



Advisory Announcement

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"Under Alaska's Health Mandates 10, 17, and 18, commercial fishing is an Essential Business and is part of Alaska's Essential Services and Critical Infrastructure. Commercial fishermen should ensure that all travel and other activities in support of commercial fishing operations follow protocols in Alaska COVID-19 Health Mandates. COVID-19 Health Mandates may be found here: <https://gov.alaska.gov/home/covid19-healthmandates/>."

2020 Togiak Herring Season Summary

The following is a summary of the 2020 Togiak herring fishery in the Togiak District, Bristol Bay. Herring are commercially harvested for sac roe using gillnet and purse seine gear when they migrate into the district to spawn, typically during the months of April and May. In July, a food and bait fishery also occurs near Dutch Harbor; the makeup of this fishery is primarily composed of Togiak herring stock and this allocation is based on the forecasted biomass of Togiak herring. The Dutch Harbor fishery is summarized separately. All data included in this summary are preliminary.

STOCK ASSESSMENT

Biomass Estimation

Department staff conducted the first Togiak District aerial survey of the season on April 27, 2020. Fish were observed during this survey, but staff concluded that the schools in question were smelt based on behavior and location. Schools of herring were first observed on May 3. Survey conditions were good to excellent for much of the season except between May 6 and May 12 when weather conditions were poor, and surveys were not conducted. In general, department staff were able to establish biomass estimates from aerial surveys that were conducted, with the peak biomass estimated to have occurred on May 6.

COMMERCIAL FISHERY

Togiak District herring fisheries are managed in accordance with the *Bristol Bay Herring Management Plan* (5 AAC 27.865), which specifies a maximum allowable exploitation rate of 20% and allocates the harvestable surplus among all the fisheries harvesting Togiak herring stocks. The 2020 preseason biomass forecast was 215,826 tons with an exploitation rate of 20% (43,165 tons). The projected harvest guideline for each fishery was as follows: 1,500 tons of herring equivalent (350,000 lbs. of product) for the spawn-on-kelp fishery, 2,917 tons for the Dutch Harbor food and bait fishery, and the remaining 38,749 tons allocated to the sac roe fishery. The management plan further specifies that the department will manage the sac roe fishery so that 80% of the harvest is taken by purse seine (30,999 tons in 2020) and 20% of the harvest is taken by gillnet (7,750 tons in 2020).

The *Bristol Bay Herring Management Plan* and other regulations direct the department to conduct an orderly, manageable fishery and strive for the highest level of product value while minimizing waste. For at least the past decade, the seine fleet has been comprised of processor-organized cooperatives. During the 2020 season, management staff allowed long duration purse seine openings across a large area of the district and let processors limit harvest for their individual fleets based on processing capacity.

Department staff took a poll of processing companies prior to the 2020 season to assess processing capacity and to inquire about additional concerns or issues. The poll indicated that one company intended to participate in the 2020 Togiak herring fishery. That company indicated they planned to buy both gillnet and purse seine fish. A second company had intended to participate in the fishery, but issues associated with the COVID-19 situation made it impossible for them to participate.

Purse Seine

The Togiak purse seine fishery opened until further notice at 3:00 p.m. on May 3, but the first harvest did not occur until May 4. Only two purse seine vessels participated in the Togiak herring fishery in 2020. All harvest for the fishery is confidential due to the low participation. Weather was good for most of the season and did not appear to prevent fishing for any significant amount of time. The fishery continued until fishermen ended participation on May 16.

Gillnet

The Togiak herring gillnet fishery opened until further notice at 3:00 p.m. May 3, but the first harvest did not occur until May 9. Only one vessel participated in the Togiak herring fishery in 2020 and harvest is therefore confidential. The fishery continued until the fisherman ended participation on May 16.

EXVESSEL VALUE / EXPLOITATION

All information related to harvest, value, and exploitation is confidential in 2020 due to low participation in the fishery.

AGE COMPOSITION

Due to limited fishing effort, logistics associated with sampling the single floating processor that participated in 2020, and COVID-19 travel complications, the limited samples the department was able to collect have not been fully processed at this time. Despite the very limited harvest and sampling effort, preliminary data suggests we will be able to characterize the age composition of the spawning biomass in 2020.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The department would like to thank Icicle Seafoods for providing herring samples from their 2020 commercial harvest. The biological data collected in our herring sampling program as well as our aerial survey estimates are the basis for the sustainable management of this stock.