

SPORT FISHING

Emergency Order

ALASKA DEPARTMENT
OF FISH & GAME

Under Authority of AS 16.05.060

Emergency Order No. 2-RCL-7-01-19

Issued at: Homer, Friday, December 21, 2018

Effective Date: 12:01 a.m. Tuesday, January 1, 2019

Expiration Date: 11:59 p.m. Tuesday,
December 31, 2019, unless superseded by
subsequent emergency order.

EXPLANATION:

This emergency order closes eastside 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.

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annual, and size limits; and special provisions for Cook Inlet — Resurrection Bay Saltwater Area (a)(14)(A) are superseded by this emergency order.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 12:01 a.m. Tuesday, January 1 through 11:59 p.m. Tuesday, December 31, 2019:

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 except for the following:

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

Doug Vincent-Lang,
Acting Commissioner

By delegation to:

Carol Kerkvliet
Fisheries Biologist III

JUSTIFICATION:

In 2018, razor clam studies were conducted on the Ninilchik South and Clam Gulch North beach sections to estimate abundance of mature (≥ 80 mm) and juvenile (< 80 mm) sized razor clams, recruitment of both size classes, annual growth and natural mortality. Above average recruitment of juvenile sized razor clams on Ninilchik and Clam Gulch beaches since 2016, indicates good success in spawning and settling and improved productivity. However, the growth of these clams in 2017 was 13% below average at Ninilchik and 18% below average at Clam Gulch. This resulted in less of an increase in productivity with fewer than expected juvenile sized razor clams recruiting to the mature size in 2018. From 2017-2018, natural mortality of mature sized razor clams improved to 10% at Ninilchik and

at Clam Gulch. As a result of the low natural mortality, abundance of mature sized razor clams at Ninilchik was approximately 3 times higher than the 2013-2017 average while at Clam Gulch, abundance remained at a historic low.

This is the seventh consecutive year where the eastside Cook Inlet beach razor clam sport fishery has been restricted or closed by emergency order since any razor clam harvest will likely delay recovery of the population. 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, the majority of the Ninilchik beach area was closed for all clams and the razor clam bag and possession limit was decreased from 60 to the first 25 clams dug on the remaining eastside Cook Inlet beaches. The eastside Cook Inlet razor clam beaches have remained closed since March 1, 2015.

Causes of the decline in razor clam abundance remains unknown, but may include a combination of heavy surf, habitat changes, environmental stressors and predation. Eastside Cook Inlet razor clam populations are beginning to rebuild, but uncertainties remain if it will continue into 2019. Razor clam abundance surveys are scheduled for the spring of 2019 on Ninilchik and Clam Gulch beaches to assess abundance of juvenile and mature sized razor clams, recruitment to the beach and mature size, annual growth, natural mortality, and potential harvest opportunity.

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.