

SPORT FISHING

Emergency Order

ALASKA DEPARTMENT
OF FISH & GAME

Under Authority of AS 16.05.060

Emergency Order No. 2-KS-1-7-26

Issued at: Soldotna, Monday, February 9, 2026

Effective Date: 12:01 a.m. Saturday, June 20, 2026

Expiration Date: 11:59 p.m. Saturday, August 15, 2026, unless superseded by subsequent emergency order.

EXPLANATION:

This emergency order closes the Kenai River to fishing for king salmon and prohibits the use of bait and multiple hooks in the Kenai River from its mouth upstream to ADF&G markers located at the outlet of Skilak Lake from 12:01 a.m. Saturday, June 20 through 11:59 p.m. Saturday, August 15, 2026. This closure prohibits all sport fishing for king salmon, including catch-and-release fishing. King salmon of any size may not be retained or possessed; king salmon caught while fishing for other species may not be removed from the water and must be released immediately.

REGULATION:

The provisions of 5 AAC 57.120. (a)(2)(A) and (a)(3)(A), and 5 AAC 57.121. (1)(A)(B) are superseded by this emergency order. The following provisions are effective 12:01 a.m. Saturday, June 20 through 11:59 p.m. Saturday, August 15, 2026:

5 AAC 57.120. General provisions for seasons, bag, possession, annual, and size limits, and methods and means for the Kenai River Drainage Area.

(a)(2) king salmon 20 inches or greater in length, as follows:

(A) from June 20 – August 15, the Kenai River from its mouth upstream to an ADF&G regulatory marker located at the outlet of Skilak Lake, is closed to sport fishing for king salmon; king salmon may not be retained or possessed; king salmon may not be removed from the water and must be released immediately;

(a)(3) king salmon less than 20 inches in length as follows:

(A) from June 20 – August 15, flowing waters and unstocked lakes and ponds and in the Kenai River from its mouth upstream to ADF&G markers located at the outlet of Skilak Lake, are closed to sport fishing for king salmon; king salmon may not be retained or possessed; king salmon may not be removed from the water and must be released immediately;

5 AAC 57.121. Special provisions for the seasons, bag, possession, and size limits, and methods and means for the Lower Section of the Kenai River Drainage Area.

(1) sport fishing gear restrictions:

(A) from January 1 – June 30, in the Kenai River, Only one unbaited, single-hook, artificial lure may be used;

(B) from July 1 – August 15, in the Kenai River from its mouth upstream to an ADF&G regulatory marker located approximately 300 yards downstream from the outlet of Skilak Lake, only one unbaited, single-hook, artificial lure may be used;

Doug Vincent-Lang,
Commissioner



By delegation to:

Phill Stacey
Area Management Biologist

JUSTIFICATION:

The *Kenai River Late-Run King Salmon Management Plan* (5 AAC 21.382) directs the department to manage to achieve the Stock of Concern recovery escapement goal of late-run king salmon into the Kenai River system. The recovery escapement goal for late-run Kenai River king salmon is 14,250 – 30,000 king salmon 75 cm mid eye to tail fork and longer.

Kenai River king salmon and other king salmon stocks throughout Cook Inlet are experiencing a period of low productivity and below average run strength. The 2026 forecast for the stock of large (≥ 75 cm mideye-to-tail-fork-length [METF] or approximately ≥ 34 inches in total length) late-run king salmon in the Kenai River is 12,718 fish. This total run forecast is below the recovery escapement goal range of 14,250 – 30,000 fish. The forecast is well below the historical average run of approximately 27,724 fish and just slightly higher than the recent 5-year (2021–2025) average total run of approximately 12,640 large fish. The 2026 run is forecast to be the 6th lowest on record. Closing the late-run king salmon sport fishery preseason is warranted until data from inseason assessment projects indicate that fishing opportunity can be provided without jeopardizing the achievement of the OEG.

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.