



Advisory Announcement

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SITKA SOUND HERRING FISHERY SUMMARY

This announcement is a summary of observations and activities of the 2023 Sitka Sound Sac Roe Herring fishery. The Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ADF&G) conducts aerial, vessel, and spawn deposition surveys to track herring activity and determine the extent and density of herring spawn for the Sitka Sound area. Random samples of herring were collected from active spawning areas and from commercial harvests for age, sex, and size composition analysis.

Aerial surveys were conducted by ADF&G from March 13 until April 29. Additional observations were made by local pilots who documented herring spawn from April 30 through May 1 and notified ADF&G with photos. Herring spawn was first observed in Sitka Sound on March 26. The primary herring spawning event for 2023 began on March 28 when 10.1 nautical miles (nmi) of active herring spawn was observed along the Kruzof Island shoreline, extending from Cape Edgecumbe to Shoals Point and further towards Fred's Creek. Spawning peaked on April 4 when 29.8 nmi of active herring spawn was documented. The last day of the primary spawn event was April 9; however, smaller areas of herring spawn were observed or reported through May 1. Surveys from skiffs were conducted April 10 and 11 to identify additional areas of herring spawn not observed during the aerial surveys. In total, ADF&G mapped 83.8 nmi of shoreline with herring spawn in 2023 (Figure 1) which is higher than both the 10-year (2013–2022) average of 66.7 nmi and the 40-year (1983–2022) average of 61.5 nmi.

Herring spawn was observed daily from April 1 to April 9 and on April 18 within the area closed to commercial fishing by regulation (commonly referred to as the “core subsistence area”). Of the total 83.8 nmi of mapped herring spawn in Sitka Sound, approximately 22.0 nmi of herring spawn was mapped within this area. Herring spawn also occurred in several other areas known to be commonly used for subsistence fishing, including Hayward Strait, Magoun Islands, Promisla Bay, Eastern Bay, and Siginaka Islands. Harvest estimates from the 2023 subsistence fishery should be available near the end of 2023.

A spawn deposition survey was conducted to estimate the total number of eggs deposited in Sitka Sound. The survey was comprised of ADF&G scientific divers completing 60 transects placed randomly throughout the observed extent of the spawn during April 11–15. Preliminary results indicate that herring egg deposition was high throughout much of the surveyed area, particularly along Kruzof Island, Hayward Strait, and the Magoun Islands areas. The highest egg deposition was observed along the southern and eastern Kruzof Island shoreline, similar to what was observed in 2020 and 2021. Egg deposition south of Sitka, in the Goddard area, was low to moderate.

The preliminary 2023 commercial herring sac roe fishery harvest was approximately 10,200-tons of herring with an average mature roe percentage of 10.8%. This year's harvest accounted for 34% of the 2023 guideline harvest level of 30,124 tons. The fishery was opened for 8 days between March 28 and April 7, with an average daily harvest of approximately 1,300 tons of herring and was closed April 11. Test sets (56 total) were conducted between March 14 and April 11. Test sets conducted between April 8 and April 11 indicated that the likelihood of high-quality herring for sac roe harvest being located was very low and processors participating in the fishery withdrew interest in continuing to search for commercial opportunity.

To estimate age composition and average size for the Sitka Sound herring population, both spawning herring and commercially harvested fish were sampled. Spawning herring were sampled using cast nets throughout the spawning area

and period, with a total of 42 samples collected. Herring sampled from commercial vessel sets were collected during fishery openings, with 24 samples collected. The herring samples will be analyzed in the coming months at the ADF&G Mark, Tag, and Age Laboratory and the final stock assessment results will be available with the 2024 forecast, later this year.

The daily herring spawn locations and photographs from 2023 will continue to be made available through the interactive herring survey map on the ADF&G website. The "Southeast Alaska 2023 Herring Surveys" map allows users to view all the data collected for each herring aerial survey throughout the 2023 season. The interactive maps are located on the department website at: <https://www.adfg.alaska.gov/index.cfm?adfg=commercialbyareasoutheast.herring#maps> or scan:



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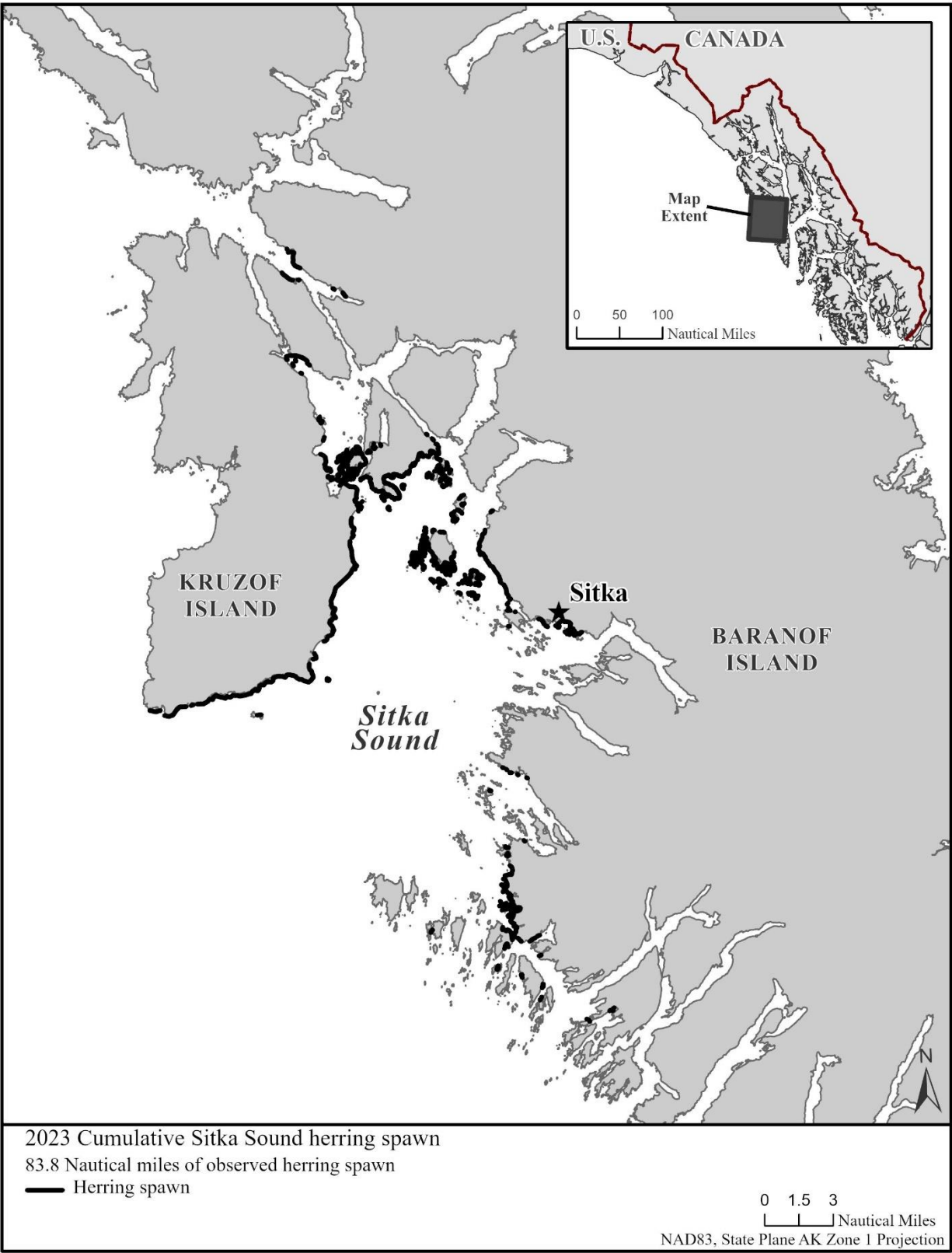


Figure 1. Cumulative Sitka Sound shoreline with observed herring spawn in 2023.