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## **Advisory Announcement**

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# **UPPER COOK INLET**

## **2021 OUTLOOK FOR COMMERCIAL SALMON FISHING**

### **Sockeye Salmon Forecast**

A run of approximately 4.4 million sockeye salmon is forecasted to return to Upper Cook Inlet (UCI) in 2021, with an expected harvest by all user groups of 2.4 million fish. The commercial fishery harvest for UCI in 2021 is estimated to be approximately 1.6 million sockeye salmon, which is 1.1 million fish less than the 20-year average annual commercial sockeye salmon harvest of 2.7 million fish.

The sockeye salmon run forecast for the Kenai River is approximately 2.3 million, which is 1.3 million less than (36%) the 20-year average run of 3.6 million fish. In 2021, the predominant age classes are projected to be age 1.3 (72%), age 1.2 (16%), and age 2.3 (5%). The 10-year mean absolute percent error (MAPE) for the set of models used for the 2021 Kenai River sockeye salmon forecast is 17%.

The Kasilof River sockeye salmon run forecast is 881,000 fish, which is 12% less than the 20-year average of 986,000 fish. The predominant age classes in the run forecast are age 1.3 (44%), age 1.2 (44%), and age 2.2 (8%). The 10-year MAPE for the set of models used for the 2020 Kasilof River sockeye salmon run forecast is 22%.

The Susitna River sockeye salmon run forecast of 436,000 is 16% greater than the 10-year average of 377,000 fish. This forecast was derived using mean return per spawner by age class and mark-recapture estimates of spawner abundance for brood years 2006–2014. The 5-year MAPE for this forecast method is 26%. The predominant age classes in the 2020 Susitna River sockeye salmon run forecast are age 1.2 (21%) and age 1.3 (53%).

The Fish Creek sockeye salmon run forecast is 92,000, which is 6,000 fish or 7% greater than the 20-year average run of 86,000 fish. The predominant age classes in the 2020 Fish Creek run forecast are age 1.2 (67%) and age 1.3 (18%). The 10-year MAPE for the Fish Creek sockeye salmon run forecast is 79%.

### **2021 Sockeye Salmon Forecasts and Escapement Goals**

System	Forecast	Goals <sup>a</sup>
Kenai River <sup>b,c</sup>	2,325,000	1,100,000–1,400,000
Kasilof River <sup>b,d</sup>	881,000	140,000–320,000
Susitna River	436,000	
Larson Lake	N/A	15,000–35,000
Chelatna Lake	N/A	20,000–45,000
Judd Lake	N/A	15,000–40,000
Fish Creek	92,000	15,000–45,000
Unmonitored Systems <sup>e</sup>	639,000	N/A
<b>Total</b>	<b>4,373,000</b>	

<sup>a</sup> Goals listed here are as follows: Kenai River: Inriver; Kasilof River: Biological Escapement Goal (BEG); Susitna River: SEG (weir goals); and Fish Creek: Sustainable Escapement Goal (SEG).

<sup>b</sup> Kenai River goal is DIDSON-based; Kasilof river is Aris-based.

<sup>c</sup> Kenai River SEG is 750,000–1,300,000 sockeye salmon.

<sup>d</sup> Kasilof River optimal escapement goal (OEG) is 140,000–370,000 sockeye salmon.

<sup>e</sup> Unmonitored systems are estimated to be 15% of monitored systems.

## **2021 Fishing Strategies**

### **Set Gillnet Salmon Fishery Overview and Management for Northern District**

- In 2020, total king salmon passage in the Deshka River was 10,638 and 2,424 in the Little Susitna River. The 2021 Deshka River preseason king salmon forecast of 11,464 fish suggests harvest will need to be limited to achieve the sustainable escapement goal (SEG) of 9,000–18,000 fish. Based on this low forecast, and recent low king salmon production throughout the Susitna Drainage, the Division of Sport Fish issued an Emergency Order (EO # 2-KS-2-07-21 and 2-KS-2-06-21) prohibiting retention of king salmon in all units of the Susitna River drainage and the Little Susitna River.
- As directed by the *Northern District King Salmon Management Plan* (NDKSMP), the 2021 directed king salmon commercial fishery in the Northern District (ND) will be restricted to 6-hour fishing periods in all subdistricts in response to the EO limiting the start of the 2021 Deshka River sport fishery to no retention. For the 2021 season, the commercial fishing periods affected by this restriction will be May 31, and June 7, 14, 21. Escapement of king salmon into the Deshka River will be closely monitored. If the run is stronger than expected and retention of king salmon is allowed in the Deshka River sport fishery, reestablishing 9 or 12 hour openings in the directed king salmon commercial fishery may occur.
- Beginning Monday, June 28, the ND set gillnet fishery will be managed per provisions found in the *Northern District Salmon Management Plan* (NDSMP). This plan provides for two 12-hour weekly fishing periods and a normal separation between nets of at least 600 feet.
- While Susitna River sockeye salmon were removed from stock of yield concern status at the 2020 Board of Fisheries meeting, restrictive actions to commercial fisheries that harvest this stock were retained in regulation. According to the NDSMP, the legal complement of gear in the ND set gillnet fishery may be reduced to either one or two nets per permit from July 20 through August 6 to conserve Susitna River sockeye salmon. However, in that portion of the General Subdistrict south of the Susitna River, options for gear reduction are limited to two nets per permit after July 30.
- The fishery will be closed for the season by EO when catch and effort cease ~ October 1.

### **Set Gillnet Salmon Fishery Overview and Management for the Chinitna Bay, Western, Kustatan, and Kalgin Island Subdistricts of the Central District**

- Chinitna Bay, Western, Kalgin Island, and Kustatan subdistrict management will generally follow regulatory fishing periods and schedules, except for that portion of the Western Subdistrict south of Redoubt Point, where fishing is often allowed three days per week based on increasing harvest rates of Crescent River sockeye salmon.

- The Kalgin Island Subdistrict may also be given up to one extra fishing period per week if the Packers Lake sockeye salmon assessment shows that the escapement goal is projected to be achieved.
- The fisheries will be closed for the season by EO when catch and effort cease ~ October 1.

### **ESSN and Central District Drift Gillnet fisheries Overview**

#### **ESSN; Upper Subdistrict Fishery**

- The 2021 preseason estimate for Kenai River late-run sockeye salmon is 2.3 million fish. If the Kenai River late-run king salmon optimal escapement goal (OEG) is projected to be achieved without sport fishery restrictions, inseason management of the east side set gillnet (ESSN) fishery will fall under the *Kenai River Late-Run Sockeye Salmon Management Plan* (KRLSSMP). For sockeye salmon runs 2.3–4.6 million fish, the KRLSSMP stipulates ADF&G shall meet the SEG range of 750,000–1,300,000, achieve an inriver goal of 1.1 to 1.4 million fish, and two regular fishing periods including up to 51 hours of EO time are allowed each week. A 36 hour Thurs-Fri closure window and a 24 hour Monday to Wednesday closure window will be applied.
- The 2021 Kenai River late-run king salmon forecast projects a total run of 18,406 large (>75cm mid eye to tail fork) fish. The OEG for Kenai River late-run king salmon is 15,000–30,000 large fish. If the run returns as forecasted, it would rank as the 5th lowest run, measured as 32nd out of 36 years, but would be approximately 50% greater than the 2020 preliminary total run estimate of 12,216 large fish. Based on the forecasted run size and if harvest rates are average in both sport and commercial fisheries, the Kenai River late-run king salmon large fish OEG may not be met without a reduction in sport and commercial harvest of this stock. If the Kenai River sport fishery is restricted to either no bait, no retention, or no retention of fish > 34 inches, then management of the entire ESSN fishery from June 20 through August 15 falls under provisions found in the KRLKSMP. The paired restrictions include fishing hour reductions, and mandatory gear restrictions. Additionally, all fishing periods under the KRLKSMP in any section may now be restricted to within 600 feet of shore, but hours fished do not count toward weekly hourly restrictions.

#### **Central District Drift Gillnet Fishery**

- The department manages the UCI drift gillnet fleet primarily under the guidance of the *Central District Drift Gillnet Fishery Management Plan* (CDDGFMP; 5 AAC 21.353). The purpose of this management plan is to ensure adequate escapement of salmon into northern Cook Inlet drainages and to provide the department with management guidelines.
- The drift gillnet fishery opens the third Monday in June or June 19, whichever is later.
- Drift gillnet openings generally follow regulatory Monday/Thursday fishing periods; 7 a.m. to 7 p.m.
- Drift gillnet fishery openings are stipulated in the CDDGFMP by date and sockeye salmon abundance.
- Additional fishing time is limited to the regular or expanded Kenai and Kasilof sections and Anchor Point Section dependent upon Kenai and Kasilof river sockeye salmon abundance and time of the season.

**Inseason Management of Upper Subdistrict ESSN and Central District Drift Gillnet Fisheries****ESSN Fishery****Kasilof Section Prior to July 8**

- The fishing season in the Kasilof Section (Figure 1; statistical areas 244-21, 244-22, and 244-31) opens on the first regular period on or after June 25, except that, if 30,000 fish are estimated to be in the Kasilof River any day after June 20, the fishery shall open on that day. If no restrictions are announced for the Kenai River sport king salmon fishery, the *Kasilof River Salmon Management Plan* (KRSMP) is in effect; fishing time will be allowed for Mon/Thurs regulatory 12-hour fishing periods, and up to 48 additional EO hours per week, with a 36-hour Friday no-fishing window.

**North Kalifornsky Beach (NKB) Statistical Area July 1 to August 15.**

- The NKB statistical area (Figure 1; statistical area 244-32) may be open within 600 feet of mean high tide any time after July 1 if the Kasilof Section is open and the Kenai and East Foreland sections are closed.
- From July 1 to July 8, all NKB openings shall be restricted to within 600 feet of shore and limited to nets with a mesh size restriction of no more than 4.75 inches and no more than 29 meshes deep.

**Kasilof, Kenai and East Forelands Sections After July 8**

- The Kenai and East Forelands sections fishing season opens on or after July 8.
- Management of the ESSN fishery will be based on the projected escapement of Kenai River late-run large king salmon, and Kenai and Kasilof river sockeye salmon passage levels. From July 8 to August 15, if the Kenai River late-run king salmon sport fishery is unrestricted, then management of the Upper Subdistrict set gillnet fishery will follow provisions in the KRLSSMP with Mon/Thurs regular fishing periods and up to 51 additional EO hours per week. A 36 hour Thurs-Fri closure and a 24 hour Monday to Wednesday closure window will apply.
- For the 2021 season, paired restriction provisions in the KRLKSMP will likely be in effect for at least the start of the fishery, allowing a maximum of between 24 to 48 (dependent on restrictions to sport fishery) hours of fishing time per week, by EO only. All fishing periods restricted by the KRLKSMP shall include gear restrictions as per 5AAC 21.359 (e)(3)(G), and fisheries restricted to within 600 feet of shore may be allowed in all stat areas, without gear or time restriction.
- The department will formally reassess the UCI sockeye salmon run after July 20.
- From August 1 to 15, management of the ESSN fishery is based upon meeting Kenai and Kasilof rivers sockeye salmon escapement objectives and the king salmon OEG in the Kenai River. If the king salmon sport fishery is restricted on July 31, the ESSN fishery will be restricted to a maximum of 36 hours of fishing time per week, by EO only, with no mandatory Friday no-fishing window. Subsequently, if at any time before August 15 the king salmon OEG is achieved in the Kenai River, the restrictive provisions of the KRLKSMP will be lifted and the management of the ESSN fishery will follow the KRLSSMP. This would entail regular

Mon/Thurs fishing periods and up to 51 hours of optional EO fishing time at run sizes > 2.3 million Kenai River sockeye salmon (except after August 11 when only Mon/Thurs regulatory fishing periods are allowed).

- The ESSN fishery closes no later than August 15. However, the season may close any time after July 31 if during two consecutive fishing periods the sockeye salmon harvest is less than one percent of the season total. The “one-percent rule” applies separately to the Kasilof Section and the Kenai/East Foreland sections and all fishing periods after July 31 will be used for the one-percent calculation.

### **Central District Drift Gillnet Fishery**

- The 2021 run size for Kenai River late run sockeye salmon is projected to be 2.3 million fish, which leads to the following management provisions in the drift gillnet fishery:
  - Prior to July 8,
    - Regulations specify 12-hour districtwide regular Mon/Thurs fishing periods.
  - From July 9 through July 15,
    - For runs > 2.3 million Kenai River sockeye salmon, drift gillnet fishing is restricted for both regular fishing periods to the Expanded Kenai and Expanded Kasilof sections (Figure 2), and Drift Gillnet Area 1 (Figure 3). One additional fishing period may be opened in the Expanded Sections and Area 1.
    - All additional fishing time is allowed only in the Expanded Kenai and Expanded Kasilof sections.
  - From July 16 through July 31,
    - For runs > 2.3 million Kenai River sockeye salmon, fishing during one regulatory period will be opened in the Expanded Kenai, Kasilof, and the Anchor Point Sections and Area 1 and the other in the Expanded Ken/Kas and Anchor Point Sections of the Upper Subdistrict. Any additional time shall be restricted to one or more of the Expanded Kenai Section, the Expanded Kasilof Section, and the Anchor Point Section.
  - From August 1 through August 15,
    - Regulatory Mon/Thurs fishing periods will be restricted to one or more of the following: Expanded Kenai Section, Expanded Kasilof Section, Anchor Point Section, or Drift Gillnet Area 1. Any additional fishing time outside regular fishing periods will be dependent upon meeting sockeye and coho salmon escapement objectives but is limited to the Expanded Kenai or Kasilof and Anchor Point sections.
    - Two one-percent rules apply to drift gillnet fishing in August. If the entire ESSN fishery is closed per its own one-percent rule, or if the department determines that less than one-percent of the season total drift gillnet sockeye salmon harvest has been taken per fishing period, for two consecutive fishing periods by drift gillnets, then regular fishing periods will be restricted to Drift Gillnet Areas 3 and 4.

- The department is now using all open periods regardless of the area(s) open to fishing to calculate the drift gillnet one-percent rule.
- From August 16 until closed by EO,
  - Drift Areas 3 and 4 are open for regular periods.
  - Chinitna Bay may be opened, by EO only, based upon chum salmon escapement objectives being met or when the chum salmon run is complete.
- Drift fisheries close for the season by EO, when effort ceases, which is generally mid- to late-September.

### **Season Opening Dates**

Season opening dates in 2021 for the various fisheries around the inlet are as follows:

- *Northern District king salmon fishery*: May 31. The area from the wood chip dock to the Susitna River remains closed for the directed king salmon fishery in 2021.
- *Big River fishery*: June 2 and continuing through June 24, unless the 1,000 king salmon harvest limit is reached prior to that date. Weekly fishing periods are Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays from 7:00 a.m. to 7:00 p.m.
- *Western Subdistrict set gillnet fishery*: June 17.
- *Drift gillnet fishery*: June 21.
- *All remaining set gillnet fisheries, except the ESSN fishery*: June 28.
- *ESSN fishery*:
  - June 25 for the Kasilof Section (that portion south of the Blanchard Line). However, the fishery shall open any day on or after June 20 if 30,000 sockeye salmon are estimated to be in the Kasilof River.
  - The NKB stat area 244-32 may open after July 1 restricted to within 600 feet of shore with nets 29 meshes or less in depth and with mesh less than 4  $\frac{3}{4}$  inches.
  - The Kenai and East Forelands sections (that portion of the Upper Subdistrict north of the Blanchard Line) will open on Thursday, July 8. By regulation, the ESSN fishery closes on Thursday, August 12, 2021.

### **Set Gillnet Registration and Buoy Stickers**

All Cook Inlet setnet fishermen are required to register prior to fishing for one of three areas of Cook Inlet: 1) the Upper Subdistrict of the Central District; 2) the Northern District; or, 3) all remaining areas of Cook Inlet (Greater Cook Inlet). Once registered for one of these three areas, fishermen may fish only in the area for which they are registered for the remainder of the year. No transfers will be permitted. Dual set gillnet permit holders are required to register both permits in the same registration area. Set gillnet permit holders fishing in the Northern District or the Greater Cook Inlet area can

register at ADF&G offices in Soldotna, Homer, or Anchorage or by mail. Forms are available at area offices or on the department's Upper Cook Inlet commercial fishing homepage at: <http://www.adfg.alaska.gov/index.cfm?adfg=commercialbyareauci.salmon#/management>.

Fishermen wishing to register in person for the Upper Subdistrict must register in the **Soldotna ADF&G office** and must purchase buoy stickers at the time of registering. Electronic registration and buoy sticker purchasing, formerly offered by UCIERA, have been replaced online. Permit holders will need to create an ADF&G profile to access the new registration/sticker application. If fishermen have any questions about the new online registration process, please contact the Soldotna ADF&G office.

### **General information and Contact Numbers**

The UCI commercial fisheries information line will again be available by calling 262-9611. The most recent EO announcement is always available on the recorded message line and catch, escapement and test fishing information is included whenever possible. The same recording may be accessed at <http://www.adfg.alaska.gov/index.cfm?adfg=commercialbyareauci.main> and clicking on the UCI Commercial Fisheries Information Recording player.

All EO announcements are also faxed or emailed to processors as quickly as possible and posted at <http://www.adfg.alaska.gov/index.cfm?adfg=commercialbyareauci.salmon>. If you would like all EOs and News Releases emailed to you as soon as they are released, you can subscribe at this website for that service. For very general information, the Commercial Fisheries web page is found at <http://www.adfg.alaska.gov/index.cfm?adfg=fishingCommercial.main>.

If, during the summer, fishermen have information or questions concerning the commercial fishery, the Soldotna Division of Commercial Fisheries staff can be reached by phone at 262-9368, by fax at 262-4709, or by mail at 43961 Kalifornsky Beach Road, Suite B, Soldotna, 99669.

or

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### **COVID-19 Mandates**

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/>.



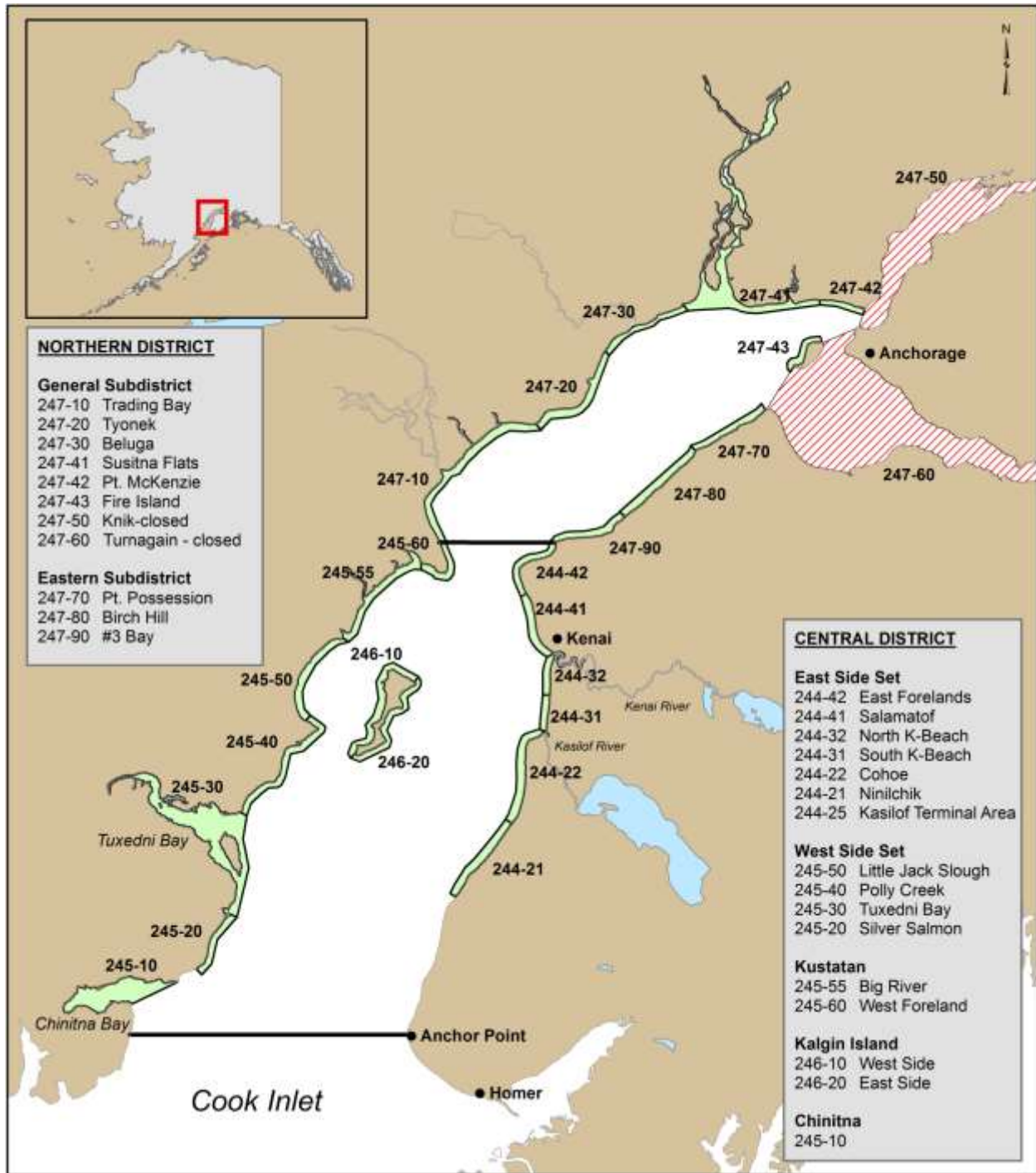


Figure 1. – Upper Cook Inlet commercial set gillnet statistical areas. The North Kalifornsky Beach (NKB) statistical area is 244-32.

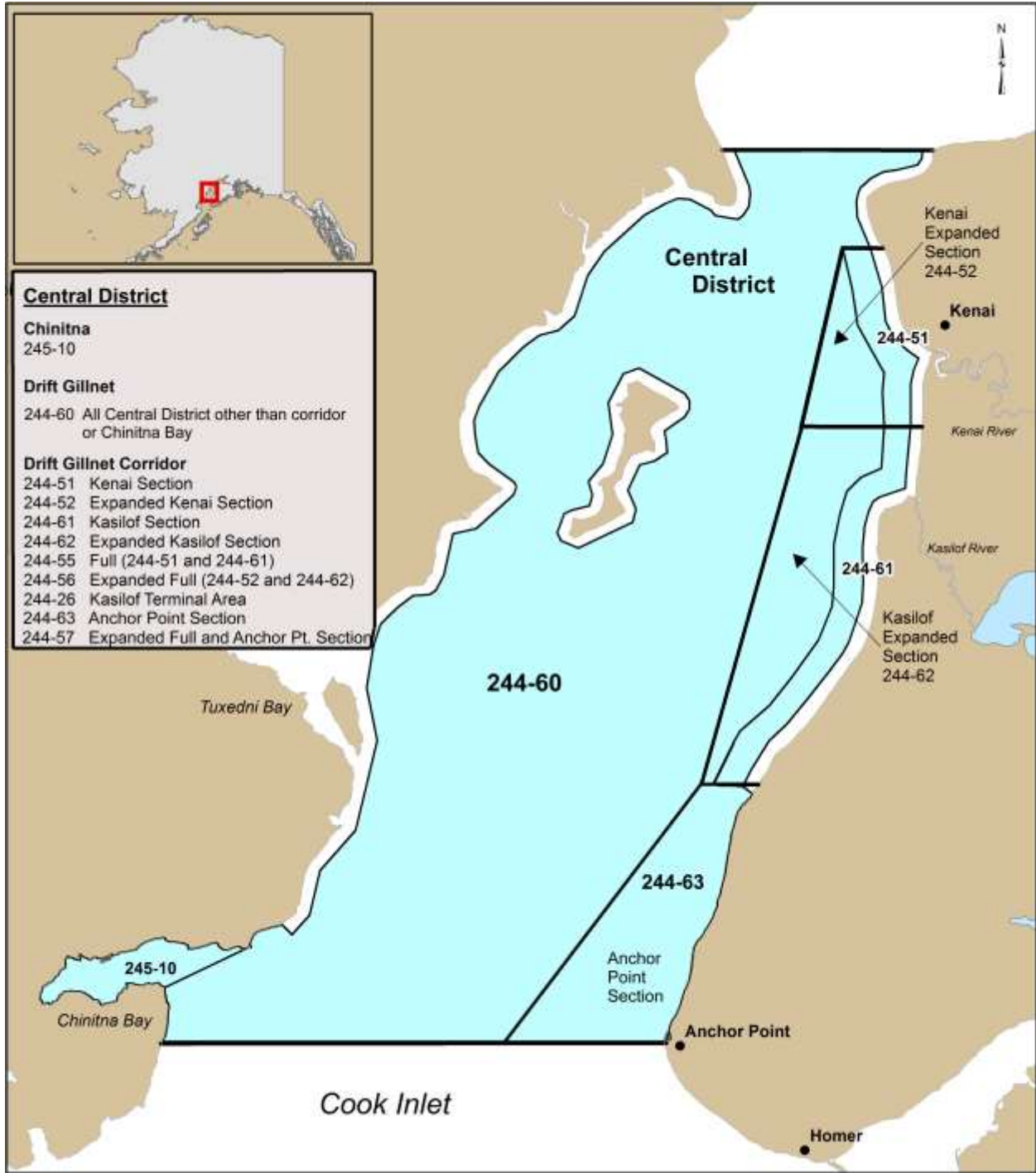


Figure 2. – Map of drift gillnet statistical areas.

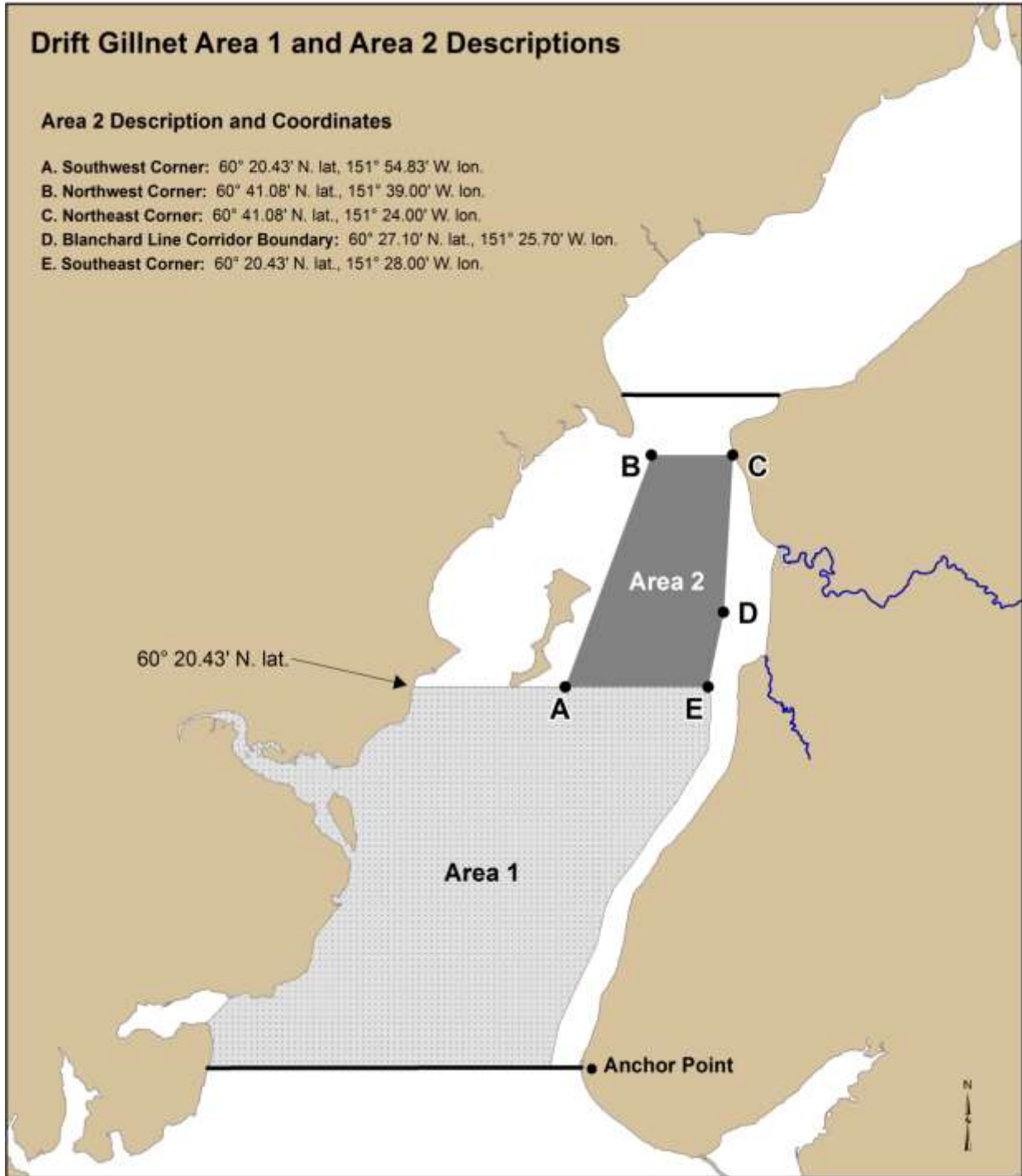


Figure 3.– Map of drift gillnet areas 1 and 2.

Latitude and Longitude are based on the North American Datum of 1983 (NAD 83), equivalent to the World Geodetic System 1984 (WGS 84).

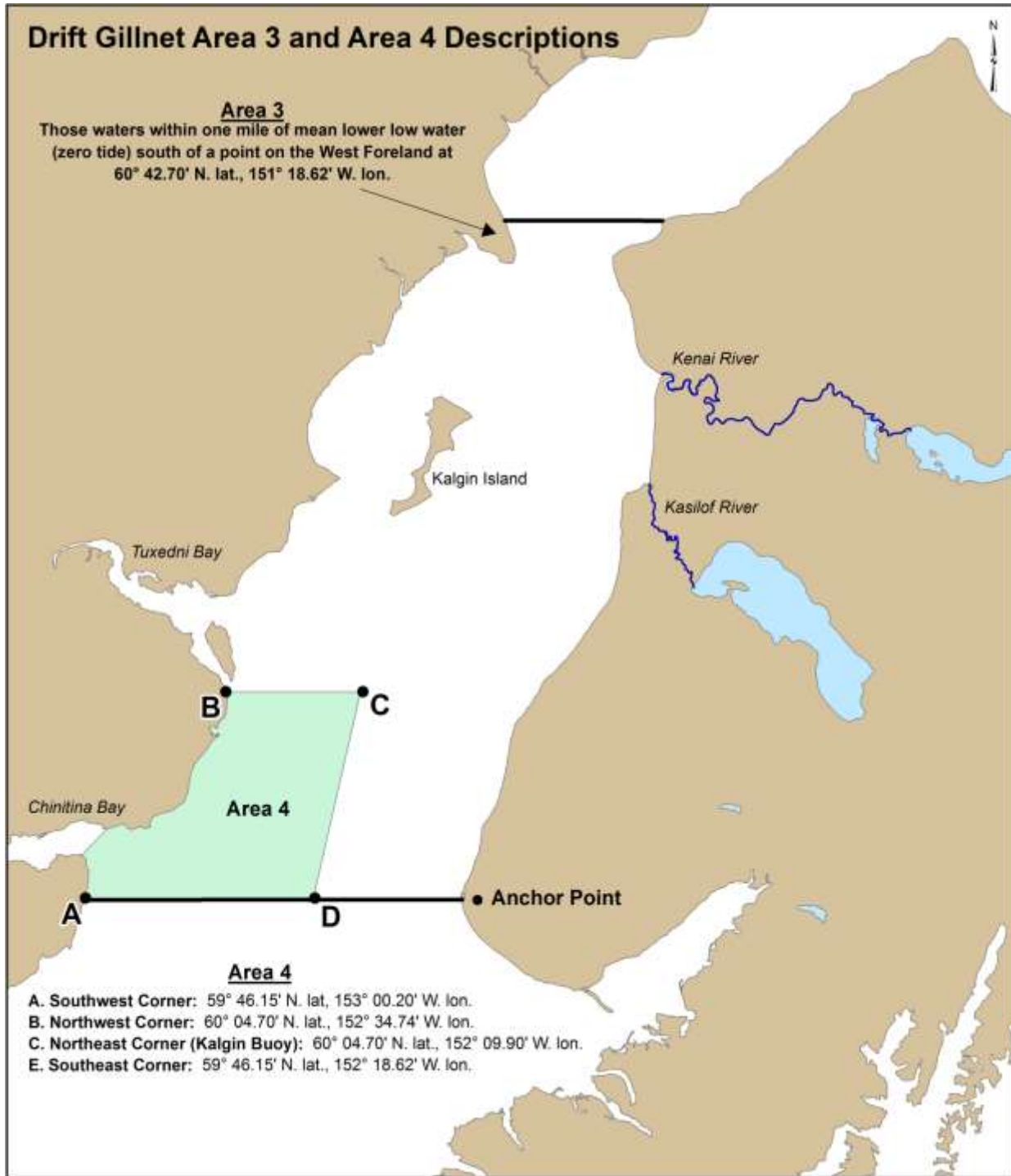


Figure 4.– Map of the drift gillnet areas 3 and 4; open after August 15.

Latitude and Longitude are based on the North American Datum of 1983 (NAD 83), equivalent to the World Geodetic System 1984 (WGS 84).