



Advisory Announcement

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2020 PRINCE WILLIAM SOUND SALMON SEASON SUMMARY

The following is an overview of the 2020 Prince William Sound (PWS) Area commercial salmon season. Please note that numbers in the narrative are rounded for simplicity and all data are preliminary, 10-year averages include year's 2010–2019.

The 2020 PWS Area commercial and hatchery cost recovery salmon harvest was 25.51 million fish. This harvest was composed of 7,000 Chinook, 956,400 sockeye, 273,900 coho, 22.27 million pink, and 2.01 million chum salmon. The 2020 harvest included 20.33 million (80%) commercial, and 5.19 million (20%) hatchery cost recovery and broodstock fish (Table 1).

The estimated value of salmon harvest, commercial and hatchery cost recovery, was approximately \$49.64 million and 57% less than the 10-year average of \$115.05 million. During the 2020 season 489 drift gillnet, 26 set gillnet, and 219 purse seine commercial permit holders fished in at least one fishing period. Drift gillnet exvessel harvest value of \$10.01 million was less than one-quarter of the 10-year average and was the lowest since 1980 (average permit earnings of \$20,500 compared to a 10-year average of \$84,400); set gillnet exvessel harvest value was an estimated \$872,300 (average permit earnings at \$33,500 compared to a 10-year average of \$89,200); and purse seine exvessel harvest value was an estimated \$22.72 million (average permit earnings at \$103,800 compared to a 10-year average of \$251,900). Revenue generated for hatchery operations was approximately \$16.03 million.

GILLNET FISHERIES

COPPER RIVER DISTRICT

The 2020 preseason commercial harvest forecast for the Copper River District was 771,000 sockeye and 223,000 coho salmon. The 2020 common property Chinook salmon forecast was 36,000 fish. Gulkana Hatchery total run was projected to be 109,000 sockeye salmon. The Copper River had one of the weakest sockeye salmon runs on record with very little fishing opportunity and the third smallest commercial harvest in the past 50 years. The sockeye salmon commercial harvest of 98,300 fish was 92% less than the 10-year harvest average of 1.31 million fish. The sockeye season was only open for 84 hours compared to 648 hours fished last year during a near average sockeye salmon run. Sockeye salmon average weight of 5.1 pounds was equal to the record small size seen in 2018 and 0.8 pounds smaller than the 30-year average (1990–2019) of 5.9 pounds. The number of wild sockeye salmon in the Copper River District commercial harvest was 91,900 or 94% of the total. Gulkana Hatchery commercial harvest was the lowest since 1984, contributing 5,731 sockeye salmon to the total commercial harvest. Main Bay Hatchery contributed 700 sockeye salmon, or <1% of the Copper River sockeye salmon harvest. The commercial harvest of 5,900 Chinook salmon was the smallest commercial harvest since statehood and 56% below the 10-year average harvest of 13,400 fish. The 2020 preliminary Mile Lake sonar passage estimate of 530,300 salmon was below the inriver goal of 661,000–1,050,000 salmon. However, the Copper River sockeye salmon escapement goal was likely achieved. Preliminary Chinook salmon abundance estimates indicate that spawning escapement was approximately 2,000 fish below the lower bound sustainable escapement goal of 24,000 fish. The Copper River delta sockeye salmon escapement estimate of 55,600 sockeye salmon was within

the sustainable escapement goal (SEG) range of 55,000–130,000 fish. The coho salmon commercial harvest of 163,700 fish was 26% below the previous 10-year (2010–2019) average harvest of 222,200 coho salmon. Copper River Delta coho salmon spawning escapement monitoring is ongoing, but peak escapement counts are currently 37,225 and within the SEG range of 32,000–67,000 fish.

BERING RIVER DISTRICT

The 10-year average commercial harvests for the Bering River District are 3,900 sockeye and 63,100 coho salmon. The sockeye salmon directed commercial fishery in the Bering River District was focused on the western portion of the district to target Copper River District bound fish but did not have any participation. The total sockeye salmon harvest was seven fish with almost no fishing effort. The coho salmon commercial harvest of 64,000 was 1% above the previous 10-year harvest average. The aerial escapement index of 15,700 sockeye salmon was within the SEG range of 15,000–33,000 fish. Bering River District coho salmon spawning escapement monitoring is ongoing, but peak escapement counts are currently 25,825 fish, within the SEG range of 13,000–33,000 fish.

COGHILL DISTRICT

Prince William Sound Aquaculture Corporation (PWSAC) forecast a 2020 run of 2.55 million chum and 115,000 coho salmon to Wally Noerenberg Hatchery (WNH). The 2020 Coghill Lake sockeye salmon total run forecast was 175,000 fish. The Coghill River weir passed 53,901 sockeye salmon, which is within the SEG range of 20,000–60,000 fish. The commercial chum salmon harvest in the Coghill District was 234,700. The proportion of wild chum salmon in the Coghill District commercial harvest was 4%. The total chum salmon harvest in PWS attributed to WNH was 1.11 million fish and was 57% below forecast. PWSAC harvested 811,000 chum salmon (73% of the total run estimate) for cost recovery and broodstock. The Coghill District sockeye salmon commercial harvest of 117,200 fish was composed of 46% wild fish and 35% below the recent 10-year average of 181,500 fish. The Coghill District commercial pink salmon harvest of 1.77 million fish was composed of 22% wild fish and 57% below the recent 10-year average of 3.99 million fish. The Coghill District drift gillnet coho salmon commercial harvest of 2,800 fish was 94% below the 10-year average of 49,600.

ESHAMY DISTRICT

PWSAC forecast a run of 1.06 million Main Bay Hatchery enhanced sockeye salmon in 2020. The total sockeye salmon harvest in PWS attributed to MBH was 492,000 fish and was 60% below forecast. The commercial harvest of sockeye salmon in the Eshamy District was 447,200 fish composed of 4% (18,800 fish) wild fish. PWSAC harvested 254,300 sockeye salmon for cost recovery. The commercial harvest of chum salmon was 72,200 fish composed of 7% wild fish. Pink salmon commercial harvest in the Eshamy District was 328,100 fish composed of 68% wild fish.

UNAKWIK DISTRICT

Unakwik District CPF harvest was 500 sockeye salmon which was below the 10-year average (2010-2019) of 3,152 sockeye salmon.

PURSE SEINE FISHERIES

CHUM SALMON

The 2020 chum salmon total run forecast was 4.46 million fish, with an estimated commercial harvest forecast of 2.97 million fish. The majority of the total run, 3.86 million (87%), were from PWSAC hatchery production, with 500,000 fish returning to the Armin F. Koernig hatchery (AFK) and 810,000 fish returning to Port Chalmers Subdistrict purse seine fisheries. Based on the department's wild stock chum salmon forecast of 604,000 fish, there was a potential commercial harvest of 404,000 wild chum salmon. The department managed for each district's

escapement goal, aiming for each district's long-term average, for a combined total of 200,000 chum salmon to all districts.

Chum salmon commercial harvest in PWS was 1.20 million fish, which was 1.77 million (60%) below the preseason harvest forecast. The commercial purse seine fleet harvested 892,000 chum salmon in 2020. Approximately 195,900 AFK chum salmon were harvested in the PWS commercial fishery, 61% below the preseason forecast of 500,000 fish. A total of 17,700 sockeye salmon were harvested in the AFK chum salmon commercial fishery. Montague District chum salmon commercial harvest was 607,300 fish, composed of 568,600 Port Chalmers, 12,600 WNH, 9,700 AFK, and 16,400 wild fish.

PINK SALMON

The 2020 pink salmon total run forecast for PWS was 33.64 million fish comprised of 14.62 million VFDA hatchery fish, 14.60 million PWSAC hatchery fish, and 4.42 million wild fish. Assuming cost recovery and broodstock needs for VFDA (3.47 million) and PWSAC (3.32 million) and a median escapement of 784,000 wild pink salmon, approximately 26.10 million pink salmon were expected to be available for commercial harvest. Approximately 3.32 million (22.7%) of PWSAC's pink salmon preseason forecast was projected for cost recovery and broodstock with the remaining 11.21 million PWSAC fish expected to be available for commercial harvest. Approximately 3.47 million (23.7%) of VFDA's pink salmon preseason forecast was projected for cost recovery and broodstock with the remaining 11.15 million VFDA fish expected to be available for commercial harvest. Based on the department's wild stock pink salmon forecast of 4.42 million fish, there was a potential commercial harvest of 3.63 million.

The 2020 commercial harvest of 18.15 million pink salmon was 31% below the 26.10 million commercial harvest forecast primarily due to low returns to all hatcheries. The pink salmon commercial harvest was composed of an estimated 5.56 million wild fish, 6.93 million VFDA fish, and 5.66 million PWSAC fish. The PWS purse seine commercial salmon harvest was 18.14 million fish composed of 17.16 million pink, 892,000 chum, 54,000 sockeye, 30,000 coho, and 630 Chinook salmon. The total pink salmon harvest was 22.26 million fish including 4.11 million fish for hatchery cost recovery and broodstock (2.58 million for PWSAC and 1.53 million for VFDA). The VFDA pink salmon run of 8.46 million fish was 42% (6.16 million) below the forecast of 14.62 million fish. The PWSAC pink salmon run of 8.26 million fish was 43% (6.34 million) below the forecast of 14.60 million fish. The PWS wild pink salmon harvest of 5.56 million fish was 53% above the harvest forecast of 3.63 million fish. The number of active permits fished in the PWS purse seine fishery dropped from 238 in 2019 to 219 permits in 2020. VFDA achieved its pink salmon egg take goal and PWSAC fell 32% short of the aggregate pink salmon egg take goal across three hatcheries.

The 2020 PWS pink and chum salmon escapement estimates are not yet available. However, inseason aerial survey escapement estimates were above escapement objectives for pink salmon in all districts and escapement goals were likely met for all districts. Aerial surveys in PWS were flown from early July through mid-September. Wild stock pink salmon escapement indices in 2020 supported openings outside of hatchery subdistricts starting in mid-July and running through the remainder of the season. Chum salmon escapements were below average across PWS, with the Northern and Eastern districts likely not achieving the lower end of their escapement goals.

COHO SALMON

The 2020 VFDA enhanced coho salmon forecast was 82,300 fish with a forecasted commercial harvest of 24,600. The total commercial purse seine harvest of coho salmon in PWS was 30,000 fish with a harvest of 19,000 in the Eastern District.

Table 1.—Preliminary Area E salmon harvest, 2020.

| District | Chinook | Sockeye | Coho | Pink | Chum | Total |
|------------------------------------|--------------|----------------|----------------|-------------------|------------------|-------------------|
| Bering River | 8 | 7 | 63,962 | 10 | 0 | 63,987 |
| Copper River | 5,850 | 98,294 | 163,735 | 738 | 1,349 | 269,966 |
| Eastern | 71 | 3,105 | 18,679 | 8,665,377 | 53,460 | 8,740,692 |
| Northern | 10 | 2,209 | 3,017 | 3,229,101 | 5,387 | 3,239,724 |
| Coghill | 365 | 117,244 | 2,756 | 1,765,879 | 234,683 | 2,120,927 |
| Northwestern | 4 | 12,834 | 492 | 913,547 | 12,068 | 938,945 |
| Eshamy | 175 | 447,178 | 927 | 328,092 | 72,220 | 848,592 |
| Southwestern | 248 | 17,743 | 6,890 | 2,613,490 | 211,728 | 2,850,099 |
| Montague | 293 | 2,423 | 809 | 266,164 | 607,228 | 876,917 |
| Southeastern | 1 | 523 | 150 | 373,385 | 1,161 | 375,220 |
| Unakwik | 9 | 533 | 0 | 2 | 17 | 561 |
| Commercial Total | 7,034 | 702,093 | 261,417 | 18,155,785 | 1,199,301 | 20,325,630 |
| Hatchery | | | | | | |
| Solomon Gulch | 0 | 0 | 12,445 | 1,531,763 | 0 | 1,544,208 |
| Cannery Creek | 0 | 0 | 0 | 562,784 | 0 | 562,784 |
| Wally Noerenberg | 0 | 30 | No Data | 1,489,352 | 811,063 | 2,300,415 |
| Main Bay | 0 | 254,324 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 254,354 |
| Armin F. Koernig | 0 | 0 | 0 | 527,071 | 0 | 527,071 |
| Hatchery Total ^a | 0 | 254,354 | 12,445 | 4,110,970 | 811,063 | 5,188,802 |
| PWS Total Harvest | 7,034 | 956,447 | 273,862 | 22,266,755 | 2,010,364 | 25,514,432 |

^a Hatchery harvest to meet cost recovery and broodstock needs.