

**Regional Information Report No. 1J09-07**

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# **2009 Yakutat Set Gillnet Fishery Management Plan**

by

**Gordon F. Woods**

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April 2009

Alaska Department of Fish and Game

Division of Commercial Fisheries



## Symbols and Abbreviations

The following symbols and abbreviations, and others approved for the Système International d'Unités (SI), are used without definition in the following reports by the Divisions of Sport Fish and of Commercial Fisheries: Fishery Manuscripts, Fishery Data Series Reports, Fishery Management Reports, Special Publications and the Division of Commercial Fisheries Regional Reports. All others, including deviations from definitions listed below, are noted in the text at first mention, as well as in the titles or footnotes of tables, and in figure or figure captions.

<b>Weights and measures (metric)</b>		<b>General</b>		<b>Measures (fisheries)</b>	
centimeter	cm	Alaska Administrative Code	AAC	fork length	FL
deciliter	dL			mid-eye-to-fork	MEF
gram	g	all commonly accepted abbreviations	e.g., Mr., Mrs., AM, PM, etc.	mid-eye-to-tail-fork	METF
hectare	ha			standard length	SL
kilogram	kg			total length	TL
kilometer	km	all commonly accepted professional titles	e.g., Dr., Ph.D., R.N., etc.		
liter	L			<b>Mathematics, statistics</b>	
meter	m			<i>all standard mathematical signs, symbols and abbreviations</i>	
milliliter	mL	at	@		
millimeter	mm	compass directions:			
		east	E	alternate hypothesis	H <sub>A</sub>
		north	N	base of natural logarithm	e
<b>Weights and measures (English)</b>		south	S	catch per unit effort	CPUE
cubic feet per second	ft <sup>3</sup> /s	west	W	coefficient of variation	CV
foot	ft	copyright	©	common test statistics	(F, t, $\chi^2$ , etc.)
gallon	gal	corporate suffixes:		confidence interval	CI
inch	in	Company	Co.	correlation coefficient	
mile	mi	Corporation	Corp.	(multiple)	R
nautical mile	nmi	Incorporated	Inc.	correlation coefficient	
ounce	oz	Limited	Ltd.	(simple)	r
pound	lb	District of Columbia	D.C.	covariance	cov
quart	qt	et alii (and others)	et al.	degree (angular )	°
yard	yd	et cetera (and so forth)	etc.	degrees of freedom	df
		exempli gratia		expected value	E
<b>Time and temperature</b>		(for example)	e.g.	greater than	>
day	d	Federal Information Code	FIC	greater than or equal to	≥
degrees Celsius	°C	id est (that is)	i.e.	harvest per unit effort	HPUE
degrees Fahrenheit	°F	latitude or longitude	lat. or long.	less than	<
degrees kelvin	K	monetary symbols		less than or equal to	≤
hour	h	(U.S.)	\$, ¢	logarithm (natural)	ln
minute	min	months (tables and figures): first three letters	Jan, ..., Dec	logarithm (base 10)	log
second	s	registered trademark	®	logarithm (specify base)	log <sub>2</sub> , etc.
		trademark	™	minute (angular)	'
<b>Physics and chemistry</b>		United States (adjective)	U.S.	not significant	NS
all atomic symbols		United States of America (noun)	USA	null hypothesis	H <sub>0</sub>
alternating current	AC	U.S.C.	United States Code	percent	%
ampere	A	U.S. state	use two-letter abbreviations (e.g., AK, WA)	probability	P
calorie	cal			probability of a type I error	
direct current	DC			(rejection of the null hypothesis when true)	α
hertz	Hz			probability of a type II error	
horsepower	hp			(acceptance of the null hypothesis when false)	β
hydrogen ion activity (negative log of)	pH			second (angular)	"
parts per million	ppm			standard deviation	SD
parts per thousand	ppt, ‰			standard error	SE
volts	V			variance	
watts	W			population	Var
				sample	var

***REGIONAL INFORMATION REPORT 1J09-07***

**2009 YAKUTAT SET GILLNET FISHERY MANAGEMENT PLAN**

By  
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## **ABSTRACT**

The 2009 Yakutat set gillnet fishing seasons and fishing periods will open by regulation on Sundays as specified in 5 AAC 30.310 and 5 AAC 30.320. The Alsek River will open on Sunday, June 7, Yakutat Bay will open on Sunday, June 14, the Situk-Ahrnklin Inlet and Manby Shore Outside Waters will open on Sunday, June 21. All Yakutat District fisheries will be open by Sunday, June 28 with the exception of the East Alsek River, which will open by emergency order when sockeye escapement levels can be documented. The East will be managed for sockeye salmon into September. Set gillnet fisheries are managed by adjusting fishing times and areas in response to inseason assessments of run strength. Management strategies will concentrate on sockeye and Chinook salmon in June and July. Following the first Sunday in August, fall fishing periods will go into effect and the emphasis for management strategies will switch to coho salmon. No formal preseason forecast program exists for the Yakutat salmon runs. Returns are expected to be average to above average for sockeye salmon, and average to below average for coho salmon.

Keywords: Yakutat, set gillnet, fishing seasons, fishing periods, Chinook, sockeye, coho salmon, *Oncorhynchus*.

## **INTRODUCTION**

The Yakutat area encompasses the waters of Alaska between Cape Suckling and Cape Fairweather. The area is divided into two fishing districts: the Yakataga District between Cape Suckling and Icy Cape, and the Yakutat District between Icy Cape and Cape Fairweather. All five salmon species are harvested in the Yakutat area, with coho, sockeye, Chinook, and pink salmon comprising the majority of the catch in order of commercial value.

Set gillnet gear is the only net gear permitted in the Yakutat area. About 170 commercial setnet entry permits are renewed annually. Setnet permit holders in the Yakutat area do not have registered sites and may fish in any open fishing area. They may also move between fishing areas during the season as long as not more than one area is fished concurrently.

There are 25 unique setnet fisheries in the Yakutat area. Most of these fisheries target sockeye salmon from mid-June through July and coho salmon in August and September. The only targeted pink salmon fishery occurs in the southeast portion of Yakutat Bay on fish returning to Humpback Creek. Set gillnet fisheries in the Yakataga District primarily harvest coho salmon.

In January, 2006 the Alaska Board of Fisheries (BOF) adopted two regulations that permanently changed the weekly fishing periods and fishing seasons for the Yakutat Area from Monday to Sunday of each week. In 2009 the Alsek River will open on the first Sunday in June (June 7), Yakutat Bay and the Dangerous River will open on the second Sunday in June (June 14), and the Situk-Ahrnklin Inlet and Manby Shore Outside Waters will open on the third Sunday in June (June 21). By the fourth Sunday in June (June 28) all fisheries in the Yakutat District may be open if expected returns are surplus to escapement needs.

## **ANTICIPATED SALMON RETURN**

No formal preseason forecast program exists for the Yakutat salmon runs. Preseason expectations are based on parent-year spawning escapements, commercial catch trends, local observations of rearing conditions, and information on year-class strength. The 2009 Yakutat area salmon runs are expected to be average to above average for sockeye salmon and average to below average for coho salmon. Detailed projections by specific drainage area are presented on page 12.

## **FISHERY MANAGEMENT**

Set gillnet fisheries in the Yakutat area are managed by adjusting fishing times and areas in response to inseason assessments of run strength. These actions are taken to provide adequate

spawning escapements and to allow harvests of salmon that are surplus to escapement goals. Inseason assessment methods include both fishery performance and spawning escapement information. In the glacial systems, fishery performance data is utilized for management because poor visibility prevents the accurate observation of spawning escapements. Biological Escapement Goals (BEG) have been established for all major areas and salmon species in the Yakutat Area.

During 2009, the major fishing areas can be expected to open on the following dates:

<b>Yakutat District</b>		
<b>Area</b>		<b>Opening Date</b>
Alsek River		7 June
Dangerous River		14 June
Yakutat Bay (south of 59°40' N lat.)		14 June
Manby Shore Ocean		21 June
Situk-Ahrnklin Inlet		21 June
Lost River		by Emergency Order
East River		by Emergency Order
Akwe River		28 June
Manby Shore Inland		28 June
Remainder of the Yakutat District		28 June
Italio River		by Emergency Order
<b>Yakataga District</b>		
<b>Season</b>	<b>Area</b>	<b>Opening Date</b>
Sockeye Season	All areas	by Emergency Order
Coho Season	Kaliakh River Tsiu River	2 August by Emergency Order (around August 20)

## **2009 SUMMER MANAGEMENT PLAN**

This management plan concentrates on the major fisheries in the Yakutat area. Information on areas that are fished only occasionally is available from the Yakutat area management biologist listed at the end of the plan. Most Yakutat gillnet openings for sockeye salmon will generally run from 6:00 a.m. Sunday through 6:00 p.m. Tuesday.

### **ALSEK RIVER**

The Alsek River, located 45 miles southeast of Yakutat, is a major transboundary river that drains a large area east of the coastal mountain range. The Alsek extends approximately 130 miles from its mouth upriver into the Yukon Territory of Canada. The U.S./Canada border is approximately 40 miles upstream from the river mouth. The river supports large populations of Chinook, sockeye, and coho salmon, and small populations of pink and chum salmon. Alaskan set gillnet fisheries target sockeye and coho salmon. Canadian subsistence and sport fisheries target sockeye and Chinook salmon.

Commercial salmon landings from the Alaskan portion of the Alsek River averaged approximately 11,800 sockeye, 1,400 coho, and 665 Chinook salmon annually from 2004 through 2008. The Canadian subsistence and sport harvest has averaged approximately 230 Chinook, 1,200 sockeye, and 150 coho salmon during the same period. Subsistence and sport fisheries in the Alaskan portion of the river are relatively minor, harvesting about 200 salmon annually.

Historically, the set gillnet fishery targeted Chinook salmon during May in the Alaskan portion of the river. However, due to what was thought to be depressed runs, the directed Chinook salmon fishery has been closed since 1962 and Chinook salmon have been harvested only incidentally during the sockeye salmon fishery in early June. The Transboundary Rivers Panel of the Pacific Salmon Commission has reached bilateral agreement to reopen the Stikine and Taku Inlet gillnet fisheries, and they also established a test fishery for the Alsek which began in late May of 2005, 2006, and 2007, and 2008. The test fishery will not be conducted in 2009. The bottom end of the BEG for Chinook salmon has not been reached in the past two years, and the test fishery is being suspended to facilitate Chinook salmon escapement. It is anticipated that the Transboundary Rivers Panel will at some point reach bilateral agreement to reopen the Alsek River to commercial fishing for Chinook salmon in May. In January, 2006 the BOF adopted regulatory language to allow for this fishery should agreement be reached. The 2009 run of Chinook salmon is expected to produce fish surplus to the current Klukshu River escapement goal of 1,100 to 2,300 fish.

The 2009 overall Alsek drainage sockeye salmon run is expected to be approximately 80,200 fish; this is well above the recent 10-year average of 63,500 fish. Recent sockeye and Chinook salmon returns have been below average, primarily due to poor marine survival, and this forecast must be viewed with some caution. The principle contributing brood years will be 2004 (Klukshu escapement of 15,300 sockeye salmon) and 2005 (Klukshu escapement of 3,400 sockeye salmon). Both the early and late run segments of the Alsek sockeye run are expected to be above average in 2009. The escapement goal for 2009 is a total of 7,500 to 15,000 sockeye past the Klukshu weir. Escapement counts in U. S. tributaries were above average in 2004 and 2005.



The Alsek will open downstream from a marker located three miles below the southern end of Alsek Basin on the first Sunday in June (June 7). Weekly openings will initially be set at 24 hours. The duration of weekly fishing periods will be based on fishery performance and Klukshu weir data. Gillnets will be restricted to a maximum mesh size of 6 inches through July 1 to minimize Chinook salmon harvest. Fishing time will be based on a comparison of current to historical fishery performance data.

The Alsek River surf fishing area is expected to be open during the same periods as the in-river fishery. The surf fishing area includes the shoreline, 0.75 of a mile in each direction, from the river mouth to the outermost bar where the surf breaks.

### **DANGEROUS RIVER**

The Dangerous River will be opened downstream from the Dangerous River Bridge on June 14. Catch and effort from this system has been sporadic. Fewer than three permits fished the Dangerous during the 2004 parent year, and catch records are confidential. The Dangerous River is seldom fished for coho salmon.

### **YAKUTAT BAY AND MANBY SHORE OCEAN FISHERIES**

Three separate set gillnet fisheries occur in Yakutat Bay. The Yakutat Bay fishery occurs in the ocean waters of Yakutat Bay south of 59°40' N. latitude and will open on the second Sunday of June (June 14). The Manby Shore Ocean fishery encompasses the ocean waters of Yakutat Bay north of 59°40' N. latitude and will open the third Sunday of June (June 21). The Manby Shore Inside Waters fishery will open on the fourth Sunday of June (June 28) in streams along the northern shore of Yakutat Bay.

Both the Yakutat Bay and Manby Shore Ocean fisheries harvest mixed stocks of sockeye salmon. Tag recovery data collected in 1987 indicated that a major portion of the Yakutat Bay sockeye harvest was of Situk origin. Because of the high Situk River sockeye salmon contribution to the Yakutat Bay and Manby Shore ocean fisheries, both fisheries will be managed to conserve or harvest Situk River sockeye from the third week in June through the third week of July. The Yakutat Bay fishery will open on Sunday, June 14 for 2.5 days. The weekly fishing period will be limited to a maximum of 4.5 days due to the mixed stock nature of the ocean fisheries and the potentially adverse impact on weaker Yakutat area stocks.

The Manby Shore fishery will open on Sunday, June 21. Weekly fishing periods will depend on Situk River sockeye salmon run strength.

### **SITUK-AHRNKLIN AND LOST RIVER**

The Situk-Ahrnklin Inlet is the site of the oldest and, historically, most productive fishery in the Yakutat area. Located about nine miles by road from Yakutat, the Situk-Ahrnklin fishery normally supports the largest concentration of fishing effort in Yakutat (up to 100 permits). Fishing occurs primarily in the inlet, although some fishing occurs at the river mouth and in the adjoining surf-fishing area. Sockeye salmon make up the major portion of the harvest during the summer and coho salmon dominate the catch during the fall. Situk-Ahrnklin catches have averaged about 39,000 sockeye, 83,000 coho, 50,000 pink, and 280 Chinook salmon (2004–2008).

The 2004 brood year Situk River sockeye salmon escapement was approximately 43,300 fish. This was within the BEG range of 30,000 to 70,000 sockeye salmon established for the Situk

River drainage. Return per spawner data indicates that the 2009 Situk River sockeye salmon run could exceed 140,000 fish. A mid-range escapement of 50,000 could leave somewhere in the vicinity of 90,000 fish available for harvest. Sockeye salmon returns in recent years have not lived up to preseason expectations, and the actual surplus available for harvest may not exceed 50,000 sockeye salmon.

The Situk-Ahrnklin Inlet will open initially on Sunday, June 21. Fishing periods will be based on fishery performance and escapements through the Situk River weir. A run-timing model will be used to estimate the total Situk River sockeye salmon run after several weeks of harvest and escapement data are available. A similar model will be used to project Situk Chinook salmon abundance.

Chinook salmon are taken incidentally in the set gillnet fishery, and the Situk commercial catch of Chinook salmon is largely dependent on fishing time allowed for sockeye salmon. The preseason forecast for Situk River Chinook salmon (900) is above the mid-range level of the BEG range in 2009. The set gillnet fishery will be managed based on sockeye salmon run strength, and the “non-sale” of Chinook salmon provision in place from 2005 through 2008 will not be in effect. Chinook salmon escapement will be closely monitored and it may become necessary to implement “non-sale” should Chinook salmon escapement fall below projected numbers. Conservation and allocation objectives associated with the harvest of Situk River Chinook salmon are described in the Situk-Ahrnklin Inlet and Lost River Chinook Management Plan (5 AAC 30.365).

Management options for maximizing harvest of Situk River pink salmon are limited due to the overlap in run timing with sockeye and coho salmon. Escapement goals for pink salmon in the Situk River are 42,000 to 105,000 in even years and 54,000 to 200,000 in odd years. The parent year (2007) escapement past the Situk weir was 230,000 pink salmon.

Steelhead trout in post-spawning condition occasionally accumulate in the Situk River prior to the time they emigrate to the ocean. When the emigration is late, there is a potential for the Situk setnet fishery to harvest a larger than normal number of adults. The rate of emigration of spawned-out steelhead often increases following periods of heavy rainfall. If a major emigration is expected to occur during a scheduled gillnet fishing period, the opening may be delayed for a few days to reduce the incidental harvest of steelhead.

During the winter of 1998/1999 the Lost River changed course and flowed into the Situk/Ahrnklin Estuary instead of the Gulf of Alaska. The Lost River continues to flow into the Situk/Ahrnklin Estuary. Prior to the 1999 fishing season ADF&G developed a management plan for the Lost River and Situk/Ahrnklin Estuary with the intent of meeting escapement requirements for the Lost River. This plan closed the Lost River and the North bank of the Situk/Ahrnklin Estuary between an ADF&G regulatory marker approximately 100 yards above the confluence of the Lost River and the Situk/Ahrnklin Estuary and a marker located near the mouth of the Situk/Ahrnklin Estuary. The plan went into effect at the beginning of the season and the Lost River (Tawah Creek) was surveyed weekly throughout the season to monitor escapement. The lower marker was moved closer to the Lost River as escapement objectives in the Lost River were met. While coho salmon escapement goals for both the Lost River and the Situk/Ahrnklin system have been consistently met using this management scenario, the sockeye salmon escapement goal was not attained in 2007 and 2008. This will necessitate a change in the marker placement at the mouth of the Lost River.

The weekly escapement surveys on the Lost River over the years have indicated that sockeye salmon run timing is different for Lost River and Situk/Ahrnklin stocks. No fish have been observed in Tawah Creek prior to July 10. The north bank of the Situk/Ahrnklin Estuary will be closed to commercial set gillnet fishing from a marker at the mouth of the estuary, 500 yards below the confluence, to a marker 500 yards above the confluence of the Lost River beginning July 10. Prior to this date the closed area will be confined to 100 yards on each side of the mouth of the Lost River. It is anticipated that the Lost River will remain closed for the entire sockeye season. The intent of these closures is to achieve a peak float count of between 1,000 and 2,300 sockeye salmon in the Lost River and to maximize fishing opportunity in the Situk/Ahrnklin estuary. Regulatory marker placement may change during the course of the season as escapement or river channel movement warrants.

## **EAST RIVER**

The East River is a short, clear river originating from upwelling Alek River water and local drainage of the eastern portion of Dry Bay. The area open to inriver commercial fishing extends from the mouth to two miles upstream; the adjacent ocean waters within two miles of the mouth in each direction out to 500 yards from the shore at low tide are also open to commercial fishing. The surf and ocean areas are open during the same periods as the inriver fishery.

Prior to 1994 the East River had been one of the most productive sockeye salmon fisheries in the Yakutat area, however salmon catches have dramatically declined. From 1994 to 1998, average catch was about 37,000 sockeye, 1,500 chum, and 7,400 coho salmon. The river was closed to commercial fishing for sockeye during the 1999, 2000, 2001, and 2002 seasons. The East was opened during coho season in 2002, and for both sockeye and coho salmon from 2003 to 2007. During those recent-year openings sockeye salmon catches steadily increased, from a low of 2,500 in 2003 to a high of almost 63,000 in 2007. 2008 proved to be a total reversal, very few sockeye returned to the East, and the river was not open to fishing in 2008.

The East River will be managed to achieve the BEG of 13,000 to 26,000 sockeye salmon. Escapement will be closely monitored, and the East will probably not open until the lower end of the escapement goal is attained. In 2007 the East opened during the second week of July, some years it does not open until the third or fourth week of July. The duration of the weekly fishing periods will be based on escapement observations. Returns to the East River are predominantly age 4 (0.4). The 2005 parent-year escapement was estimated at 50,000 sockeye salmon, above the BEG range.

## **AKWE RIVER**

The Akwe River is a glacial river system located about 35 miles south of Yakutat. The lower seven miles of the river are wide and shallow and flow parallel to the beach before entering the ocean. The commercial fishery occurs in this lower portion of the river. The 2004–2008 average Akwe River harvest was approximately 10,000 sockeye and 165 Chinook salmon. Historically, the Akwe coho salmon harvest has averaged approximately 4,000 fish, but the recent average of 2,800 has been due to the decreased effort because of market conditions.

The sockeye salmon return to the Akwe River is expected to be above average in 2009 based on parent-year fishery performance and effort. The 2004 parent year harvest of 11,900 sockeye salmon was above both the recent and the long-term historical average. Parent-year escapement counts were minimal due to the turbidity of the river. The sockeye fishery is scheduled to open

on Sunday, June 28 and the season will extend through early August. Inseason management will be based on fishery performance and index escapement counts, and reductions in the normal 2.5-day weekly fishing period may be necessary to insure adequate escapement. An escapement goal (peak aerial count) of 600 to 1,500 sockeye salmon has been established for the Akwe River.

The Akwe River will be open upstream of the markers located about 0.5 miles from the terminus of the Akwe River lagoon at mean low tide to the upper markers located 2.5 miles downstream from the westernmost end of the Sand Dunes, a fishing area of about four miles.

### **MANBY SHORE INLAND FISHERY**

Management of the Manby Shore inland fisheries (waters upstream of the mean high-tide line) will be based on the abundance of local stocks. During the summer, these fisheries harvest salmon primarily from Manby and Sudden Streams. A 2.5-day weekly fishing period can be expected during the initial opening period scheduled for June 28. Additional open periods will depend on fishery performance.

### **HUMPBACK (HUMPY) CREEK FISHERY**

The Humpy Creek fishery located in the southeastern portion of Yakutat Bay targets pink salmon. A below average run is expected at Humpy Creek for the 2009 season. Humpy Creek was not surveyed during the 2007 parent year. Inseason management of this fishery will be based on observed pink salmon escapement to Humpy Creek and the availability of pink salmon in the Yakutat Bay fishery. Escapement goals (peak aerial count) of 3,300 to 8,000 pink salmon in even years and 7,000 to 18,000 pink salmon in odd years have been established for Humpy Creek. There has not been a directed fishery on Humpy Creek since 1988.

### **ITALIO RIVER**

The Italo River is located adjacent to the Akwe River. The Italo supports small runs of sockeye and coho salmon. The course of the Italo River changed and flowed into the lower Akwe River during the winter of 1986/1987 and both rivers now share a common mouth. Both Italo and Akwe salmon stocks are present in this area and for some distance upstream in each river. Determination of Akwe or Italo run strengths based on fishing success in the junction area is not possible. Therefore, the junction and a portion of each river above the junction is closed to set gillnet fishing.

The Italo River sockeye salmon fishery has not been open since 1987. When the Italo River changed channel and entered the Akwe River lagoon, the homing ability of Italo River sockeye salmon may have been negatively affected. As a result, it may take several years for the productivity of the Italo River sockeye stock to return to historic levels. The Italo River fishery may open by emergency order if good escapements are observed. The 2004 parent-year escapement for this year's sockeye return was below the lower range of the escapement goal in place prior to 2003. Based on an analysis completed in the winter of 2002–2003 the escapement goal for the Italo was rescinded and no formal goal is in place due to changes in productivity of the system.

### **YAKATAGA DISTRICT**

The Yakataga District is not expected be open during the sockeye season in 2009. It will open by emergency order sometime in August based on coho escapement.

## **2009 FALL MANAGEMENT PLAN**

Fall fishing is directed primarily at harvesting coho salmon, although sockeye as well as fall chum salmon can contribute to the catches on the East River. The fall fishing season generally will start on the first Sunday of August. At that time, the regulatory weekly fishing period changes in most areas to a 12:01 p.m. opening, and 12:00 noon, closing time. During the fall, set gillnet fishing occurs in both the Yakutat and Yakataga Districts. In the Yakutat District, the fall coho salmon fishery occurs primarily in the same areas as the summer sockeye salmon fishery. In the Yakataga District, there are areas where only coho salmon fishing takes place.

Overall catches and escapements of coho salmon in the Yakutat area were below average in the parent year (2005). The peak escapement count for the Situk River was below the bottom end of the BEG range. The bottom end of the goal range was barely attained in the Tsiu River, though no late surveys were flown due to inclement weather. The parent year return was not strong, and coho salmon returns since 2003 have been below average for the most part. The 2009 coho salmon run is expected to be average to below average area-wide.

A potential concern regarding Yakutat area coho salmon is based on both climatic and geological effects. Yakutat has been through a six-year period of drought. The land is rising away from the water table due to some of the highest rates of isostatic rebound found in the world. These factors dramatically affect fresh water rearing habitat for coho salmon. Forest Highway 10 crosses many streams, tributaries of the Situk and Ahrnklin Rivers and of Seal Creek. At least five of these streams, although listed in the Anadromous Stream Catalog as important for both spawning and rearing of coho salmon, no longer exist. These streams have not had any water in them at all for almost six years. It is possible that these events will negatively impact coho salmon production in the Yakutat area.

### **YAKUTAT DISTRICT**

Fall fishing will begin on Sunday, August 2 in the Yakutat District, except in the East River where management will continue to be based on sockeye salmon run strength through most of August and into September. The initial fishing periods can be expected to extend from 12:01 p.m. Sunday through 12:00 noon Wednesday. Inseason management of all Yakutat District fall fisheries will be based on fishery performance data and inseason coho escapement surveys.

The following BEGs have been established for coho salmon in the Yakutat District: East River 2,500 to 8,500; Akwe River 1,800 to 5,000; Itatio Rivers 1,400 to 3,600; Situk River 3,300 to 9,800.

Fishing time and area adjustments will be made for each river as needed for conservation. A closed area can be expected in the Yahtse River to protect schools of milling coho salmon at tributary mouths. The actual closed water area will be based on inseason observations of coho schooling behavior, which is related to river flow conditions. Several small coho streams are located along the forelands west of the Yahtse River to Cape Yakataga. Most of these streams have very small numbers of spawning coho and cannot support in-river set gillnet fisheries. The area from the Yahtse River to Cape Yakataga will remain closed until harvestable surpluses are evident.

## **YAKATAGA DISTRICT**

The major fisheries in the Yakataga District occur for coho salmon on the Kaliakh and Tsiu Rivers, located about 125 miles northwest of Yakutat. The Tsiu River is the more productive of the two rivers; in recent years, catches have averaged about 25,000 coho salmon. The Kaliakh, which had not been fished since 1999, had minor recorded effort during the past three seasons. The Tsiu recorded minor effort in 2004 and supported a more normal fishery from 2005 through 2008. Prior to that it had not been fished since 2001 due to market conditions. The parent-year (2005) escapement count of 10,400 coho salmon just made the bottom of the BEG range of 10,000 to 29,000 fish. The Kaliakh was not surveyed in 2005. The 2009 coho salmon return is expected to be average in both the Tsiu and Kaliakh Rivers. The BEG range for the Kaliakh is 4,000 to 14,000 coho salmon.

The Tsiu River opening date and fishing periods will be determined from observed escapements above and below the regulatory markers. The Kaliakh River weekly fall fishing periods will normally open from 9:00 a.m., Sunday through 9:00 a.m., Wednesday, beginning on August 3. Market conditions will determine whether or not the Yakataga District is fished in 2009. The area is remote and fish must be flown to markets. It is possible that it will be economically unfeasible to fish the district.

## **NEW REGULATIONS FOR YAKUTAT AREA**

The Alaska Board of Fisheries met February 17–26, 2009 in Sitka and adopted some new commercial salmon fishery regulations for the Yakutat area. Although the new regulations do not directly change regulations for the Yakutat area set gillnet fishery, they may have indirect effects.

The regulation providing for the salmon subsistence Fishing Seasons and Periods (5 AAC 01.660) was amended so that weekly subsistence fishing periods of 36 hours will be from 6:00 a.m. Friday through 6:00 p.m. Saturday each week unless extended by emergency order.

The salmon summer troll fishery regulation 5 AAC 29.100 (i)(1) which had limited trolling within specified State waters from August 7 through September 20 to the same fishing periods as for the set gillnet fishery on the Situk River was repealed. Repeal of this regulation was intended to help reduce set gillnet effort levels on the Situk River by creating additional troll fishing opportunity.

Hand troll gear specifications 5 AAC 29.120 (e) were changed to allow four gurdies on board of hand troll vessels following the initial summer season king salmon opening, and to allow operation of four gurdies in waters of the exclusive economic zone north of the latitude of Cape Spencer following the initial summer season king salmon retention period. Change of this regulation was intended to provide additional opportunity for the hand troll fishery and to help reduce set gillnet effort levels on the Situk River.

Finally, sport fishing bag and possession limits for sockeye salmon in the Situk-Ahrnklin Estuary and drainages were reduced to three per day and six fish in possession (5 AAC 47.021 (b) (3)).

## **2009 SALMON RUN EXPECTATIONS**

### **SOCKEYE SALMON**

#### **Alsek River**

The parent-year sockeye salmon escapement was approximately 15,300 through the Klukshu River Weir. A total catch of around 15,000 to 20,000 sockeye salmon is expected.

#### **East River**

The parent year escapement was approximately 50,000 sockeye salmon. A normal return this year could lead to a catch of approximately 20,000 to 40,000 fish.

#### **Akwe River**

No parent-year escapement counts are available. Based on catch, the runs in both parent years, 2004 and 2005, were above average, and the Akwe has shown above average sockeye salmon production in recent years. A catch of 8,000 to 12,000 sockeye is expected for 2009 based on parent-year fishery performance and effort.

#### **Italio River**

Parent-year escapements were low and it is unlikely there will be a directed sockeye salmon fishery in the Italio River in 2009.

#### **Situk River**

The parent-year escapement was approximately 43,300 sockeye salmon. A catch of around 40,000 to 60,000 sockeye, with an escapement of about 60,000 sockeye, is expected.

### **COHO SALMON**

#### **Tsiu/Kaliakh River**

If there is any effort, a catch of over 30,000 coho may be possible in the Tsiu River in 2009. In the Kaliakh River, a harvest of 1,000 to 3,000 coho is possible.

#### **Area-wide**

Parent-year escapements were below average in most areas. Based on recent trends in the fishery, the run is expected to be average to below average. The area wide set gillnet catch is expected to be about 80,000 to 125,000 coho, but effort, and how it is distributed throughout the area, will largely determine how many coho are harvested.

## FISHERY CONTACTS

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