

2023 UPPER COOK INLET ESCAPEMENTS AND FISHERY MANAGEMENT ACTIONS



United Cook Inlet Drift Association

October 2023



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1. Introduction

The Upper Cook Inlet salmon fishery has come under examination by NMFS, the State of Alaska, State Court and Federal Courts. These legal and biological examinations have been on-going since 2010. This paper is chronology of both sockeye escapements and management actions, including Emergency Orders by the State of Alaska. For reference to fishing areas, please refer to Attachment 1.

2. 2023 Commercial Management Actions for UCI Sockeye Salmon: Attachment 2

- A. Thurs, Mar 9 – Kenai, Kasilof, East Forelands setnet fisheries closed until further notice
Northern District setnet closed from 5-29 thru 6-26
- B. Mon, Jun 19 thru Sat, Jul 8 – Inlet-Wide openings, 7am-7pm
- C. Mon, Jul 10 – All remaining openings are restricted by time or area, often to areas less than 250 square miles resulting in limited vessel participation.
- D. August 16 – Drift fleet moved to West Side – Areas 3 & 4 and Chinitna Bay

Open Drift Days in 2023 – Jun 19 thru Aug 16: 30, 22 of which were restricted by area
Closed Drift Days in 2023 – June 19 thru Aug 16: 29 (See Attachment 1)

**** After August 16, drift fleet participation dropped below 5 deliveries per opening**

Sun, Jul 9 thru Wed, Sept 13:

**** Time and area restrictions occurred during every commercial drift fishing opening while time, area, bag and possession limits were liberalized or increased in the sport fishery.**

3. 2023 Sport and PU Fisheries Management Actions: Attachment 2

- A. Sun, Jan 1: Salmon Fishing Opens
- B. Mon, Jun 12: Russian River Sanctuary Opens
- C. Thurs, Jun 15: Russian River & Upper Kenai bag & possession limits double
- D. Thurs, Jun 22: Kasilof Personal Use (PU) area expanded, Russian River & Upper Kenai bag and possession limits increased – 2nd time
- E. Wed, Jun 28: Kasilof bag & possession limits increased
- F. Mon, Jul 3: Little Su closed to King Salmon fishing
- G. Mon, Jul 10: Kenai PU opens
- H. Wed, Jul 19: Kenai bag & possession limits doubled, Kenai PU opened 24/7
- I. Thurs, Jul 20: Fish Creek PU opened 24/7, Jul 22 thru July 31
- J. Mon, Jul 31: Fish Creek Sport fishery opens Aug 1 thru Aug 11, bag & possession limits doubled
- K. Mon, Aug 7: Kenai bag & possession limits doubled
- L. Thurs, Aug 10: Little Su bait prohibited, coho limits reduced to 1 in possession

4. Escapement Goal Dates: Attachments 2, 3 & 4

**** UCI escapement numbers Do Not include the estimated 10% additional escapement after the counter is removed from the river.**

BEG – Biological Escapement Goal

SEG – Sustainable Escapement Goal

OEG – Optimal Escapement Goal

IRG – In-river Goal

**A. Kasilof River: BEG – 140,000 – 320,000
OEG – 140,000 – 370,000**

- Mon, Jul 3: Lower BEG & OEG met (147,048 – 15% of Escapement)
- Sun, Jul 16: Upper BEG met (334,635 – 36% of Escapement)
- Mon, Jul 17: Upper OEG met (384,567 – 41% of Escapement)

Kasilof River Escapement Goals and selected dates:

| <u>Date</u> | <u>Escapement</u> | <u>Future Escapement</u> |
|-------------|-------------------|--------------------------|
| July 1 | 13% | 87% |
| July 15 | 29% | 71% |
| Aug 1 | 77% | 23% |
| Aug 15 | 92% | 8% |
| Aug 27 | 100% | 0% |

**B. Kenai River: SEG – 750,000 – 1,300 000
IRG – 1,100,000 – 1,400,000**

- Wed, July 26: Lower SEG met (759,912 – 32% of Escapement)
- Sat, Jul 29: Lower IRG met (1,177,578 – 50% of Escapement)
- Tues, Aug 1: Upper SEG met (1,327,978 – 56% of Escapement)
- Thurs, Aug 3: Upper IRG met (1,413,562 – 60% of Escapement)

Kenai River Escapement Goals and selected dates:

| <u>Date</u> | <u>Escapement</u> | <u>Future Escapement</u> |
|-------------|-------------------|--------------------------|
| July 1 | 0% | 100% |
| July 15 | 3% | 97% |
| Aug 1 | 56% | 44% |
| Aug 15 | 81% | 19% |
| Aug 27 | 100% | 0% |

5. Sockeye Cumulative Overescapement Above MSY: Attachments 2 & 3

Between 1,500,000 and 2,300,000 surplus sockeye overescapement occurred in 2023 in Upper Cook Inlet (UCI). These underutilizations and wasted sockeye overescapements equate to \$15,000,000 to \$23,000,000 dollars lost to the local, regional and Alaska economies. Additionally, the economic multiplier effect equates to \$75,000,000 to \$100,000,000 dollars lost to the national economy. The 1,500,000 to 2,300,000 underutilized sockeye salmon also represent 9,000,000 to 14,000,000 lost meals to the nation’s food supply. The underutilization of UCI sockeye salmon does not include the coho, chum and pink salmon stocks of UCI. All these lost yields, overescapements and economic losses are due to the direct and intentional mismanagement by the State of Alaska.

A. Kenai River Late-Run Sockeye

| | | | |
|------------------------------------|------------------|----|----------------|
| Sonar Count, River Mile (RM) 19.5: | 2,351,020 | | |
| Sport Harvest Above RM 19.5: | <u>- 300,000</u> | | |
| Estimated Escapement 2023: | 2,051,020 | | |
| Estimated Escapement 2023: | 2,051,020 | | 2,051,020 |
| Sustainable Escapement Goal Range: | <u>1,300,000</u> | to | <u>750,000</u> |
| 2023 Foregone Harvest Range: | 751,020 | to | 1,301,020 |

MSY Foregone Harvest Range: 751,020 – 1,301,020 sockeye salmon

B. Kasilof River Sockeye

| | | | |
|-------------------------------------|-----------------|----|----------------|
| Sonar Count, Sterling Hwy Bridge: | 932,986 | | |
| Sport Harvest, Sterling Hwy Bridge: | <u>- 15,000</u> | | |
| Estimated Escapement 2023: | 917,896 | | |
| Estimated Escapement 2023: | 917,896 | | 917,896 |
| Biological Escapement Goal Range: | <u>320,000</u> | to | <u>140,000</u> |
| 2023 Foregone Harvest Range: | 597,896 | to | 777,896 |

MSY Foregone Harvest Range: 597,896 – 777,896 sockeye salmon

C. Other Sockeye Stocks in UCI

Includes: Russian River, Matanuska River, Susitna River, Little Susitna River, Knik Arm, Turnagain Arm and West Side Sockeye Stocks

MSY Foregone Harvest Range Estimate: 110,000 – 200,000

D. Summary of Total UCI Foregone Sockeye Harvest Estimates:

- Kenai River: 750,000 to 1,300,000
- Kasilof River: 600,000 to 800,000
- Other Systems: 100,000 to 200,000

MSY Foregone UCI Sockeye Harvest Total Estimate: 1,500,000 to 2,300,000
UCI Commercial Sockeye Harvest thru 8-29-23: 1,566,758

The underutilization of UCI sockeye salmon in 2023 was about the same as the total 2023 UCI commercial harvest. The commercial harvest exploitation rate was 29%.

**6. July 15 Sockeye Escapements, Management Actions and Harvests:
 Attachments 5 & 6**

- A. Kenai River Sonar Count: 63,977 2.7% of August 29 escapement
 August 29 Sonar Count: 2,351,020 Counter pulled

- B. Kasilof River Sonar Count: 248,121 26.6 % of August 27 escapement
 August 27 Sonar Count: 932,896 Counter pulled

- C. Other Sockeye Systems: No Stock Assessments
 Sonar Counts: No Complete Stock Assessments

D. Cumulative Commercial Harvests up to July 15:

- Eastside Setnets – closed for all of 2023: 0%

- Northern District total – 1,298: 2.2%
 August 29 total – 61,216

- Drift Fleet total – 488,955 35.9%
 August 29 total – 1,359,888

7. August 25-27 Sonar Counts as a Percentage of Total Sonar Counts

| | Total Sonar | July Sonar | August Sonar |
|-------------------------------------|-------------|-----------------|------------------|
| Kenai River | 2,351,020 | 1,294,835 (55%) | 1,056,185 (45%) |
| Kasilof River | 932,896 | 708,733 (76%) | 224,163 (24%) |
| Other Systems: NO STOCK ASSESSMENTS | | | ?? |
| | | | <u>1,280,348</u> |

References:

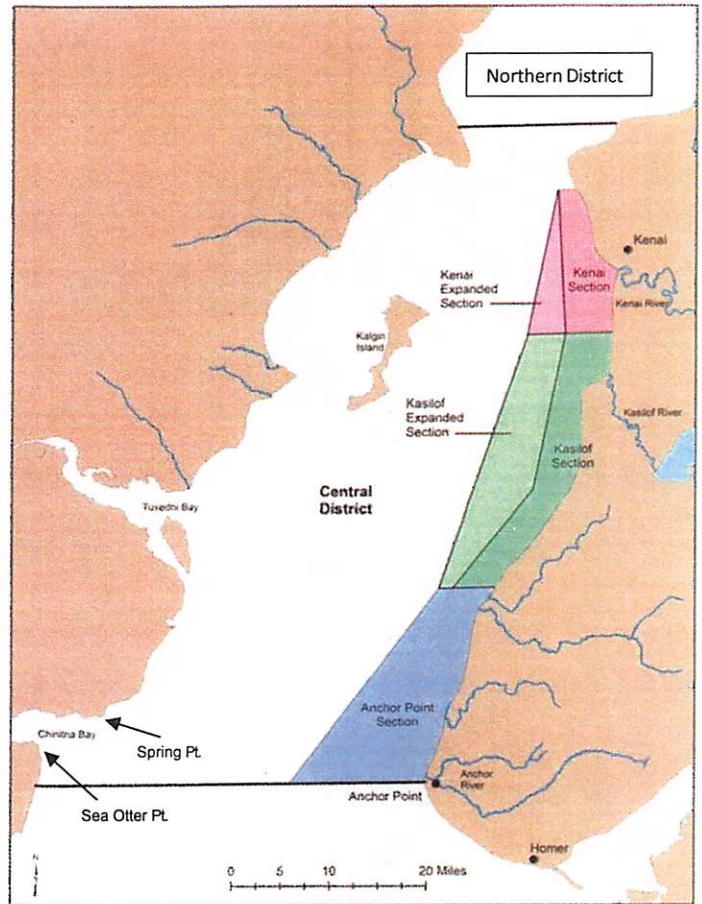
- ATTACHMENT 1: Central District Fishing Areas - Cook Inlet 2023
- ATTACHMENT 2: Summary of 2023 UCI Fishery Management Actions
- ATTACHMENT 3: ADF&G Fish Count Webpage – 2023 Kenai River Late-Run Sockeye
- ATTACHMENT 4: ADF&G Fish Count Webpage – 2023 Kasilof River Sockeye
- ATTACHMENT 5: UCI Commercial Salmon Harvest for July 13, 2023
- ATTACHMENT 6: UCI Commercial Salmon Harvest for August 29, 2023

Central District Fishing Areas – Cook Inlet 2023

The Central District + Chinitna Bay: 2,334 miles 100%

| Central District Areas | Sq. Mi | % Open | % Closed |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------|--------|--------|----------|
| The Central District | 2,299 | 98.5 | 1.5 |
| Kasilof section | 111 | 4.8 | 95.2 |
| Expanded Kasilof Section | 242 | 10.4 | 89.6 |
| Kenai Section | 63 | 2.7 | 97.3 |
| Expanded Kenai Section | 99 | 4.3 | 95.7 |
| Anchor Point Section | 197 | 8.5 | 91.5 |
| Area 1 | 1,452 | 62.3 | 37.7 |
| (delineated based on mean lower low water (zero tide)) | | | |
| Area 2 | 89 | 12.4 | 87.6 |
| (not utilized by ADF&G) | | | |
| Area 3 | 210 | 9.0 | 91.0 |
| (does not deduct fishing area removed by BOF from Area 3 in 2020) | | | |
| Area 4 | 395 | 17.0 | 83.0 |
| Area 1 + Exp corridors | 1,624 | 69.6 | 30.4 |
| Area 3 + 4 | 56 | 24.3 | 75.7 |
| (does not deduct fishing area removed by BOF from Area 3 in 2020) | | | |
| Chinitna Bay | 35 | 1.5 | 98.5 |

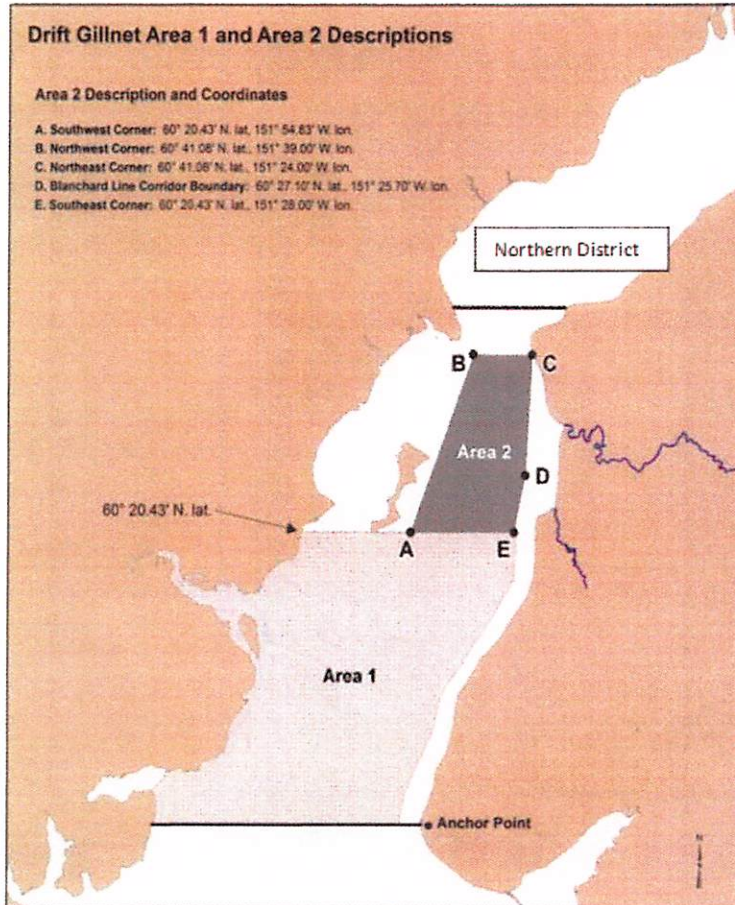
ADF&G Disclaimer* all estimates are approximate and unpublished data and considered preliminary



Drift Gillnet Area 1 and Area 2 Descriptions

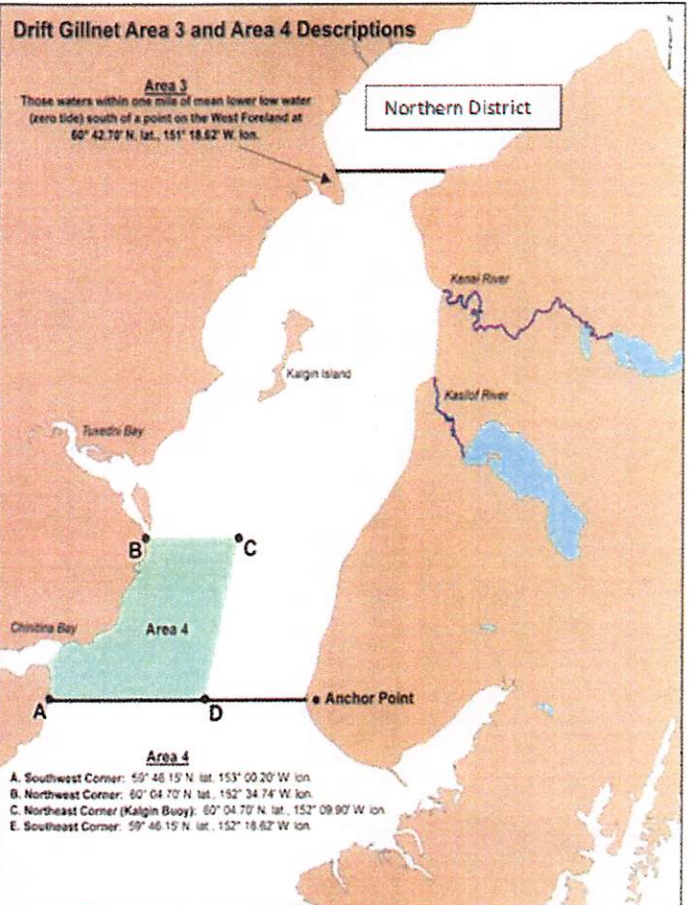
Area 2 Description and Coordinates

- A. Southwest Corner: 60° 20.43' N. lat, 151° 54.83' W. lon.
- B. Northwest Corner: 60° 41.08' N. lat, 151° 39.00' W. lon.
- C. Northeast Corner: 60° 41.08' N. lat, 151° 24.00' W. lon.
- D. Blanchard Line Corridor Boundary: 60° 27.10' N. lat, 151° 25.70' W. lon.
- E. Southeast Corner: 60° 20.43' N. lat, 151° 28.00' W. lon.



Drift Gillnet Area 3 and Area 4 Descriptions

Area 3
Those waters within one mile of mean lower low water (zero tide) south of a point on the West Foreland at 60° 42.70' N. lat, 151° 18.62' W. lon.



- Area 4**
- A. Southwest Corner: 59° 48.15' N. lat, 153° 00.20' W. lon.
 - B. Northwest Corner: 60° 04.70' N. lat, 152° 34.74' W. lon.
 - C. Northeast Corner (Kalgin Buoy): 60° 04.70' N. lat, 152° 09.90' W. lon.
 - E. Southeast Corner: 59° 46.15' N. lat, 152° 18.62' W. lon.