

SPORT FISHING

Emergency Order

ALASKA DEPARTMENT
OF FISH & GAME

Under Authority of AS 16.05.060

Emergency Order No. 2-KS-2-05-23

Issued at: Palmer, Thursday, March 02, 2023

Effective Date: 6:00 a.m. Monday, May 1, 2023

Expiration Date: 11:59 p.m. Thursday, July 13, 2023,
unless superseded by subsequent emergency order.

EXPLANATION:

This emergency order restricts sport fishing for king salmon in the Yentna River drainage to catch-and-release and prohibits fishing for king salmon in the remainder of the Susitna River drainage. In addition, sport fishing gear is limited 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.

Fishing for other finfish species remains open. In the waters of Unit 2 normally open to king salmon fishing, fishing for trout and other species continues to be allowed seven days per week from 6:00 a.m. to 11:00 p.m. per regulation. Except in the Yentna River drainage, king salmon may not be targeted and those caught while fishing for other species may not be removed from the water and must be released immediately.

REGULATION:

The provisions of 5 AAC 61.110. (1), 5 AAC 61.112. (1), (4), (6)(A) and (B), 5 AAC 61.114. (1) and (3), 5 AAC 61.116. (2), 5 AAC 61.118. (1), (2), (4), (6)(A), and (7)(A) and (C), 5 AAC 61.120. (1) and (2), and 5 AAC 61.122. (1) and (4)(A) are superseded and 5 AAC 61.112. (6)(F) are added by this emergency order. Under this emergency order, the following provisions are effective 6:00 a.m. Monday, May 1 through 11:59 p.m. Thursday, July 13, 2023:

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) sport fishing for king salmon is closed; king salmon may not be retained or possessed; king salmon that are 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) sport fishing for king salmon is closed;

(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, sport fishing for king salmon is closed; 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;

(F) the remainder of the Deshka River drainage is closed to sport fishing for 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;

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 January 1 – July 13, Unit 2 is open to sport fishing for all finfish species, except king salmon; sport fishing for king salmon is closed; 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;

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, sport fishing for king salmon is closed; 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 61.118. 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;

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

(2) from May 1 – July 13, sport fishing for king salmon is closed; 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;

5AAC 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, except for king salmon; sport fishing for king salmon is closed; 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 7,243 king salmon, with an 80% prediction interval of 2,603 – 11,883 fish. The Biological Escapement Goal (BEG) of 9,000 – 18,000 fish was missed in 2022 due to poor return across all major age classes, particularly 4-yr and 5-yr old fish. The outcome of the 2022 run reveals 2017 and potentially 2018 as weak brood years driving this year's low forecast. Therefore, total closure of the sport fishery is warranted. Weir counts will be used to adjust management actions as run strength is monitored during the season.

Modeled escapement of the Yentna River king salmon stock is based on postseason aerial index counts of spawners on three major and five minor streams of the Yentna River drainage (Unit 4 of the Susitna River). Since an escapement goal was implemented on this stock beginning in 2020, the Optimal Escapement Goal (OEG) of 16,000 – 22,000 was missed in 2020 and achieved in 2021 and 2022; however, no trend in escapement is apparent. With recent king salmon runs variable around the low end of the OEG, continued catch-and-release fishing is justified in 2023.

Modeled escapement of the Talkeetna River king salmon stock is based on postseason aerial index counts of spawners on two major streams of the Talkeetna River drainage (Unit 5 of the Susitna River). Since an escapement goal was implemented on this stock beginning in 2020, the SEG of 9,000 – 17,500 was missed in 2020, narrowly achieved in 2021, and missed in 2022 at a historically low level despite mid-season closure of a catch-and-release fishery. Diminished and unpredictable returns over recent years warrants closing the sport fishery from the outset of the season.

Modeled escapement of the Eastside king salmon stock is based on postseason aerial index counts of spawners on eight streams within Unit 2 of the Susitna River. The SEG of 13,000 – 25,000 was missed in 2022 at a historically low level despite mid-season closure of a catch-and-release fishery. The Eastside king salmon stock is a stock of management concern. Diminished and unpredictable returns over recent years warrants closing the sport fishery from the outset of the season.

The East Fork Chulitna River SEG of 1,200 – 2,900 king salmon could not be assessed in 2022; however, due to historically low returns to the Talkeetna and Eastside Susitna areas in 2022, it is likely escapement to the Chulitna was also low and below its SEG. This coupled with no apparent trend in escapement in recent years, warrants closure of the Chulitna (Unit 6) and upper Susitna (Unit 3) areas in 2023.

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 2023 season with these restrictions. In addition to these management actions to the sport fishery, the Northern District commercial king salmon fishery will also be closed. Data gathered from weirs, fishwheels, boat surveys, and aerial surveys will be used to gauge run strength during the season.

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.