



Advisory Announcement

For Immediate Release: April 2, 2021

CONTACTS:

Tim Sands and Jordan Head,
(907) 842-5227
Travis Elison and Aaron Tiernan
(907) 246-3341

BRISTOL BAY 2021 COMMERCIAL SALMON FISHING OUTLOOK

INTRODUCTION

This document provides general information to fishermen, processors, and the public concerning the upcoming Bristol Bay salmon season. Included is the general framework for management of each of the five major districts and the 2021 salmon forecast.

During the season, Bristol Bay salmon fishing announcements are broadcast on marine VHF channel 07A. Current fishing announcements are aired on local radio stations—KAKN and KDLG. As conditions in the fishery change, for the most current information, fishermen should stand by at regular announcement times: 9:00 a.m., 12:00 noon, 3:00 p.m., 6:00 p.m., and 8:00 p.m., unless otherwise stated. Information is also available via telephone; for east-side fisheries (Naknek-Kvichak, Egegik, and Ugashik), dial 246-INFO (4636), for west-side fisheries (Nushagak and Togiak) dial 842-5226. Fishermen are asked to note that regular office hours at the Dillingham ADF&G office will be 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. Monday thru Friday. From June 15 to July 16, the Dillingham office will be open 7 days a week from 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. In King Salmon, the office hours are as follows: June 1 to June 15 and after July 16: 8:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m., and 1:00 p.m. to 4:30 p.m., closed for lunch and weekends. From June 16 to July 16: 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. seven days per week.

ADF&G Forms

Due to COVID-19, we ask that forms required for fishery participation be submitted electronically and well in advance of the season when possible.

Regarding district registration cards: set gillnet permit holders are only required to fill out and return set gillnet registration cards if they fish in the Nushagak District. Drift gillnet permit holders must fill out and return district registration cards prior to commercial fishing in any district in Bristol Bay. PDF files of district registration cards, permit holder agent authorization forms, and dual drift registration forms are posted online on the ADF&G Bristol Bay homepage and can be printed, completed, then mailed to the address on the printout, or submitted electronically to Dillingham at tim.sands@alaska.gov and karen.brito@alaska.gov or King Salmon at travis.elison@alaska.gov and mary.emery@alaska.gov. If electronic submission or mail submission is not possible, forms will be available May 1 and may be submitted to Anchorage,

King Salmon, or Dillingham office personnel. These resources are available online at:

<http://www.adfg.alaska.gov/index.cfm?adfg=commercialbyareabristolbay.salmon#management>

Inseason Fishery Information

Fishery updates, announcements, catch and escapement information, and Port Moller Test Fishery genetic stock composition estimates will be available at:

<http://www.adfg.alaska.gov/index.cfm?adfg=commercialbyareabristolbay.salmon>

The Port Moller Test Fishery daily catch updates and interpretations of the data will be posted at the following web site once the project becomes operational on June 10:

<https://www.bbsri.org/port-moller-test-fishery>

Alaska Wildlife Troopers – Summer 2021 Outlook – Bristol Bay

Enforcement priorities:

- The department is concerned about underreporting of king salmon harvested in the Bristol Bay fishery. Tenders can expect to be boarded and checked for undocumented king salmon on their vessels. All salmon, including king and coho, are required by regulation to be reported on fish tickets at the time of delivery even when taken but not sold - see 5AAC 39.130 and 5AAC 06.377(b) for details.
- Continued strong focus on fishing district lines and open/closed fishing periods in all districts using all available assets.
- Routine boarding of drift gillnet and processor vessels as well as beach patrols to verify licensing and permitting regulations are met. Fishermen and processors are reminded that at the time of delivery of fish, a fish ticket must be generated and must include the signature of a company representative and the full name and signature of the CFEC permit holder (BOTH permit holders if dual drift operation). The permit holder(s) must be present at the time of delivery in order to sign the fish ticket. Crew members cannot sign fish tickets for permit holders. Fish tickets also must include the number or pounds of fish, by species, retained by a commercial fisherman for that person's own use.
- Continued enforcement of vessel and gear identification markings. Fishermen should review 5AAC 06.334, 5AAC 06.343, AAC 39.119, and 5AAC 39.280. In part, this covers buoy and cork markings in addition to vessel markings for both drift and set gillnet fishermen.
- Fishermen are reminded to review regulations on gillnet specifications and operations. Be aware that it is prohibited by regulation to be fishing a drift gillnet when the net, or vessel to which it is attached, is grounded.
- You must report the loss of a gillnet, or portion of a gillnet, directly to a local ADF&G department office in Dillingham or King Salmon within 15 hours of the gear loss.
- Drift fishermen are also reminded that when registering or reregistering (changing districts) under 5AAC 06.370 with an agent authorization on file, the CFEC permit holders are still responsible for ensuring that the registration was accomplished by their agent.
- Continued enforcement of state boating safety laws in cooperation with the U.S. Coast Guard.

- Permit holders are reminded that skiffs and documented vessels may need current DMV registrations.

SALMON OUTLOOK

BAYWIDE

The 2021 Bristol Bay inshore sockeye salmon run is forecasted to be approximately 50.0 million fish. Based on the forecast and using the midpoints of the lower or upper portion of escapement goal ranges, depending on forecasted run size, 36.4 million fish are potentially available for commercial inshore harvest (Table 1). The department manages fisheries based on inseason information regarding abundance. The inseason management approach uses a suite of assessment tools to provide information on abundance and run timing in each district, and that information will be used by the department to determine fishing opportunity.

The commercial salmon season in Bristol Bay opens June 1 by regulation. Fishing in eastside districts and the Togiak District will be allowed using a weekly schedule that varies by section. The schedules are in place to balance fishing opportunity with escapement in the early part of the season, particularly for king salmon. As each run develops and sockeye salmon run characteristics become defined within individual districts, fishing time will be adjusted accordingly. In the Nushagak District, management will focus on king salmon in the early part of the season, and switch to sockeye salmon management as abundance dictates.

2021 Regulatory Changes and Board of Fisheries

There have been no regulatory changes for the Bristol Bay salmon fishery in the last year. The Board of Fisheries meeting originally scheduled for December 2021 has been delayed until 2022 due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. With this delay, the proposal deadline has been extended until April 11, 2022.

NAKNEK-KVICHAK DISTRICT

An inshore run of approximately 17.0 million sockeye salmon is expected for the Naknek-Kvichak District in 2021. Based on the forecast, the projected harvest in the Naknek-Kvichak District is approximately 9.0 million sockeye salmon: 2.2 million from the Kvichak River, 1.3 million from the Alagnak River, and 5.4 million from the Naknek River (Table 1). Sockeye salmon returning to the Naknek-Kvichak District are predicted to be 47% age-1.2, 45% age-1.3, 5% age-2.2, and 3% age-2.3 fish.

The Naknek River escapement goal range is 800,000 to 2.0 million sockeye salmon. The Kvichak River escapement goal range is 2.0 million to 10.0 million sockeye salmon. The Alagnak River escapement goal is a minimum of 210,000 sockeye salmon. Escapements will be managed within the lower or upper portions of the escapement goals proportional to the run size based on the preseason forecast and inseason assessment of run size.

Fishing in the Naknek-Kvichak District will be open four days per week from 9:00 a.m. Monday to 9:00 a.m. Friday, beginning 9:00 a.m. Tuesday, June 1 and ending 9:00 a.m. Friday, June 25. Drift gillnets will be restricted to fishing in the Naknek Section only, while set gillnets will be allowed to fish in the entire Naknek-Kvichak District. From June 25 until July 17, fishing periods will be based on sockeye salmon escapements, abundance in the district, and gear group harvest percentages. District test fishing for inseason management may be conducted periodically depending on run characteristics. As in previous years, some openings could occur on short notice.

EGEGIK DISTRICT

The 2021 forecasted inshore run for the Egegik River is approximately 11.0 million sockeye salmon. With an escapement goal of 800,000 to 2.0 million fish, the potential surplus of fish available for harvest is 9.3 million (Table 1). Approximately 40% of the run is expected to be age-1.2 fish, followed by age-2.2 (32%), age-1.3 (19%), and age 2.3 (18%).

In 2021, separate gear openings and extensions will be used to adjust harvest in an attempt to achieve allocation percentages. Fishermen are reminded that regulations direct the department to avoid “to the extent practicable,” continuous fishing with set gillnet gear in the Egegik District, therefore, Egegik set gillnet fishermen should expect breaks in fishing.

Based on the Kvichak River sockeye salmon forecast, fishing will begin in the full Egegik District. The season will start with a three day per week schedule that will be in effect until June 18. The primary reason for the three day per week schedule is to provide for Chinook salmon escapement. Commercial fishing will be allowed in the Egegik District from 9:00 a.m. Monday, until 9:00 a.m. Wednesday and from 9:00 a.m. Thursday until 9:00 a.m. Friday. This schedule will begin at 9:00 a.m. Tuesday, June 1 and run through 9:00 a.m. Friday, June 18 for drift and set gillnet gear. After June 18, additional fishing time for both gear groups will be scheduled according to sockeye salmon run strength. As in previous years, some openings could occur on short notice.

In addition, subsistence fishing will be permitted in the waters of the Egegik commercial district from 9:00 a.m. Tuesday, June 1 until 9:00 a.m. Friday, June 18. The department will consider additional directed subsistence openings but will wait until inseason to announce the timing of those openings.

UGASHIK DISTRICT

The Ugashik River sockeye salmon forecasted inshore run for 2021 is 6.5 million fish. With an escapement goal of 500,000 to 1.4 million sockeye salmon, the potential surplus available for harvest is 5.4 million. Approximately 60% of the run is expected to be age-1.2, 33% age-1.3, 10% age-2.2, and 2% age-2.3 fish. Separate gear openings and adjusting length of commercial periods will be used to address allocation between gear groups in 2021.

Beginning 9:00 a.m. Tuesday, June 1, commercial fishing in the Ugashik District will be allowed on a 9:00 a.m. Monday to 9:00 a.m. Friday schedule through 9:00 a.m. Wednesday, June 23. With an expected run to the Kvichak River that exceeds the minimum escapement goal stipulated in regulation, fishing will begin in the full Ugashik District. Additional fishing time after June 23 will depend on fishery performance and run strength indicators. Permit holders should note that the regulation restricting opportunity to no more than 48 hours between June 16 and June 23 will not be in effect for 2021.

In addition, subsistence fishing will be permitted in the waters of the Ugashik commercial district from 9:00 a.m. Tuesday, June 1 until 09:00 a.m. Wednesday, June 23

As a reminder, Area T permit holders have the ability to fish in the inner portion of the Cinder River Section (river and lagoon) and the Inner Port Heiden Section during all months when open by regulation. For further information contact ADF&G in Port Moller at 907-375-2716. Area T permit holders who fish the Cinder River and Port Heiden sections and deliver their catch in the Ugashik District are reminded to report the section of catch on the appropriate fish tickets and note

that transporting fish from the sections mentioned above to deliver in the Ugashik District is not permitted during July.

WALRUS

It is unknown at this time whether walrus will return to the Cape Greig area. If they do, then the department will use the adjusted line as with previous years. If they do not, the district boundaries will revert to those in regulation at 5 AAC 06.200(d). The first announcement of the 2021 season will clarify which boundary will be in place for the summer.

NUSHAGAK DISTRICT

The Nushagak District sockeye salmon inshore run forecast is approximately 15.0 million fish; 2.6 million for escapement and 12.2 million potentially available for harvest in the commercial salmon fishery (Table 1). The total inshore run by river system is as follows: Wood River, 7.9 million (escapement goal range 700,000 to 1.8 million), Igushik River, 1.4 million (escapement goal range 150,000 to 400,000), and Nushagak River, 5.8 million (escapement goal range of 370,000 to 900,000). Approximately 48% of the forecasted run is expected to be age-1.2 sockeye salmon, < 2% age-2.2, 50% age-1.3, and < 1% age-2.3 fish.

Nushagak River king salmon are managed according to the *Nushagak-Mulchatna King Salmon Management Plan* (5 AAC 06.361). This plan directs the commercial fishery to be managed for an inriver goal of 95,000 king salmon. King salmon escapement in the Nushagak River did not meet the lower end of the escapement goal range in 2019 or 2020. A conservative approach to management of the commercial fishery in the Nushagak District will be used in 2021 to ensure the king salmon escapement goal is met. The department will closely monitor king salmon escapement and does not anticipate any directed king salmon openings in 2021.

The strategy for 2021 is to start directed sockeye salmon openings once there is at least 100,000 sockeye salmon counted past the Wood River tower. This is contingent upon the Nushagak River king salmon escapement projecting to be at least 95,000 fish. If king salmon escapement is projecting below 95,000 fish, the department may wait before opening directed sockeye salmon fishing to allow for additional king salmon to pass through the commercial fishing district. The department will also seek to avoid continuous fishing with set gillnets, which means there will likely be set gillnet closures in the Nushagak Section of the district late into the season if king salmon escapement is below necessary levels.

Openings will be scheduled based on sockeye salmon escapement levels in the Nushagak and Wood Rivers. Mesh size will be limited to 5.5 inches or smaller. If the Nushagak River sockeye salmon escapement decreases relative to desired levels, the department may provide advance notice and then impose a 4.75-inch mesh restriction in the Nushagak District. The department would also open the Wood River Special Harvest Area (WRSHA) at this time. Subsequently, if Nushagak River sockeye salmon escapement falls below the projected 370,000 fish curve, then the department may limit fishing to only the WRSHA to protect Nushagak River sockeye salmon. Commercial openings in the district may follow as allowed by escapement levels in the Nushagak River.

Igushik River sockeye salmon will be managed independently of the Nushagak and Wood River sockeye salmon stocks. Set gillnet fishing will begin in the Igushik Section when there is a market available. Initial openings will be 8 hours per day and additional time will be added if large harvests

or escapement information indicate more time is warranted. Drift gillnet openings in the Igushik Section will be added as needed to control sockeye salmon escapement. Igushik River sockeye salmon returns can be quite variable relative to forecasted run strength. Management will incorporate a readiness to respond with increasing early set gillnet openings and attempt to maintain the 6% sockeye salmon harvest allocation to the Igushik Section set gillnet group by only adding drift gillnet openings as needed.

The department will switch to pink and coho salmon management within the Nushagak District around July 23, when sockeye salmon harvest decreases. Nushagak sonar counts will cease approximately July 25. After that, management decisions will be based on catch per unit effort, subsistence reports, and possibly aerial surveys.

District test fishing for inseason management may be conducted periodically depending on run characteristics. Permit holders interested in test fishing in the Nushagak District should contact Tim Sands in Dillingham at (907) 842-5227.

TOGIAC DISTRICT

The 2021 inshore run of Togiak River sockeye salmon is forecast to be approximately 800,000 fish with 600,000 sockeye salmon potentially be available for commercial harvest. The escapement goal range is 120,000 to 270,000 sockeye salmon. Approximately 38% of the run is expected to be age 1.2; 1% of the run is expected to be age 2.2; 61% is expected to be age 1.3; and <1% is expected to be age 2.3.

Unlike other fishing districts in Bristol Bay that require emergency orders to announce fishing periods, Togiak District follows a regular weekly schedule that allows fishing in Togiak Bay Section four days per week, fishing in Kulukak Section two and a half days per week, and fishing in Matogak, Osviak, and Cape Peirce sections five days per week. Following the *Registration and Reregistration* regulations, permit holders are restricted from fishing in the Togiak District until 9:00 a.m. July 27 if they have fished in any other district in Bristol Bay, and conversely, restricts permit holders from fishing in any other district until 9:00 a.m. July 27 if they have fished in the Togiak District. Regulation requires vessel transfers to be restricted in Togiak District similarly to the restriction of permit transfers. Regulation also prevents drift gillnet fishing effort near the Togiak River mouth through July 15 and restricts mesh size to 5.5 inches or smaller between June 15 and July 15 for the conservation of king salmon.

King salmon run strength to the Togiak River has been considered below average for several years. The department anticipates another poor king salmon run, and permit holders can expect emergency orders to reduce the weekly fishing schedule in the last two weeks of June in the Togiak River Section.

Harvest of coho salmon will be dependent on market presence. If a market for coho salmon is present, the department will continue to follow the regular weekly schedule unless it is determined that a more conservative management approach is needed.

Acknowledgements

The department would like to again thank stakeholders for funding assistance via the Bristol Bay Fisheries Collaborative (BBFC) in 2020. The BBFC began in 2016 as an agreement between ADF&G and the Bristol Bay Science and Research Institute (BBSRI) to work together with stakeholders to restore a world class fisheries management system and raise funds to support and

maintain it. This agreement is supported by ADF&G, the Bristol Bay Regional Seafood Development Association (BBRSDA), processors, municipalities, villages, support industries, individual setnet fishermen, and other stakeholders. The annual report for 2020, a list of organizations that committed financial support to the BBFC, and additional information about this BBFC agreement can be found at <https://www.bbsri.org/bbfc>.

In 2020, BBSRI and BBRSDA again funded a second test boat in the Port Moller Test Fishery. The *R/V Ocean Cat* was to target Port Moller offshore of the traditional test fishing stations. However, due to mechanical issues, the *R/V Pandalus* did not operate in 2020, unexpectedly reducing the planned two-vessel program to one. Soon after learning the *R/V Pandalus* would not show up, BBSRI chartered the *F/V Americanus* to provide support to the *R/V Ocean Cat* and helping to salvage the most from the 2020 Port Moller program.

The department would also like to thank those processors and Bristol Bay communities who provided access for our sampling technicians to collect data last season. We ask for your continued cooperation as we work to keep everyone healthy and safe during the COVID-19 pandemic, while still being able to collect critical information needed to effectively manage the fishery.

COVID-19

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/>.

Table 1.–Forecast of total run, escapement, and harvest of major age classes of sockeye salmon returning to Bristol Bay river systems in 2021.

DISTRICT	River	Millions of sockeye salmon							South Peninsula ^a	BB Inshore
		Forecasted production by age class				Total	Forecasted			
		1.2	2.2	1.3	2.3		Escapement	Harvest		
NAKNEK-KVICHAK										
	Kvichak	3.21	0.55	2.54	0.07	6.37	4.00	2.24	0.13	6.24
	Alagnak	1.70	0.12	1.84	0.09	3.75	2.35	1.32	0.07	3.67
	Naknek	3.19	0.27	3.45	0.32	7.23	1.70	5.39	0.14	7.09
	Total	8.10	0.94	7.82	0.48	17.35	8.05	8.95	0.35	17.00
EGEGIK										
		4.33	3.51	2.05	1.29	11.18	1.70	9.26	0.22	10.96
UGASHIK										
		3.89	0.64	1.97	0.16	6.66	1.18	5.35	0.13	6.52
NUSHAGAK										
	Wood	5.31	0.12	2.47	0.04	7.94	1.53	6.26	0.16	7.79
	Igushik	0.39	0.01	0.94	0.01	1.35	0.28	1.05	0.03	1.32
	Nushagak	1.48	0.03	4.17	0.02	5.76 ^b	0.77	4.88	0.11	5.65
	Total	7.19	0.15	7.59	0.07	15.06	2.57	12.19	0.30	14.76
TOGIAC										
		0.31	0.01	0.50	0.00	0.82	0.20	0.60 ^c	0.02	0.80
BRISTOL BAY										
		23.82	5.25	19.93	2.01	51.06	13.69	36.35	1.02	50.04
		47%	10%	39%	4%	100%				

Note: This table is a summary. Slight differences may appear due to rounding.

^a Projected harvest is based on the current 5-year running average exploitation rate of 2.0%.

^b Nushagak River forecast total includes approximately 52,000 age-0.3 and age-1.4 fish.

^c Forecasts for Kulukak, Kanik, Osviak, and Matogak river systems are not included. These systems contribute approximately 50,000 sockeye salmon to Togiak District harvest each year.