



Advisory Announcement

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SITKA SOUND HERRING FISHERY UPDATE # 19

Today's aerial survey of Sitka Sound covered an area ranging south to Lodge Island, north to Sukoi Inlet, and west to St. Lazaria Island. Weather and visibility were excellent with partly cloudy skies, and 5-knot winds. Herring predators were scattered throughout the area with whales and sea lions mostly concentrated close to shore along the southern and eastern shores of Kruzof Island, and south of St. Lazaria Island. In addition, whales were seen bubble-net feeding near Jamestown Bay. A number of large herring schools were seen from the air south of town around Deep Inlet and near West Crawfish Inlet. No significant spawning was seen in the area; however, a small area of spot spawn was seen along the eastern shoreline of Kruzof Island at Mountain Point. A second aerial survey was conducted in the afternoon to investigate additional spawn near the earlier observed spot spawn. The spot spawn observed earlier had expanded but was still confined to Mountain Point and no additional spawn was observed. Numerous large schools of herring were observed from Shoals Point to Brent's Beach, in Promisla and Eastern bays, and in the Siginaka Islands. Whales and sea lions were observed scattered through this area in shallow water actively feeding.

Boat surveys conducted by department vessels located a very large biomass of herring south of town from Crescent Harbor to Entry Point. Numerous large schools of herring were also observed in Aleutkina Bay. A comprehensive vessel survey was not conducted north of Watson Point this morning. Numerous large schools of herring were observed in the state and federal regulatory closed waters extending from Eliason Harbor to Makhnati Island, west of the airport, and beyond into the islands south of the airport. In the afternoon, the vessel survey observed a large biomass of herring in shallow waters from Fred's Creek to Brent's Beach and extending into Hayward Strait.

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

- 9:30 a.m., Indian River, 100-ton set, mature roe – 9.6%, average weight–106 g.

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 state and federal regulatory closed waters extending from Eliason Harbor to Makhnati Island, west of the airport, and beyond into the islands south of the airport; 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 11:30 a.m. until 2:00 p.m. in 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°18.86' W long, and from 11:30 a.m. until 3:45 p.m. in the waters south of 57°00.81' N lat and east of 135°21.93' W long.

Harvest from the fishery conducted on April 2 was approximately 1,200-tons of herring. The estimated cumulative harvest through April 2 is approximately 10,700-tons of herring. Harvest estimates from today's fishery will be included in the next fishery update.

The next aerial survey is scheduled for Sunday, April 4, 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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