

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



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**2013 Kuskokwim River Salmon Fishery News Release 2  
Kuskokwim River King Salmon Forecast and Subsistence Fishing Restrictions**

This is an announcement from the Alaska Department of Fish and Game in Bethel for subsistence salmon fishermen in the Kuskokwim River Drainage.

**King Salmon Forecast**

The preliminary estimated 2012 total run of king salmon in the Kuskokwim River was the lowest on record, which goes back to 1976. The preliminary 2012 subsistence king salmon harvest estimate was the smallest king salmon subsistence harvest estimate in our dataset, which goes back to 1990. The sacrifices made by subsistence users last season did have a positive impact on escapement. However, weir based escapement goals were not achieved in 2012.

The 2013 Kuskokwim River king salmon forecast is for 160,000–240,000 fish. The drainage-wide king salmon escapement goal is 65,000–120,000. Average subsistence king salmon harvest is 84,000. If the run comes back as forecast then there would be enough king salmon to provide for escapement and subsistence needs. However, escapements at Kwethluk, Kisarialik, Tuluksak, and Aniak Rivers have been poor in recent years. Also, given consecutive years of low king salmon runs to the Kuskokwim River, conservation measures are warranted in tributaries with specific conservation concerns.

## **Kuskokwim River Tributary Restrictions**

Effective 6:00 a.m., Saturday, June 1, 2013 until 6:00 p.m., Thursday, July 25, 2013 subsistence king salmon fishing with hook and line gear is closed and subsistence fishing is restricted to the use of gillnets with 4-inch or less mesh size not to exceed 60-feet in length and 45 meshes deep, in the following waters of the Kuskokwim River drainage:

- The Kwethluk River drainage including its confluence with Kuskokuak Slough and downstream to ADF&G regulatory markers located at the downstream mouth of the slough.
- The Kasigluk and Kisaralik river drainages including Old Kuskokuak Slough to ADF&G regulatory markers at the confluence of Old Kuskokuak Slough with Kuskokuak Slough.
- The Tuluksak River drainage including its confluence with the Kuskokwim River and downstream approximately 1-mile to ADF&G regulatory markers.
- The Aniak River drainage to ADF&G regulatory markers at its confluence with the Kuskokwim River.

ADF&G and USFWS have determined that restrictions to the Kwethluk River subsistence fishery would result in an increase in subsistence fishing effort and harvest of king salmon in the Kisaralik and Kasigluk rivers due to their close proximity. In order to meet escapement into the Kwethluk River and minimize the effect of conservation efforts on the Kisaralik and Kasigluk river king salmon stocks, it is warranted to restrict subsistence fishing in the Kisaralik and Kasigluk rivers, a portion of Kuskokuak Slough, and the Old Kuskokuak Slough. Allowing use of 4-inch or less mesh size gillnets will provide opportunity to harvest non-salmon species in these waters. Subsistence fishing with hook and line gear for fish other than king salmon is still allowed and all king salmon caught must remain in the water and be immediately released alive.

The Kuskokwim River Salmon Management Working Group (Working Group) met on May 10, 2013 in Bethel, to discuss preseason management strategies and actions jointly recommended by the ADF&G and USFWS to conserve and meet king salmon escapement goals. The Working Group passed all motions supporting these actions with modifications to the sport fishing recommendation. Sport and commercial fishing management strategies for the 2013 season will be addressed in separate news releases from ADF&G.

Managers will be closely monitoring the king salmon run inseason. If inseason information indicates the king salmon run is stronger than expected and escapements are projected to be achieved, subsistence restrictions in affected Kuskokwim River tributaries may be relaxed or rescinded.

## **Kuskokwim River Mainstem Management Strategy**

Subsistence salmon fishing will be open on to unrestricted gillnet mesh size (large mesh gear) in the mainstem of the Kuskokwim River. However, subsistence salmon fishing restrictions may again be necessary in 2013 on the Kuskokwim River mainstem to ensure sustainable runs for future generations. If warranted, subsistence salmon fishing restrictions in the mainstem will be based on inseason information.

**The following information is intended to inform subsistence fishermen of POTENTIAL management actions, and the intent of those actions, that may be used for king salmon conservation in 2013.**

**Salmon fishing closures and subsistence fishing restrictions to 4-inch or less mesh size gillnets not to exceed 60 feet in length and 45 meshes deep:**

Early in the season when king salmon are the primary species available, the use of gillnets with 4-inch or less mesh size not to exceed 60 feet in length and 45 meshes deep is allowed. Use of this gear type during salmon fishing closures is intended to provide subsistence harvest opportunity on species other than salmon such as whitefish. This type of closure and restriction is effective for conserving king salmon in early to mid-June before chum and sockeye salmon become abundant. It is recognized that this gear type may incidentally harvest some salmon, including king salmon. Salmon incidentally harvested may be retained, but this gear may NOT be used to target salmon during closed periods. If a person intentionally attempts to harvest salmon with this gear type during a closed period that person may be charged with fishing for salmon in closed waters.

If there is a salmon fishing closure, ADF&G and Alaska Wildlife Troopers will closely monitor the use of this gear type. If incidental harvest of king salmon using this gear type is determined to be too high then ADF&G may remove the provision to allow 4-inch or less gillnets, at which time all fishing would be closed.

**Subsistence salmon fishing restrictions to the use of gillnets with 6-inch or less mesh size:**

For king salmon conservation when chum and sockeye salmon are abundant, ADF&G may restrict the use of gillnets to 6-inch or less mesh size. These gillnets must not exceed 50 fathoms in length and 45 meshes deep. The intent of restricting to 6-inch or less mesh size is to provide subsistence harvest opportunity for chum and sockeye salmon. This gear restriction is effective for conserving king salmon from late June through early July; however, if incidental harvest of king salmon using this gear type is determined to be too high then ADF&G may remove the provision to allow 6-inch or less gillnets. ADF&G recognizes that many people prefer to utilize king salmon to meet their needs, but when king salmon conservation is necessary people should make every effort to utilize other salmon species.

**Subsistence Fish wheels equipped with a live box:**

For king salmon conservation, ADF&G may require subsistence fish wheels be equipped with a livebox that contains no less than 45 cubic feet of water volume while in operation. The live box must be checked at least once every six hours while in operation and all king salmon must be returned to the water alive. The intent of this requirement allows people to harvest chum and sockeye salmon while conserving king salmon. This regulation would be used during the same times that gillnets are restricted to 6-inch or less mesh size.

**King salmon subsistence hook and line fishing closures or bag limits:**

For king salmon conservation, ADF&G may close subsistence hook and line fishing directed at king salmon or apply bag and possession limits. During king salmon closures, hook and line fishing for other salmon species would remain open and all king salmon caught must remain in the water and be immediately released alive.

**Rolling Closures:**

“Rolling Closures” refers to the implementation of closures or restrictions in each section of the Kuskokwim River timed to coincide with salmon migration upstream. By dividing the river into five different sections, greater protection can be provided for migrating salmon with fewer days of closures or restrictions in each section.

**Elder’s Fishery:**

A new management tool available to ADF&G that may be implemented in 2013 is called the “Elder’s Fishery.” During times when the amount of fish available for subsistence harvest is very small, ADF&G may open a fishing period during which king salmon may only be taken by persons 60 years of age or older. Persons 60 years of age or older can only be assisted by family members “within the second degree of kindred,” which is defined as parents, siblings, children, grandparents, grandchildren, in-laws, step-parents, step-siblings, and step-children. The persons 60 years of age or older must be present while fishing and proxies are not allowed.

This regulation was adopted by the Alaska Board of Fisheries in response to public testimony that asked for provisions to allow elders to harvest king salmon during times when there are not enough fish to allow everyone to harvest king salmon. King salmon harvested during an “Elder’s Fishery” are intended to contribute to the subsistence needs of elders. An additional intent of this regulation is to provide opportunity for the passing of knowledge about cultural fishing practices from older generations to younger generations.

The next Kuskokwim River Salmon Management Working Group meeting is scheduled for 10:00 a.m., Tuesday, June 11 in the Bethel Fish and Game office.

Working Group meetings are open to the public and may be attended in person or by teleconference. The teleconference number is 1-800-315-6338 and the conference code is 58756#.

Further announcements will be made from the Bethel Fish and Game office and through local radio stations. News releases will be faxed to area villages and local fish processing companies.

**For additional information concerning this news release:**

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**USFWS:** Gene Peltola in Bethel 907-543-3151

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