

SPORT FISHING

Emergency Order

ALASKA DEPARTMENT
OF FISH & GAME

Under Authority of AS 16.05.060

Emergency Order No. 2-KS-2-14-21

Issued at: Palmer, Tuesday, February 23, 2021

Effective Date: 6:00 a.m. Saturday, May 1, 2021

Expiration Date: 11:59 p.m. Tuesday, July 13, 2021,
unless superseded by subsequent emergency order.

EXPLANATION:

This emergency supersedes emergency order 2-KS-2-07-21 issued January 22, 2021, and corrects an error that unintentionally limited fishing area on the Deshka River. All waters normally open to king salmon fishing on the Deshka River are open to catch-and-release fishing for king salmon. Specifically, the Deshka River is open to catch-and-release fishing for king salmon from its mouth upstream to ADF&G regulatory markers near Chijuk Creek (river mile 17), and in all waters within a one-half mile radius of its confluence with the Susitna River. This emergency order restricts sport fishing for king salmon in the Susitna River drainage to catch-and-release only. This emergency order further limits sport fishing gear to one unbaited, single-hook, artificial lure in all waters of the Susitna River drainage. A single-hook is defined as a hook with only one point. In addition, fishing time is reduced in Unit 2 of the Susitna River to allow catch-and-release fishing for king salmon from Saturday, May 1 through Monday, June 14 and then only on Sunday and Monday for three consecutive weeks starting Sunday, June 20. Areas open to catch-and-release fishing include waters normally open to king salmon fishing by regulation such as lower minor tributaries within Unit 1 of the Susitna River and the Deshka River, Parks Highway streams within Unit 2, Yentna River (Unit 4), Talkeetna River (Unit 5), Chulitna River (Unit 6), and Upper Susitna River (Unit 3).

King salmon may not be removed from the water and must be released immediately. The area affected by this emergency order includes all waters open to king salmon fishing in Units 1 - 6 of the Susitna River drainage.

REGULATION:

The provisions of 5 AAC 61.110. (1)(A) and (B)(i), 5 AAC 61.112. (1), (4), (6)(A), and (B), 5 AAC 61.114. (1), (3), and (15), 5 AAC 61.116. (2), 5 AAC 61.118. (1), (2), (4), (6)(A), and (7)(A) and (C), 5 AAC 61.120. (1), (2), and (3)(B), and 5 AAC 61.122. (1) and (4)(A) are superseded by this emergency order. Under this emergency order, the following provisions are effective, beginning 6:00 a.m. Saturday, May 1 through 11:59 p.m. Tuesday, July 13, 2021:

5 AAC 61.110. General provisions for seasons, bag, possession, annual, and size limits, and methods and means for the Susitna River Drainage Area.

- (1) king salmon may not be retained or possessed; king salmon caught must be released immediately; a person may not remove a king salmon from the water before releasing the fish;

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) in flowing waters only one unbaited, single-hook, artificial lure may be used;
- (4) king salmon may not be retained or possessed; king salmon caught must be released immediately; a person may not remove a king salmon from the water before releasing the fish;
- (6) in the Deshka River drainage, including Trapper Lake,

(A) in flowing waters, including waters within a one-half mile radius of its confluence with the Susitna River, only one unbaited, single-hook, artificial lure may be used;

(B) from its mouth upstream to ADF&G regulatory markers near Chijuk Creek (river mile 17), and in all waters within a one-half mile radius of its confluence with the Susitna River; king salmon may not be retained or possessed; king salmon caught must be released immediately; a person may not remove a king salmon from the water before releasing the fish; the remainder of the drainage is closed to sport fishing for king salmon;

5 AAC 61.114. Special provisions for the seasons, bag, possession, and size limits, and methods and means for Unit 2 of the Susitna River Drainage Area.

(1) from May 1 – July 13, Unit 2 is open to sport fishing for all finfish species, except king salmon; sport fishing for king salmon is open through the second Monday in June, and on Sunday and Monday for three consecutive weeks starting on the Saturday following the second Monday in June; king salmon may not be retained or possessed; king salmon caught must be released immediately; a person may not remove a king salmon from the water before releasing the fish;

(3) in flowing waters only one unbaited, single-hook, artificial lure may be used;

(15) from May 1 - July 13, sport fishing for any finfish species is not allowed from 11:00 p.m. to 6:00 a.m.;

5 AAC 61.116. Special provisions for the seasons, bag, possession, and size limits, and methods and means for Unit 3 of the Susitna River Drainage Area.

(2) from May 1 - July 13, king salmon may not be retained or possessed; king salmon caught must be released immediately; a person may not remove a king salmon from the water before releasing the fish; sport fishing for any finfish species is not allowed from 11:00 p.m. to 6:00 a.m.;

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

(1) in flowing waters only one unbaited, single-hook, artificial lure may be used;

(2) from May 1 - July 13, sport fishing is not allowed from 11:00 p.m. to 6:00 a.m.;

(4) king salmon may not be retained or possessed; king salmon caught must be released immediately; a person may not remove a king salmon from the water before releasing the fish;

(6) in the Fish Lake Creek drainage,

(A) king salmon may not be retained or possessed; king salmon caught must be released immediately; a person may not remove a king salmon from the water before releasing the fish;

(7) in the Lake Creek drainage,

(A) from an ADF&G regulatory marker located approximately 100 yards upstream of its mouth to an ADF&G regulatory marker located approximately one-quarter mile upstream of Bulchitna Lake, only one unbaited, single-hook, artificial lure may be used;

(C) king salmon may not be retained or possessed; king salmon caught must be released immediately; a person may not remove a king salmon from the water before releasing the fish;

5 AAC 61.120. Special provisions for the seasons, bag, possession, and size limits, and methods and means for Unit 5 of the Susitna River Drainage Area.

(1) in flowing waters only one unbaited, single-hook, artificial lure may be used;

(2) from May 1 - July 13, sport fishing is not allowed from 11:00 p.m. to 6:00 a.m.;

(3) in the Clear (Chunilna) Creek drainage;

(B) king salmon may not be retained or possessed; king salmon caught must be released immediately; a person may not remove a king salmon from the water before releasing the fish;

5 AAC 61.122. Special provisions for the seasons, bag, possession, and size limits, and methods and means for Unit 6 of the Susitna River Drainage Area.

(1) in flowing waters only one unbaited, single-hook, artificial lure may be used;

(4) in the East Fork of the Chulitna River drainage, including all waters within a one-quarter mile radius of its confluence of the East Fork and West Fork and including the Middle Fork of the Chulitna and the first quarter mile of Honolulu Creek,

(A) the waters are open to sport fishing for all finfish species, including king salmon; king salmon may not be retained or possessed; king salmon caught must be released immediately; a person may not remove a king salmon from the water before releasing the fish;

Doug Vincent-Lang,
Commissioner

By delegation to:

Sam Ivey,
Area Management Biologist

JUSTIFICATION:

The Susitna River and other king salmon stocks throughout Cook Inlet are experiencing a period of low productivity. Below average escapements have resulted in preseason and inseason restrictions and closures on the Deshka, Eastside, Talkeetna, and Yentna king salmon stocks and other isolated streams since 2012.

The preseason forecast for Deshka River king salmon is for a total run of 11,464 king salmon, with an 80% prediction interval of 3,041 - 19,887 fish. There is uncertainty in the forecast of 4-yr old fish due to a history of weak brood years 2013-2015 that returned low numbers of 4-yr old fish during 2017-2019. The Biological Escapement Goal (BEG) of 9,000 - 18,000 fish was achieved in 2020 with a catch-and-release fishery in place. Given a forecast within but near the low end of the BEG, coupled with uncertainty in the return of 4-yr old fish, a cautionary approach is warranted. The weir counts will be used to adjust management actions as run strength is monitored during the season. Mortality due to catch-and-release fishing and harvest of this stock in commercial and subsistence fisheries is not expected to reduce escapement below the lower end of the BEG based on the point estimate of the forecast.

Modeled escapement of the Yentna River king salmon stock is based on post season aerial index counts of spawners on three major and five minor streams of the Yentna River drainage (Unit 4 of the Susitna River). Escapement of the Yentna River king salmon stock trended upward from 2017-2019, exceeding the Optimal Escapement Goal (OEG) of 16,000 - 22,000 in 2019. The OEG was narrowly missed in 2020, however, as a downward trend is not yet evident, catch-and-release fishing is justified in 2021.

Modeled escapement of the Talkeetna River king salmon stock is based on post season aerial index counts of spawners on two major streams of the Talkeetna River drainage (Unit 5 of the Susitna River). Escapement of the Talkeetna River king salmon stock trended upward from 2017-2019 and was within the Sustainable Escapement Goal (SEG) of 9,000 - 17,500 king salmon in 2019. The SEG was missed in 2020, however, as a downward trend is not yet evident, catch-and-release fishing is justified in 2021.

Modeled escapement of the Eastside king salmon stock is based on post season aerial index counts of spawners on eight streams within Unit 2 of the Susitna River. Escapement of the Eastside king salmon stock in 2020 of 13,815 showed improvement over 2018-2019 escapement levels and an upward trend has been experienced over the past three years. Even still, a cautionary approach is warranted given escapements in 2018 and 2019 were below the lower end of the SEG of 13,000 - 25,000 king salmon.

The East Fork Chulitna River (Unit 6) SEG of 1,200 - 2,900 king salmon was achieved in 2019 and missed in 2020. Indexed escapement in Indian and Portage creeks of the upper Susitna River (Unit 3) were below the 10-yr average and similar to the recent 5-yr average. These remote areas of the Susitna River drainage receive minor effort; mortality due to catch-and-release fishing is negligible.

Prohibiting retention of king salmon in the Susitna River drainage is expected to provide sport fishing opportunity and still achieve escapement goals during 2020. 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 2020 season with these restrictions. Data gathered from weirs, fishwheels, boat surveys, and aerial surveys will be used to gauge run strength during the season.

PREVIOUS EMERGENCY ORDERS AFFECTED:

Emergency Order No. 2-KS-2-07-21, which restricted sport fishing for king salmon in the Susitna River drainage to catch-and-release only and limited sport fishing gear to one unbaited, single-hook, artificial lure in all waters of the Susitna River drainage. In addition, fishing time was reduced in Unit 2 of the Susitna River to allow catch-and-release fishing for king salmon from Saturday, May 1 through Monday, June 14, 2021, and then only on Sunday and Monday for three consecutive weeks starting Sunday, June 20. Areas open to catch-and-release fishing include waters normally open to king salmon fishing by regulation such as lower minor tributaries within Unit 1 of the Susitna River and the Deshka River, Parks Highway streams within Unit 2, Yentna River (Unit 4), Talkeetna River (Unit 5), Chulitna River (Unit 6), and Upper Susitna River (Unit 3) is superseded by this emergency order.

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.