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Advisory Announcement

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2023 KOTZEBUE SOUND SALMON SEASON SUMMARY

COMMERCIAL SALMON FISHERY

In 2023, the commercial salmon season opened July 10 and closed by regulation on August 31. There were two buyers throughout most of the season: Copper River Seafoods and Arctic Circle Wild Salmon. Both buyers ceased operations prior to the regulatory closure with Arctic Circle Wild Salmon ending buying operations on August 16 and Copper River Seafoods stopping on August 22.

During the season, fishing was generally allowed 6 days a week with no periods scheduled on Saturdays due to transportation availability and to allow subsistence fishing with no commercial fishing occurring at the same time.

Effort was well below the historical average in the Kotzebue salmon fishery with 54 permits making deliveries. This low effort may have been the result of fewer commercial buyers compared to recent years, decreasing from three to two in 2023. Harvest rates were slightly below the most recent 5-year average during the first two weeks of the fishery, causing the department to manage more conservatively during the third week, restricting fishing schedules from 6 days per week for 8 hours per day, to 5 days per week for 9 hours per day. Stronger catch per unit effort in week three bolstered catch rates to above the recent 5-year average and commercial periods reverted to original fishing schedules until buying operations ceased on August 22. Season harvest totals were likely affected by mechanical breakdowns restricting buying operations from August 4 through August 10 and limits placed on fishermen by buyers due to transportation difficulties during part of the season.

Commercial salmon fishing gear is limited to set gillnets with an aggregate length of no more than 150 fathoms per permit holder in the Kotzebue District. Permit holders generally operate with nets anchored on/near the shore or set in deeper channels in the mud flats farther from shore. Most gear used in the district is 5-3/4 inch to 6-inch stretched mesh gillnet.

The 2023 commercial harvest of 141,781 chum salmon was below the 1962- 2022 average harvest of 232,662 chum salmon but within range of the historic catches prior to the large harvests since 2010. Additionally, 6 sockeye salmon and 16 sheefish were sold. There were 3 Chinook salmon,

9 sockeye salmon, 104 chum salmon, 17 pink salmon, 3 coho salmon, 31 Dolly Varden and 16 sheefish kept for personal use.

There were 54 permit holders that sold fish in 2023, which is well below the 1962-2022 average of 105 permits and likely effected by the reduced market availability (Figure 1 and Table 1). The highest daily fishing effort occurred on August 26 when 32 permit holders fished.

Chum salmon had an average weight of 7.9 pounds in 2023, slightly above last year's average weight of 7.6 pounds. There have only been 7 years in the commercial fishery history when the average weight has been below 8.0 pounds and five of those years have been since 2006.

A total of 1,120,630 pounds of chum salmon was sold at an average price of \$0.65 per pound. This year's average price was \$0.07 per pound more than the 2022 price of \$0.58 per pound. The total exvessel value for 2023 is \$733,061, which was near the historic average (Table 1).

ESCAPEMENT

Primary fishery management objectives are to provide adequate chum salmon escapement throughout the duration of the commercial fishery to ensure sustainability of the fishery and to provide for the subsistence priority. A test fishery conducted on the Kobuk River provides the only inseason escapement index of the Kotzebue Sound District. In 2023, high water resulted in limited fishing and reduced catches at the test fish project and estimates derived from the project are not useful as an index of abundance.

SUBSISTENCE SALMON FISHERY

No subsistence salmon surveys are scheduled. Residents who were contacted during the fishing season reported good catches of chum salmon.

Table 1.– Kotzebue District chum salmon catch and dollar value, 1962–2023.

Year	Total Catch	Number of Permits ^a	Average Catch per Permit Holder	Gross Value of Catch to Permit Holders ^b
1962	129,948	84	1,547	\$4,500
1963	54,445	61	893	\$9,140
1964	76,449	52	1,470	\$34,660
1965	40,025	45	889	\$18,000
1966	30,764	44	699	\$25,000
1967	29,400	30	980	\$28,700
1968	30,212	59	512	\$46,000
1969	59,335	52	1,141	\$71,000
1970	159,664	82	1,947	\$186,000
1971	154,956	91	1,703	\$200,000
1972	169,664	104	1,631	\$260,000
1973	375,432	148	2,537	\$925,000
1974	627,912	185	3,394	\$1,822,784
1975	563,345	267	2,110	\$1,365,648
1976	159,796	220	726	\$580,375
1977	195,895	224	875	\$1,033,950
1978	111,494	208	536	\$575,260
1979	141,623	181	782	\$990,263
1980	367,284	176	2,087	\$1,446,633
1981	677,239	187	3,622	\$3,246,793
1982	417,790	199	2,099	\$1,961,518
1983	175,762	189	930	\$420,736
1984	320,206	181	1,769	\$1,148,884
1985	521,406	189	2,759	\$2,137,368
1986	261,436	187	1,398	\$931,241
1987	109,467	160	684	\$515,000
1988	352,915	193	1,829	\$2,581,333
1989	254,617	165	1,543	\$613,823
1990	163,263	153	1,067	\$438,044
1991	239,923	142	1,690	\$437,948
1992	289,184	149	1,941	\$533,731
1993 ^c	73,071	114	641	\$235,061
1994	153,452	109	1,408	\$233,512
1995	290,730	92	3,160	\$316,031
1996	82,110	55	1,493	\$56,310
1997	142,720	68	2,099	\$187,978
1998	55,907	45	1,242	\$70,587
1999	138,605	60	2,310	\$179,781
2000	159,802	64	2,497	\$246,786
2001	211,672	66	3,207	\$322,650
2002	8,390	3	2,797	\$7,572
2003	25,763	4	6,441	\$26,377
2004	51,077	43	1,188	\$64,420
2005	75,971	41	1,853	\$124,820
Average 1962-2022	232,662	105	2,448	\$728,025

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Table 1–Page 2 of 2.

Year	Total Catch	Number of Permits ^a	Average Catch per Permit Holder	Gross Value of Catch to Permit Holders ^b
2006	137,961	42	3,301	\$229,086
2007	147,087	46	3,198	\$243,149
2008	190,550	48	3,970	\$385,270
2009	187,562	62	3,025	\$376,554
2010	270,343	67	4,035	\$860,125
2011	264,321	89	2,970	\$867,085
2012	227,965	83	2,747	\$567,664
2013	319,062	66	4,834	\$689,163
2014	636,187	94	6,768	\$2,879,016
2015	305,383	105	2,908	\$867,583
2016	400,417	86	4,656	\$1,123,248
2017	463,749	98	4,732	\$1,839,637
2018	695,153	95	7,317	\$2,279,477
2019	494,593	92	5,376	\$1,559,260
2020	149,808	68	2,203	\$542,308
2021	96,492	52	1,856	\$332,064
2022	475,624	65	7,317	\$2,107,610
2023	141,781	54	2,626	\$733,061
Average 1962-2022	232,662	105	2,448	\$728,025

^a During 1962–1966 and 1968–1971 figures represent the number of vessels licensed to fish in the Kotzebue District, not the number of permit holders.

^b Some estimates of fishery value between 1962 and 1981 include only chum salmon (and typically represents over 99% of the total value). Figures after 1981 represent the chum salmon value as well as incidental species such as Dolly Varden, whitefish, and other salmon.

^c Includes 2,000 chum salmon and \$3,648 from the Sikusuilaq Springs hatchery terminal fishery.

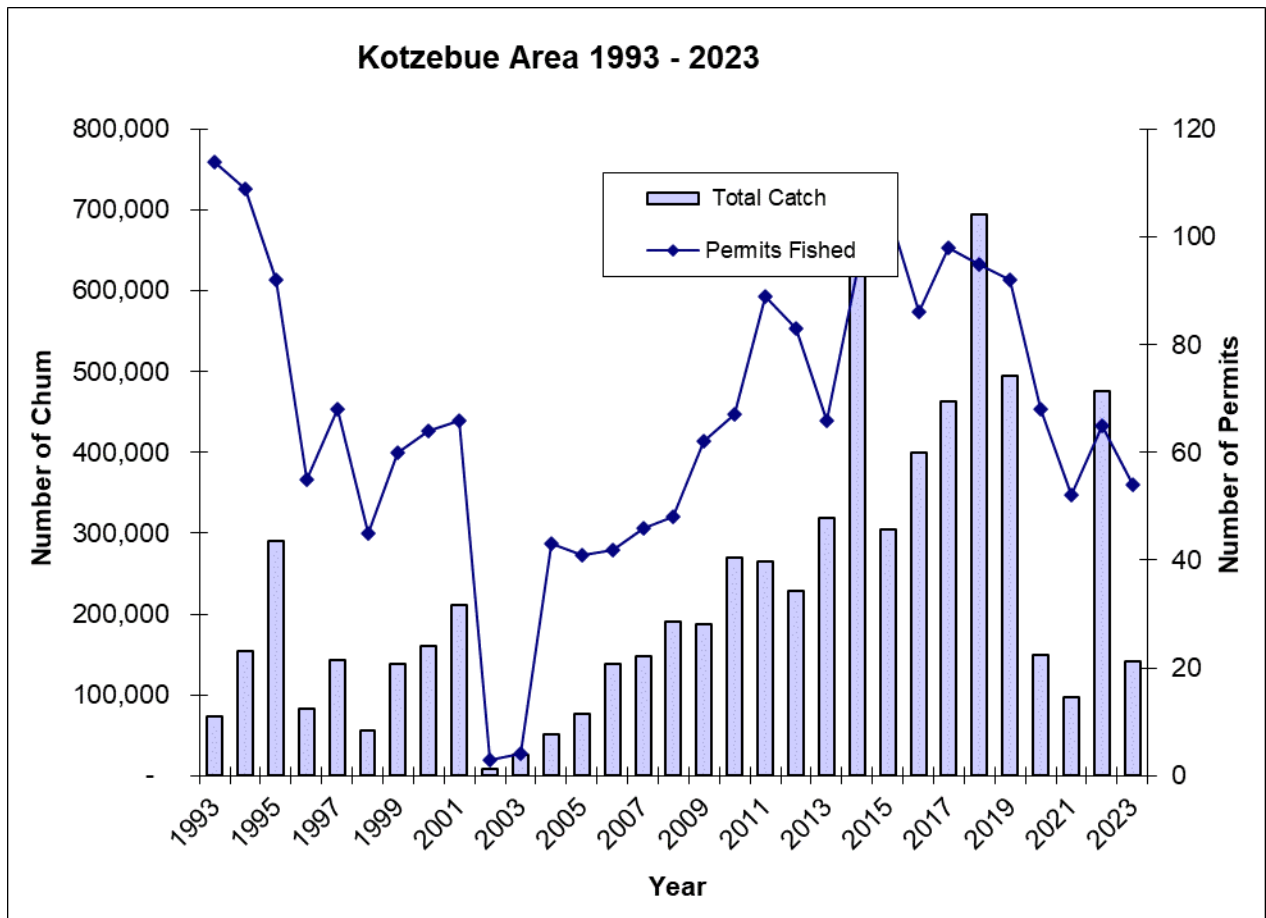


Figure 1.—Kotzebue District commercial chum salmon harvest and number of permits fished, 1993 - 2023.