

SPORT FISHING

Emergency Order

ALASKA DEPARTMENT
OF FISH & GAME

Under Authority of AS 16.05.060

Emergency Order No. 2-RCL-7-12-15

Issued at: Homer, Tuesday, February 24, 2015

Effective Date: 12:01 a.m., Sunday, March 1, 2015

Expiration Date: 11:59 p.m., Thursday,
December 31, 2015, unless superseded by
subsequent emergency order.

EXPLANATION:

This emergency order closes east Cook Inlet beach areas from the mouth of the Kenai River to the southernmost tip of the Homer Spit to the taking of all clam species. This emergency order is effective beginning 12:01 a.m., Sunday, March 1, through 11:59 p.m., Thursday, December 31, 2015.

REGULATION:

The provisions of 5 AAC 58.022. Waters; seasons; bag, possession, annual, and size limits; and special provisions for Cook Inlet — Resurrection Bay Saltwater Area. (a)(14)(A) are superseded by this emergency order. Under this emergency order, the following provisions are effective, beginning 12:01 a.m., Sunday, March 1, through 11:59 p.m., Thursday, December 31, 2015:

5 AAC 58.022. Waters; seasons; bag, possession, annual, and size limits; and special provisions for Cook Inlet — Resurrection Bay Saltwater Area.

(a)(14) razor clams: may be taken from January 1–December 31 as follows:

(A) the taking of all clam species is closed in east Cook Inlet from the mouth of the Kenai River to the southernmost tip of the Homer Spit.

Sam Cotten
Commissioner

By delegation to:

Carol Kerkvliet
Fisheries Biologist II

JUSTIFICATION:

In 2014, abundance and density of mature ($\geq 80\text{mm}$) and juvenile ($< 80\text{mm}$) size clams were estimated at Ninilchik and Clam Gulch. The estimated abundance of mature sized razor clams was ~82% below the 1991–2012 average at Ninilchik South and 89% below the 1989–2008 average at Clam Gulch. Additionally, the estimate abundance of juvenile sized razor clams was ~36% below the average at Ninilchik South and 86% below average abundance at Clam Gulch. In 2014, low densities of both juvenile and mature sized razor clams were observed at both beaches. Assessment of the length and age of the juvenile sized razor clams in the 2014 surveys suggests poor recruitment to the mature size class for the next two to three years.

Assessment of the age and length composition of the harvest found similar trends at most East Cook Inlet beaches. In recent years (2009–2014) the harvest has been comprised of fewer age classes with the predominate and average age shifting toward younger clams. This has been coupled with a decline in mean length of the razor clam harvest and with decrease in the percentage of large clams (≥ 120 mm) in the harvest.

The cause of the decline in razor clam abundance on east side beaches is unknown but is thought to have resulted from poor spawning and/or settling success. In 2013, the razor clam bag and possession limit was decreased by emergency order from 60 to the first 25 clams dug for all eastside Cook Inlet beaches. In 2014, a section of the Ninilchik beach was closed to the harvest of clams and the razor clam bag and possession limit was decreased from 60 to the first 25 clams dug on the remaining eastside beaches. Any razor clam harvest in 2015 will likely delay recovery of the east side Cook Inlet razor clam populations.

DISTRIBUTION:

The distribution list for this emergency order is on file at the Region 2 Office of Alaska Department of Fish and Game, Division of Sport Fish, 333 Raspberry Road, Anchorage, AK 99518, (907) 267-2218.