



Advisory Announcement
For Immediate Release: March 20, 2021

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SITKA SOUND HERRING FISHERY UPDATE # 5

Today's aerial survey covered Sitka Sound from Povorotni Point to Hayward Strait. Weather during the flight was good with high overcast and 5-knot winds. No herring were observed. A small spot spawn was observed near Fred's Creek. The highest concentrations of herring predators were observed near of Vitskari Rocks and St. Lazaria Island. Numerous whales were seen working in deeper waters near Vitskari Rocks and St. Lazaria Island. Large groups of sea lions were observed holding off Vitskari Rocks and Shoals Point. A small number of whales were observed east of Middle Island. South of Sitka, one whale and five sea lions were observed near Eastern Channel. The herring predators that have been near Bieli Rock appear to have shifted south to Vitskari Rocks.

A survey conducted by department vessels showed a very large biomass of herring in the vicinity of Vitskari Rocks. Additionally, schools of herring were also observed near Bieli Rock, in Eastern Channel, and east of Middle Island.

One test set was conducted today near Vitskari Rocks but failed to produce a sample. Herring mortality associated with test sets is likely minimal and there is no evidence that the small number of fish taken has any measurable impact on the subsistence fishery. Nevertheless, to ensure reasonably opportunity for subsistence harvest of herring roe would not be negatively impacted by test setting, prior to authorizing test fishing in this area the department considered the following: 1) test setting in the area of Vitskari Rocks is well outside the commercial closed waters and core subsistence areas; and 2) the fish encountered during test fishing in this area would represent a small fraction of the overall biomass in the area.

The next aerial survey is scheduled for Sunday, March 21 and the next fishery update can be expected to be released after aerial and vessel surveys are completed.

The Sitka Sound herring sac roe fishery has been placed on 2-hour notice effective 8:00 a.m., Saturday, March 20, 2021.

Under Alaska's Health Advisories 1, 2, 3, and 4, 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 Advisories. COVID-19 Health Advisories may be found here: <https://covid19.alaska.gov/health-advisories/>.

Advisory Announcement web site: <http://www.adfg.alaska.gov/index.cfm?adfg=cfnews.main>.

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