

SPORT FISHING

Emergency Order

ALASKA DEPARTMENT
OF FISH & GAME

Under Authority of AS 16.05.060

Emergency Order No. 2-KS-2-09-17

Issued at: Palmer, Friday, March 24, 2017

Effective Date: 6:00 a.m. Monday, May 1, 2017

Expiration Date: 11:59 p.m. Thursday, July 13, 2017, unless superseded by subsequent emergency order.

EXPLANATION:

This emergency order imposes gear, harvest, and other restrictions to sport fishing in Unit 1 of the Susitna River, except the Deshka River, and in Unit 4 (Yentna River drainage) for the conservation of king salmon. This limits sport fishing gear to one unbaited, single-hook, artificial lure only in Unit 1 (except the Deshka River) and Unit 4. This emergency order also prohibits the harvest of king salmon (any size) in Unit 1 (except Deshka River).

Within Unit 4, this emergency order allows harvest to occur each Friday, Saturday, Sunday, and Monday and prohibits the retention of king salmon (any size) each Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday, including the Talachulitna River, which was restricted to nonretention 2013 – 2016. This emergency order further establishes an annual limit of two king salmon 20 inches or greater in length in Unit 4. The annual limit is five king salmon greater than 20 inches in Cook Inlet, of which only two may be from the Yentna drainage.

The Deshka River is not affected by this emergency order and will begin the season per regulation.

REGULATION:

The provisions of 5 AAC 61.112. Special provisions for the seasons, bag, possession, and size limits, and methods and means for Unit 1 of Susitna River Drainage Area. (1), (2) and (4), and 5 AAC 61.118. Special provisions for the seasons, bag, possession, and size limits, and methods and means for Unit 4 of Susitna River Drainage Area. (1), and (2), are superseded by this emergency order. Under this emergency order, the following provisions are effective, beginning 6:00 a.m. Monday, May 1 through 11:59 p.m. Thursday, July 13, 2017:

5 AAC 61.112. Special provisions for the seasons, bag, possession, and size limits, and methods and means for Unit 1 of the Susitna River Drainage Area.

(1) from September 1 – July 13, in flowing waters only one unbaited, single-hook, artificial lure may be used;

(2) in waters open to sport fishing for king salmon, from May 1 – July 13, sport fishing for any finfish species is closed from 11:00 p.m. to 6:00 a.m.;

(4) except in the Alexander Creek drainage, the bag and possession limit for king salmon 20 inches or greater in length is one per day and two in possession; except in the Deshka River drainage, king salmon may not be retained or possessed; any king salmon caught must be released immediately and returned to the water unharmed;

5 AAC 61.118. Special provisions for the seasons, bag, possession, annual, and size limits, and methods and means for Unit 4 of the Susitna River Drainage Area.

(1) from September 1 – July 13, in flowing waters only one unbaited, single-hook, artificial lure may be used;

(2) from May 1 – July 13, king salmon may be retained on Fridays, Saturdays, Sundays, and Mondays only; any king salmon caught on Tuesdays, Wednesdays, and Thursdays must be released immediately and returned to the water unharmed; in waters open to sport fishing for king salmon, fishing is not allowed from 11:00 p.m. to 6:00 a.m.; there is an annual limit of two king salmon 20 inches or greater in length and a harvest record is required as specified in 5 AAC 75.006;

Sam Cotten
Commissioner

By delegation to:

Sam Ivey
Area Management Biologist

JUSTIFICATION:

Susitna River king salmon and other king salmon stocks throughout Cook Inlet are experiencing a period of low productivity and, since 2007, below average run strength. The department monitors escapement on five streams of the Westside Susitna River (Units 1 and 4 of the Susitna River) with established escapement goals. Fewer than half the escapement goals were achieved 2008 – 2012. The preseason strategy implemented 2013 – 2016 reduced harvest by 50–75% percent from the low run years 2009 – 2011 across all Susitna River tributaries in an effort to achieve escapement goals. In general, harvest reductions have been greatest along Eastside Susitna tributaries where harvestable surpluses have not been demonstrated in recent years. Harvestable surpluses have been available at a reduced level on the Deshka River, Yentna River tributaries, and the Little Susitna River.

Given past performance of fisheries within Westside Susitna River tributaries, continued conservative actions must be taken in 2017. Preseason restrictions set out under this emergency order are similar as those implemented in 2016, with the exception of harvest being allowed on the Talachulitna River commensurate with other Unit 4 streams. Escapement and harvest data from 2014 – 2016 warrants increasing sport harvest on the Talachulitna River in 2017. Recent years' run size on the Deshka River indicates that an anticipated harvest of 2,500–3,800 fish will not reduce the escapement below the Sustainable Escapement Goal (SEG) of 13,000–28,000 fish in an unrestricted sport fishery; this is likely the same level of harvest that occurred in 2016. A 60 percent reduction in harvest is again required within Unit 4 of the Susitna River in order to achieve the escapement goals at Lake Creek, Talachulitna River, and Peters Creek, assuming a similar run as in 2014 – 2016.

It is anticipated that these restrictions on the Westside Susitna River will contribute to a reduction in harvest by as much as 50 percent across the Susitna River drainage, all units together, when combined with an

annual limit reduction of five fish to two fish contained in another emergency order. This reduction is expected to provide the greatest potential for achieving escapement goals during 2017 yet continue to provide fishing opportunity throughout the season. Below average runs during previous years, past performance of fisheries within the Susitna River drainage under previous years' management strategies, and uncertainty over how returns may recover in the future justify starting the 2017 season with these restrictions. Data gathered from weirs, boat surveys, and aerial surveys will be used to gauge run strength during the season.

PREVIOUS EMERGENCY ORDERS AFFECTED:

Emergency Order No. 2-KS-08-17 imposes gear and harvest restrictions to sport fishing in Eastside Susitna River tributaries. This emergency order remains in effect from 6:00 a.m. Monday, May 1 through 11:59 p.m. Thursday, July 13, 2017.

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