



Advisory Announcement

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SITKA SOUND HERRING FISHERY UPDATE # 18

Today's aerial survey of Sitka Sound covered an area from Windy Passage to St. John Baptist Bay and from Silver Bay to Shoals Point. Weather and visibility were good with cloudy skies, occasional snow flurries, and 10-knot winds. Herring predators were scattered throughout the area with whales and sea lions mostly concentrated close to shore from Shoals Point to the Siganaka Islands. Whales were seen bubble-net feeding near Jamestown Bay. Large schools of herring were seen from the air outside of Deep Inlet and by Whiting Harbor. No significant spawning was seen in the area aside from a small spot spawn 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 Entry Point. 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. Smaller scattered schools were noted in Redoubt Bay and Windy Passage. In the afternoon, scattered schools of herring were observed close to the shoreline from Halibut Point to Watson Point and large schools were located near Battery Island and within Whiting Harbor.

One successful test set was conducted today; the results were:

- 7:43 a.m., Indian River, 100-ton set, mature roe – 9.6%, average weight–112 g, and 44% 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 set 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, furthermore, numerous schools of herring were observed within and adjacent to the regulatory closed waters during the afternoon vessel survey conducted on April 1 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 9:30 a.m. until 1:30 p.m. in two areas: 1) 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 2) the waters south of 57°00.81' N lat and east of 135°21.93' W long.

Harvest from the fishery conducted on April 1 was approximately 1,500-tons of herring. The estimated cumulative harvest through April 1 is approximately 9,500-tons of herring. Harvest estimates from today's fishery will be included in the next fishery update.

The next aerial survey is scheduled for Saturday, April 3, 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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