



Advisory Announcement

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SITKA SOUND HERRING FISHERY UPDATE # 17

Today's aerial herring survey of Sitka Sound covered an area from Redoubt Bay to the Magoun Islands and from Silver Bay to Low Island. Visibility was mostly good with mostly cloudy skies, passing snow squalls, and 5-10 knot winds. Herring predators were scattered throughout Sitka Sound with whales and sea lions concentrated close to the shorelines. Whales were seen feeding by the Siganaka Islands, at Whiting Harbor, and near Vitskari. Schools of herring were observed at Whiting Harbor, by Jamestown Bay, and Deep Inlet. Two very small areas of spot spawn were seen along the eastern shoreline of Kruzof Island.

Boat surveys conducted by department vessels located numerous large schools of herring south of town from Crescent Harbor to Thimbleberry Bay and in Deep Inlet. A comprehensive vessel survey was not conducted north of Watson Point this morning, however, numerous large schools of herring were observed in the regulatory closed waters extending from Eliason Harbor to Makhnati Island, near Whiting Harbor. In the afternoon, large schools of herring were observed close to the shoreline on the eastern side of the Siganaka Islands and from Lisianski Point to Watson Point.

Two successful test sets were conducted today, the results are as follows:

- 7:30 a.m., Indian River, 50-ton set, mature roe – 12.1%, average weight–112 g, and 53% female.
- 8:15 a.m., Aleutkina Bay, 5-ton set, mature roe – 10.0%, average weight–117 g, and 46% female.

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 reasonable opportunity for subsistence harvest of herring roe would not be negatively impacted by test setting, prior to authorizing test fishing in these areas the department considered the following: 1) today's test sets occurred outside the regulatory closed waters and core subsistence areas; 2) while a comprehensive vessel survey was not conducted north of Watson Point this morning, numerous large schools of herring were observed in the regulatory closed waters extending from Eliason Harbor to Makhnati Island, near Whiting Harbor, furthermore, large schools of herring have been observed within and adjacent to the regulatory closed waters during the past several surveys of this area; 3) the fish encountered during test fishing in these areas represented a small fraction of the overall biomass within the areas; and 4) the number of test sets was kept to the minimum amount necessary to determine roe quality for a potential commercial opening.

An opening of the Sitka Sound herring sac roe fishery occurred today from 9:45 a.m. until 6:30 p.m. Open areas for this fishery included the waters south of 57°02.88' N lat, north of 57°01.95' N lat, west of 135°16.61' W long, and east of 135°20.21' W long, and the waters south of 57°00.81' N lat and east of 135°21.93' W long.

Harvest from the fishery conducted on March 31 was approximately 2,100-tons of herring. The estimated cumulative harvest through March 31 is approximately 8,000-tons of herring. Harvest estimates from today's fishery will be included in the next fishery update.

The next aerial survey is scheduled for Friday, April 2, and the next fishery update will be released after aerial and vessel surveys are completed.

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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