

# SPORT FISHING

## *Emergency Order*

Under Authority of AS 16.05.060

ALASKA DEPARTMENT  
OF FISH & GAME

Emergency Order No. 2-KS-2-6-26

Issued at: Palmer, Monday, February  
9, 2026

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

Expiration Date: 11:59 p.m. Thursday,  
Decemeber 31, 2026, unless superseded by  
subsequent emergency order.

### **EXPLANATION:**

This emergency order closes all freshwaters 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The provisions of 5 AAC 62.120(1) are superseded by this emergency order.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 12:01 a.m. Friday, May 1 through 11:59 p.m. Thursday, December 31, 2026:

### **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:



Samantha Oslund  
Area Management Biologist

  
Mike Booz  
Area Management Biologist

### **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 and Theodore Rivers. In 2011, these stocks were designated as stocks of concern and king salmon fisheries

were closed by the Alaska 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 below management objectives. As few as 30 king salmon were counted in the Theodore River in 2025. Recent counts on Coal Creek of the Beluga system were about 30% of 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 may be in jeopardy of overexploitation if left open to sport fishing in 2026. Given anticipated poor runs of king salmon to Cook Inlet, including the Kenai Peninsula and Northern Cook Inlet, the majority of wild stock sport fisheries are starting the 2026 season closed and it is justified to include the 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.