

SPORT FISHING

Emergency Order

ALASKA DEPARTMENT
OF FISH & GAME

Under Authority of AS 16.05.060

Emergency Order No. 2-KS-2-06-23

Issued at: Palmer, Thursday, March 02, 2023

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

Expiration Date: 11:59 p.m. Friday,
June 30, 2023, unless superseded by
subsequent emergency order.

EXPLANATION:

This emergency order closes all waters of the West Cook Inlet Management Area to sport fishing for king salmon. The closure prohibits sport fishing for king salmon, including catch-and-release fishing. King salmon may not be taken or possessed; king salmon incidentally caught while fishing for other species may not be removed from the water and must be released immediately. The area affected by this emergency order includes all freshwater drainages flowing into Cook Inlet from Cape Douglas north to the Susitna River.

REGULATION:

The provisions of 5 AAC 62.120. (1) are superseded by this emergency order.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. Friday, June 30, 2023:

5 AAC 62.120. General provisions for the seasons, bag, possession, annual, and size limits, and methods and means for the West Cook Inlet 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;

Doug Vincent-Lang
Commissioner

By delegation to:



Sam Ivey and Mike Booz
Area Management Biologists

JUSTIFICATION:

King salmon stocks throughout Cook Inlet are experiencing a period of low productivity. In the West Cook Inlet (WCI) area, the major king salmon fisheries traditionally occurred on the Chuitna, Theodore, and Lewis Rivers. In 2011, these stocks were designated as Stocks of Concern and king salmon fisheries were closed by the Board of Fisheries for failure to achieve escapement goals. The Beluga River drainage was also closed in regulation. King salmon returns to these rivers continue to be low and below

management objective. As few as 38 king salmon were counted in the Theodore River on a recent year. Recent year counts on Coal Creek of the Beluga system were about 1/3 the previous 5-year average. Although there is no active escapement monitoring, several small stocks remain open to king salmon fishing in WCI, such as small sloughs of the McArthur River and streams in Kamishak Bay. These stocks are likely experiencing poor productivity and in jeopardy of overexploitation if left open to sport fishing in 2023. Given anticipated poor runs of king salmon to Cook Inlet, including Kenai Peninsula and Northern Cook Inlet, the majority of wild stock sport fisheries are starting the 2023 season closed and it is justified to include these vulnerable stocks of WCI.

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.