emergency Orders nearly every year. Please understand that these inseason restrictions are imposed only after extensive internal review, and only with the goal of conserving fisheries for the future.

## **KING (CHINOOK) SALMON**

The king salmon sport fishery is one of the most popular in Bristol Bay. The most visited waters include the lower reaches of the Naknek, Nushagak/Mulchatna, Alagnak and Togiak rivers, as well as several smaller waters.

### ***General Run Timing***

The opening date for king salmon angling varies by drainage. Some waters open May 1 and others open June 8. All Bristol Bay drainages have king salmon spawning season closures of either July 25 or July 31, depending upon location. Most anglers targeting king salmon must purchase a valid 2017 king salmon stamp (please see the regulations summary or contact ADF&G for exceptions). Also note that in all waters of the BBMA a king salmon may not be removed from the water before releasing it. Please check your regulation summary before fishing for Bristol Bay king salmon.

### ***Naknek River Drainage King Salmon Outlook***

ADF&G projects an average return for Naknek River king salmon in 2017. This season's Naknek River king salmon return will be the offspring of the 2010-2014 escapements. Aerial escapement counts for these years were not conducted due to a lack of funding. In previous years, commercial fishery management actions to protect Kvichak River sockeye resulted in a Naknek River Special Harvest Area inriver commercial fishery for part of the season. When commercial fishing is restricted to an inriver fishery, the upper range of the Naknek sockeye escapement goal is raised, allowing the department to manage for quality of the sockeye and king salmon escapements.

### ***Nushagak / Mulchatna River Drainages King Salmon Outlook***

Based on recent run performance in the Nushagak and statewide, the return of king salmon to the Nushagak River drainage is expected to be average. If the projected inriver return remains above 95,000 king salmon, then sport, subsistence, and commercial king salmon fisheries will proceed normally. The "Nushagak-Mulchatna King Salmon Management Plan" directs the department to manage the commercial fishery to achieve a 95,000 king salmon inriver goal, which is designed to provide for a spawning escapement of 55,000-120,000 king salmon, a reasonable subsistence harvest opportunity, and a guideline sport harvest of 5,000 fish. When the projected inseason return falls below 95,000 fish, the king salmon bag limit for fish 20 inches or longer will be reduced from 2 fish per day, only 1 over 28 inches, to 1 per day. When the projected inseason return falls below 70,000 fish, additional sport fishing restrictions, such as prohibition of bait, or catch-and-release fishing only, may be implemented. These actions will assure that an escapement of at least 55,000 king salmon will be achieved on the spawning grounds and should help avoid complete closure of the sport fishery. To remain within the 5,000 fish guideline harvest level, the bag and possession limit for king salmon 20 inches or longer is two (2) king salmon per day, of which only one (1) may be longer than 28 inches. In addition, a sport angler may harvest 5 king salmon 20 inches or longer per year, but only four (4) king salmon may come from the Nushagak/Mulchatna drainage. If the king salmon are less than 20 inches in length, anglers may harvest 5 per day and these smaller fish will not count toward an angler's 5 fish annual harvest limit or towards the 5,000 fish guideline harvest level. All harvested king salmon 20 inches or longer must be recorded on the back of the fishing license (or on the Harvest Record Card) and count toward an angler's annual limit. Please call

907-842-2653 or 907-842-REGS prior to coming out to the Nushagak for the latest counts and regulatory updates.

***Muklung River and Wood River Drainage King Salmon Outlook***

There is little biological data available to help in forecasting this very small king salmon return. Escapements in recent years have been fair in the Muklung River and are anticipated to be to average in 2017.

Note: The bag limits for king salmon 20 inches or longer from the Muklung River and the rest of the Wood River drainage are one king salmon per day and two king salmon per year.

***Alagnak (Branch) River Drainage King Salmon Outlook***

An average Alagnak River king salmon return is projected for 2017. A majority of the 2017 return is the product of the 2010-2014 escapements. The unknown returns during 2010-2014 and recent below average king returns statewide support a cautious approach in projecting no more than an average return in 2017. Angling effort on this river should be similar to recent seasons.

***Togiak River King Salmon Outlook***

The 2017 Togiak River king fishery should be below average to average. The 2010-2014 spawning escapements are unknown. Given the lack of recent escapement information and the recent trend of below average king returns statewide, we cautiously anticipate a below average to average return in 2017.

Recent management of the commercial fishery seems to provide a good balance between commercial harvest opportunity and escapement. The sport fishery will start as normal and, as in the past, performance in the commercial, subsistence, and sport fishery, as well as aerial surveys will be used to gauge in-season run strength. In-season restrictions to the sport fishery may be necessary if run strength appears insufficient to achieve the escapement goal. If so, we will attempt to implement restrictions early enough to preserve some sport fishing opportunity throughout the season.

## **RED (SOCKEYE) SALMON**

***Bristol Bay General Outlook***

Sockeye salmon are the most abundant of the Pacific salmon species to spawn in Bristol Bay, which is the world's largest producer of sockeye salmon. Keep in mind that while recent Bristol Bay sockeye returns have been low (with resultant restrictions in commercial fisheries) nearly all of the Bristol Bay drainages provide abundant opportunities for the sport angler. The most popular sport fisheries occur in the Naknek and Kvichak drainages, but very good to excellent fishing can be found in the drainages of the Wood River lakes, and the Nushagak, Togiak, Egegik, and Ugashik rivers as well.

The Division of Commercial Fisheries has forecast a total return of 41.5 million sockeye salmon for Bristol Bay in 2017. This prediction is nearly identical to the previous 10-year mean of total runs and 27% greater than the long-term mean (32.76 million). Based on the forecast, the entire season is expected to proceed under published sport fishing regulations.

***Kvichak River Drainage Sockeye Salmon Outlook, Including the Kvichak and Newhalen rivers, and lakes Iliamna and Clark***

The Division of Commercial Fisheries' forecast is for a total return of 7.8 million sockeye salmon to the Kvichak River drainage, with a minimum escapement goal of 2.0 million fish for spawning and inriver use. Based on the forecast and in accordance with the "Kvichak River Sockeye Salmon Management Plan," it is unlikely that restrictions will be implemented on the sockeye salmon sport fishery. However, anglers are strongly encouraged to check the regulation hotline (907-842-REGS) or our website (see below) before heading to the Kvichak drainage. In Igiugig, the village at the outlet of Lake Iliamna, there is a public trail from the airport to a prime sockeye sport fishing spot west of the village, so look for the signs. Please stay on public lands or get permission in advance to use private lands. Villagers also request that anglers avoid fishing close to subsistence nets and cleaning tables. A little courtesy on everyone's part will go a long way to avoid conflicts and assure future access and angling opportunities in this wonderful area.

***Newhalen River Sockeye Salmon Outlook***

The Newhalen River sockeye salmon return should be well above average in 2017. Typically, about 10% of the fish that pass the counting tower at Igiugig return to the Newhalen River. Thus, based on a forecast of 4.0 million sockeye passing the counting tower at Igiugig, about 400,000 sockeye are expected in the Newhalen River. The trail from the Iliamna airport to the river remains open to public access. Historically, peak fishing time is July 4 until July 15. Although sockeye salmon numbers typically decline after this period, some reasonable angling opportunities may continue for a while longer.

Again, anglers are advised to check our in-season regulation hotline before making a trip to participate in any Kvichak River drainage sockeye salmon fisheries.

Bears have been a problem in this area, so be alert and smart when fishing and camping. Also, respect the private property and lands of local village residents. Stay on public lands or get permission before using private lands.

***Alagnak River Sockeye Salmon Outlook***

Excellent sockeye salmon abundance is expected in the Alagnak River and good to excellent angling is expected during the first three weeks of July. The 2017 total inshore return to the Alagnak River is forecast to be 5.7 million sockeye salmon. The Alagnak River is specifically excluded from the "Kvichak River Sockeye Salmon Management Plan".

***Naknek and Brooks River Sockeye Salmon Outlook***

Sport fishing opportunities should be excellent in the Naknek River drainage, including the Brooks River. The 2017 total inshore return to the Naknek River is forecast to be 4.0 million sockeye salmon. The escapement goal range is 0.8 to 1.4 million fish. Peak sport fishing will occur during the first week of July, with the week before and after offering some good opportunities as well. Anglers visiting the Naknek River will find that there are numerous commercial services available. The Naknek River upstream from the ADF&G marker at Rapids Camp is restricted to single hook artificial lures. A single hook has only 1 point, with or without barb.

***Nushagak and Wood River Sockeye Salmon Outlook***

Sport fishing opportunities should be good in the Nushagak, Mulchatna, and Wood River drainages. The total run forecast for the Wood River is 5.5 million sockeye salmon, plus

another 1.3 million fish to the Igushik River, and 1.9 million fish to the Nushagak River. This totals 8.6 million sockeye salmon forecasted for the major Nushagak Bay drainages. Of that total, we project a commercial harvest of 6.1 million sockeye salmon. The combined escapement goal for these drainages is 1.9 million fish. The “Wood River Special Harvest Area Management Plan” (WRSHA) directs the department to manage the Nushagak River component for a 235,000 optimum escapement goal, at least until the early July run strength assessment. However, because the preseason forecast is greater than 1 million fish for the Nushagak River, the initial management goal is 550,000 fish, with a biological escapement goal minimum of 340,000 fish. This goal will be re-evaluated during the first week of July. Additionally, a regulation adopted at the 2009 Board of Fish meeting allows the Department to open the WRSHA to commercial fishing when sockeye salmon escapement in the Wood River exceeds 1.1 million *and* the escapement is projected to exceed 1.4 million.

The best sockeye salmon sport fishing will occur in the Wood River and rivers connecting the chain of lakes in this system. Anglers should anticipate interruptions in fish passage if commercial fishing is allowed in the WRSHA. The best angling will occur from late June until approximately July 15. If the Nushagak River component of this run meets preseason expectations, the Nuyakuk River may provide good angling opportunities in mid-July, particularly at the base of the falls. Look for fish where the river currents force them near the riverbanks and where the fish school up in lakes before moving into the spawning streams.

## **SILVER (COHO) SALMON**

Silver salmon are a very popular species in Bristol Bay’s recreational fisheries. Silver salmon fisheries occur from late July through September, with some limited opportunities available into October. Significant fisheries occur in the Alagnak, Egegik, Mulchatna, Naknek, Nushagak, Togiak, and Ugashik rivers, as well as a host of smaller, lesser-known waters. In general, most silver salmon runs are difficult to accurately predict and are highly dependent on a single parent-year and juvenile survival for their success.

### ***Naknek and Alagnak River Drainages Silver Salmon Outlook***

There is little data available to generate forecasts for the 2017 silver salmon return. The parent year for the 2017 return was 2013. The sport catch in 2013 was below average for the Naknek and above average for the Alagnak. These catch levels suggest that the parent year return was below average for the Naknek and above average for the Alagnak and that the 2017 return will reflect that as well. HOWEVER, silver returns to these drainages are, at times, highly erratic and predictions are, at most, an “educated guess” using the best available data. Therefore, we will approach the 2017 season with caution.

### ***Kvichak River and Lake Iliamna Drainage Silver Salmon Outlook***

The silver salmon run in this drainage has never been large. Sport catches suggest the 2013 parent year run was average and we cautiously project an average run in 2017.

### ***Nushagak and Mulchatna Drainage Silver Salmon Outlook***

The 2017 return to the Nushagak drainage will be the product of the 2013 escapement. The inriver return in 2013 was well above average. Additionally, historical data indicates that this will be a high run cycle year. Therefore, we predict an above average run for 2017. If the run doesn’t materialize as predicted and in season restrictions become necessary, we will attempt to preserve some angling and harvest opportunity by acting as early as possible in the season.

### ***Togiak River Drainage Silver Salmon Outlook***

Although the 2013 Togiak River silver salmon escapement (parent year for the 2017 return) is unknown, the sport catch was below average. As a result, we cautiously predict a below average to average return in 2017.

## **RAINBOW TROUT**

For over 70 years, the abundant wild rainbow trout stocks of the Bristol Bay area have been providing one of the most highly regarded recreational fisheries in the world. Sport fishing occurs during the ice-free season (generally from June through October), with August through freeze-up being the prime fishing time. Although rainbow trout are found throughout the area, the most popular waters are in the Kvichak River drainage, the Naknek River drainage, and portions of the Nushagak/Mulchatna River drainages, as well as streams of the Wood River Lakes system.

### ***Kvichak River***

Good rainbow trout fishing in the Kvichak is expected from the June 8 season opening date through the third week of June. A lull will follow until mid-August, when trout return to feed on salmon eggs and carcasses. Fishing usually peaks in September and can remain good into October.

### ***Lower Talarik Creek***

Slow sport fishing at Lower Talarik Creek is expected for June, but good to excellent fishing is expected beginning late August and lasting through freeze-up in early October. The number of large fish (in excess of 28 inches) caught each season appears to have increased slightly in recent years.

The lower reaches of Lower Talarik Creek are a “Special Use Area.” Regulations are intended to maintain the August through October historic use patterns. Guides and their clients are allowed day-use only. There is no overnight guided camping allowed. The camping area to the northeast of the Fish and Game cabin is for private, unguided anglers and campers. Camping in this area is limited to five consecutive nights. A pamphlet on this Special Use Area is available from the Dillingham office of the Division of Sport Fish, the Anchorage Sport Fish Information Center, and on the web.

### ***Naknek River***

Good to excellent sport fishing for rainbow trout is expected all season. In mid-June through July, when trout are feeding on outmigrating salmon smolt, the outlet of the lake and the Rapids area can provide especially good opportunities for anglers. After a lull in late July and early August, fishing should improve as the trout move into salmon spawning areas to feed on eggs and salmon carcasses. The best fishing for large trout generally occurs from early September until freeze-up in October.

### ***Alagnak (Branch) River***

Rainbow trout fishing in this drainage has been very good in recent years. Spring angling at the outlets of Kukaklek and Nonvianuk lakes should be very good in 2017. Fall fishing in the braids and along salmon spawning areas is likely to be very good as well.

### ***Agulowak River***

Angling for Agulowak River rainbow trout should be good to excellent all season. The best fishing opportunities occur after the spring runoff has passed and water levels begin to drop. Low water and the presence of spawning salmon in August make for very good fishing opportunities.

### ***Agulukpak River***

Angling for rainbow trout on the Agulukpak River has been good to excellent. Angler success is usually moderate from spring until mid-autumn, when salmon begin to spawn. Fall fishing is best, after the peak of the salmon spawning until freeze-up. Recent fishery data indicate that present regulations adequately balance angling opportunity with stock conservation.

## **OTHER SPECIES**

### ***Bristol Bay Northern Pike***

Northern pike are native to Bristol Bay waters, and an important subsistence and sport species. Note that in Bristol Bay there *are* size and bag limits for northern pike. The Alaska Board of Fish adopted pike bag limits for Lake Kulik of the Wood River drainage and the Chulitna River drainage to conserve trophy pike in these drainages. The bag limit is 5 fish, none of which may be over 30 inches; all fish greater than 30 inches must be released.

### ***Wood River Lakes Arctic Char***

Good fishing is expected throughout the drainage. Catch rates are highest in June and July.

## **OTHER HELPFUL INFORMATION**

### ***Division of Sport Fish Offices in Dillingham and King Salmon***

For additional information you may stop by the offices or call us at 907-842-2427. For in-season regulatory advisories and emergency order restrictions call our recorded message at **907-842-REGS (7347)**. If no Sport Fish biologist is available at the King Salmon office, use the toll-free red phone provided to reach our Dillingham staff. Additional information can be found on our websites at the addresses provided in the following attachment. The mailing address for the Division of Sport Fish in Dillingham is P.O. Box 230, Dillingham, AK, 99576-0230.

### ***Division of Sport Fish Office in Bethel***

An ADF&G Sport Fish Division biologist is stationed in Bethel/Fairbanks and is in charge of management and research of sport fisheries in the Kuskokwim River and tributaries, **including the Kisaralik, Aniak, Goodnews, and Kanektok rivers.**

While the Dillingham office receives some information on these rivers, interested anglers are encouraged to contact the Bethel office directly. The web site below may offer some useful information:

<http://www.adfg.alaska.gov/index.cfm?adfg=ByAreaInteriorKuskokwim.main>

The mailing address for the Bethel office of the Division of Sport Fish is P.O. Box 1467, Bethel, AK 99559-1467. The phone number is 907-543-1677.

### ***Enforcement***

The Division of Sport Fish and the Alaska State Troopers' Bureau of Wildlife Enforcement will continue their successful stepped-up coordinated enforcement of Bristol Bay's sport fisheries regulations. ***Be familiar with the regulations before traveling to the area.***

### ***Camping and Land Use***

**State of Alaska:** "Generally allowed" uses do not require a permit. These include: hiking, harvesting berries or wild plants for personal, non-commercial use, landing small aircraft, recreational gold panning, travel with a four-wheel-drive vehicle, snowmobile, stock pick-up truck, or all-terrain vehicle (wheeled or tracked), personal use of a temporary camp that will be moved at least two (2) miles every 14 days (or more frequently if use is occurring in a "Special Use Area" in which a shorter camp term has been established), and "day use" of most state land used in conjunction with commercial recreation activities.

**Commercial** recreation activities do require a permit. Contact your local office of the State of Alaska, Department of Natural Resources for information about commercial permits.

Department of Natural Resources  
Public Information Center  
550 W. 7<sup>th</sup> Ave., Suite 1260  
Anchorage, AK 99501  
tel: 907-269-8400  
fax: 907-269-8901  
TDD 907-269-8411  
e-mail: [pic@dnr.state.ak.us](mailto:pic@dnr.state.ak.us)

Department of Natural Resources  
Division of Land, Southcentral Region  
550 W. 7<sup>th</sup> Ave., Suite 900C  
Anchorage, AK 99501  
tel: 907-269-8552  
fax: 907-269-8913

**Special Use Areas:** In "Special Use Areas" (SUA), overnight camping limits are less than 14 days, and other regulations apply **to all users**. Three such areas are:

**State lands adjoining Togiak Refuge:** Overnight camping is limited to 3 consecutive days in the same location. On or before the 3<sup>rd</sup> day, a camp must be moved at least 1 mile. Similar restrictions apply on refuge lands as well.

**Mulchatna and Stuyahok rivers:** Public Use Site 21, located at the confluence of the Stuyahok and Mulchatna rivers, is restricted to a 7-day camping limit.

**Lower Talarik Creek Special Use Area:** This SUA includes the lands within approximately a 3/4- to 1-mile radius around the Lower Talarik Creek outlet into Lake Iliamna. Regulations in effect August 1 through October 31 allow (A) private noncommercial camping for 5 days northeast of the ADF&G cabin; and (B) "day use only" for commercial guided activities.

**Private Property:** Much of the land in southwest Alaska belongs to Native organizations and private individuals, particularly along waterways. Some owners charge user fees, and others do not allow trespass. Contact nearby local villages for more information. Please respect private property as if it were your own.

**Federal Lands:** Federal agencies (the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, which manages the Togiak, Alaska Peninsula, Becharof, and Yukon-Kuskokwim Delta national wildlife refuges, and the National Park Service, which manages the Katmai and Lake Clark national parks) regulate some public access and use of lands under their jurisdictions. Anglers, particularly commercial recreational businesses, are advised to familiarize themselves with the regulations by directly contacting these agencies.

**Wood Tikchik State Park:** The Alaska Department of Natural Resources recently completed the “Wood Tikchik State Park Management Plan.” This plan provides overall guidance for management and development of the park. New and/or revised regulations can be viewed on the web at: <http://dnr.state.ak.us/parks/regstatu/index.htm>

**King Salmon Visitor’s Center:** Stop in and see the King Salmon Visitor’s Center at the airport or call them at 907-246-4250 for additional information about the Naknek/King Salmon area.

**Katmai Park and Brooks River Note:** In addition to state fishing regulations, the National Park Service has regulations regarding public activities at Brooks River. Check with Katmai National Park staff in King Salmon (907-246-3305) regarding their regulations and possible in-season restrictions to public access of the Brooks River.

## ADF&G WEB SITES

The ADF&G web site is a rich source of fisheries information, including weekly in-season fishing reports, fishery informational and research publications, trip planning tips, regulations, in-season Emergency Orders, and even recipes. We regularly update our web pages so please visit our sites often. Anglers can even buy their licenses and king stamps online.

### **Department of Fish and Game home page; all divisions:**

<http://www.adfg.alaska.gov/index.cfm?adfg=home.main>

Sport Fish Home Page:

<http://www.adfg.alaska.gov/index.cfm?adfg=fishingSport.main>

Southcentral Region (includes Bristol Bay) Sport Emergency Orders:

<http://www.adfg.alaska.gov/sf/EONR/index.cfm> Bristol Bay Area general information and important links:

<http://www.adfg.alaska.gov/index.cfm?adfg=ByAreaSouthcentralBristolBay.main>

Weekly Bristol Bay updates for in-season information:

[http://www.adfg.alaska.gov/sf/FishingReports/index.cfm?ADFG=R2.reportDetail&area\\_key=19](http://www.adfg.alaska.gov/sf/FishingReports/index.cfm?ADFG=R2.reportDetail&area_key=19)

License and king salmon tag purchases:

<https://www.adfg.alaska.gov/store/>

Sport Fishing Regulations:

<http://www.adfg.alaska.gov/index.cfm?adfg=fishregulations.sport>

Information for Sport Fish Business Owners and Guides:

<http://www.adfg.alaska.gov/index.cfm?adfg=prolicenses.sportfishguides>

Southcentral fishing information brochures (including Bristol Bay):

<http://www.adfg.alaska.gov/index.cfm?adfg=fishingSportFishingInfo.SouthcentralPublications>

Division of Sport Fish Strategic Plan:

<http://www.adfg.alaska.gov/static/fishing/PDFs/sport/StrategicPlan2015Final.pdf>

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