

SPORT FISHING

Emergency Order

Under Authority of AS 16.05.060

ALASKA DEPARTMENT
OF FISH & GAME

Emergency Order No. 2-KS-1-8-26

Issued at: Soldotna, Monday, February 9, 2026

Effective Date: 12:01 a.m. Friday, May 1, 2026

Expiration Date: 11:59 p.m. Friday, June 19, 2026 unless superseded by subsequent emergency order.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. Friday, May 1 through 11:59 p.m. Friday, June 19, 2026. This closure prohibits 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 (a)(2)(A)(i) and (a)(3)(A), and 5 AAC 57.121 (1)(A), are superseded by this emergency order. Under this emergency order, the following provisions are effective 12:01 a.m. Friday, May 1 through 11:59 p.m. Friday, June 19, 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) (i) from May 1 – June 19, 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 May 1 – June 19, 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;

Doug Vincent-Lang,
Commissioner



By delegation to:

Phill Stacey
Area Management Biologist

JUSTIFICATION:

Consistent with 5 AAC 57.160. *Kenai River and Kasilof River Early-Run King Salmon Management Plan*, From January 1 – June 30, from its mouth upstream to an ADF&G regulatory marker located approximately 300 yards downstream from the mouth of the Slikok Creek, if the preseason forecast projects the inriver run to be below the lower end of the optimal escapement goal, the commissioner shall, by emergency order close the sport fishery to the taking of king salmon.

The sustainable escapement goal (SEG) for early-run king salmon is 2,800-5,600 large king salmon (75 cm mid eye to tail fork length and longer) and the optimal escapement goal (OEG) for early-run Kenai River king salmon is 3,900 – 6,600 large king salmon (75 cm mid eye to tail fork length 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) early-run king salmon in the Kenai River is 2,325 fish. This total run forecast is less than the OEG range of 3,900 to 6,600 fish. The forecast is well below the historical average run of approximately 5,957 fish and is lower than the recent 5-year average run of approximately 2,390 fish. If realized, this forecast would be the 5th lowest run on record. With no fishing mortality, the escapement from this forecasted run would be less than the optimum escapement goal. Closing the early-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.