

Division of Commercial Fisheries
Sam Rabung, Director

Soldotna Office
43961 Kalifornsky Beach Road, Suite B
Soldotna, AK 99669



Alaska Department of Fish and Game
Doug Vincent-Lang, Commissioner

PO Box 115526
Juneau, AK 99811-5526
www.adfg.alaska.gov

Advisory Announcement
For Immediate Release: May 16, 2024

CONTACT:
Colton Lipka, Area Management Biologist
Lucas Stumpf, Assistant Area Management Biologist
(907) 262-9368

**UPPER COOK INLET
2024 OUTLOOK FOR COMMERCIAL SET GILLNET SALMON
FISHING**

Sockeye Salmon Forecast

In 2024, a run of approximately 5.72 million sockeye salmon is forecast to return to Upper Cook Inlet (UCI) with an estimate of 3.70 million available for harvest (commercial, sport, personal use, and subsistence).

The Kenai River sockeye salmon forecast is approximately 3.38 million fish. The 2024 Kenai River forecast is 500,000 (14%) fish less than the historical (1986–2023) average run of 3.88 million, but 215,000 (6%) fish more than the recent 10-year (2014–2023) average run of 3.17 million. The Kenai River forecast has overestimated the total run by an average of 0.8% over the past 10 years with a range of -42% to 59%. For sockeye salmon runs 2.3–4.6 million fish, the *Kenai River Late-Run Sockeye Salmon Management Plan* (KRLSSMP) stipulates ADF&G manage to the SEG range of 750,000–1,300,000 and achieve an inriver goal of 1.1 to 1.4 million fish. The department will formally reassess the UCI sockeye salmon run after July 20.

The Kasilof River sockeye salmon run forecast is approximately 1.12 million fish. The Kasilof River forecast has overestimated the total run by an average of 7% over the past 10 years with a range of -35% to 79%. The 2024 forecast is 201,000 fish (20%) greater than the historical (1986–2023) average run of 0.91 million fish and 174,000 fish (17%) greater than the recent 10-year (2014–2023) average run.

Approximately 303,400 and 86,690 sockeye salmon are forecast to return to the Susitna River and Fish Creek respectively in 2024. The 2024 Susitna River sockeye salmon forecast is 127,400 fish (35%) below the historical (2002–2023) average run and 71,600 fish (21%) below the recent 10-year (2014–2023) average run. The 2024 Fish Creek sockeye salmon forecast is 25,450 fish (26%) below the historical average but the same as the recent 10-year average run size.

2024 Sockeye Salmon Forecasts and Escapement Goals

System	Forecast	Goals ^a
Kenai River ^{b,c}	3,380,000	1,100,000–1,400,000
Kasilof River ^{b,d}	1,120,000	140,000–320,000
Susitna River	303,400	
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	86,690	15,000–45,000
Unmonitored Systems ^e	829,910	N/A
Total	5,720,000	

^a 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).

^b Kenai River goal is DIDSON-based; Kasilof river is Aris-based.

^c Kenai River SEG is 750,000–1,300,000 sockeye salmon.

^d Kasilof River optimal escapement goal (OEG) is 140,000–370,000 sockeye salmon.

^e Unmonitored systems are estimated to be ~15% of monitored systems.

Set Gillnet Season Opening Dates

Season opening dates in 2024 for the various fisheries around the inlet are as follows:

- *Northern District directed king salmon fishery*: The directed king salmon fishery is closed to start the 2024 season until Deshka River king salmon sport fisheries are opened (EO # 2-F-H-1-24).
- *Northern District set gillnet fishery*: June 27, unless modified by emergency order. Weekly fishing periods are Mondays and Thursdays from 7:00 a.m. to 7:00 p.m.
- *Big River fishery*: June 3 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, weekly fishing periods are Mondays and Thursdays from 7:00 a.m. to 7:00 p.m.
- *Upper Subdistrict Set Gillnet fishery (ESSN)*: The ESSN fishery will begin closed and may only open if Kenai late-run king salmon projections indicate achievement of the recovery goal.
- *All remaining set gillnet fisheries, except the ESSN fishery*: June 27, weekly fishing periods are Mondays and Thursdays from 7:00 a.m. to 7:00 p.m.

Northern District Set Gillnet Salmon Fishery Overview

- The 2024 Deshka River preseason king salmon forecasted total run of 6,671 fish is well below the sustainable escapement goal (SEG) of 9,000–18,000 fish. Based on this forecast and recent low king salmon production throughout the Susitna River Drainage, the department issued an Emergency Order (EO # 2-KS-2-05-24) which closed king salmon directed sport fisheries throughout the Susitna River drainage, including the Deshka River.

- As stipulated by the *Northern District King Salmon Management Plan* (NDKSMP), the 2024 directed king salmon commercial fishery in the Northern District (ND) will start the season closed (Figure 1). Escapement of king salmon into the Deshka River will be closely monitored. If the run is stronger than expected and sport fishing of king salmon is allowed in the Deshka River, the directed king salmon commercial fishery may occur.
- Beginning Thursday, June 27, the ND set gillnet fishery is managed per provisions found in the *Northern District Salmon Management Plan* (NDSMP). This plan provides for two 12-hour weekly fishing periods and follows standard regulatory gear stipulations.
- 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 UCI set gillnet fishery will be closed for the season by EO when catch and effort cease ~ October 1.

Central District Set Gillnet Fisheries in Chinitna Bay, Western, Kustatan, and Kalgin Island Subdistricts of the Set Gillnet Salmon Fisheries Overview

- Chinitna Bay, Western, Kalgin Island, and Kustatan subdistricts management will generally follow regulatory fishing periods and schedules, except for that portion of the Western Subdistrict south of Redoubt Point, where fishing may be allowed three days per week based on increasing harvest rates of Crescent River sockeye salmon (Figure 1).
- 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 (15,000–30,000) is projected to be achieved.
- The fisheries will be closed for the season by EO when catch and effort cease ~ October 1.

Upper Subdistrict Set Gillnet (ESSN) Fishery Overview

ESSN fishery—(See the Summary of Commercial Fisheries Regulatory Changes from the 2024 Upper Cook Inlet Board of Fisheries Meeting advisory announcement for more details on stock of concern stipulations)

- The 2024 Kenai River late-run king salmon forecast projects a total run of 13,639 large (>75cm mid eye to tail fork) fish. The newly established recovery goal for Kenai River late-run king salmon is 14,250–30,000 large fish. The recovery goal was established with the listing of Kenai River Late-run king salmon as a stock of a management concern and adoption of the *Kenai River Late-Run King Salmon Stock of Concern Management Plan* (KLKSOC). The KLKSOC established regulation that closes the sport fisheries in the Kenai River and in the salt waters of

Cook Inlet north of the latitude of Bluff Point to the taking of king salmon and closed the commercial set gillnet fishery in the Upper Subdistrict of the Central District. Limited commercial or sport opportunity is only available when inseason projections of escapement are greater than 14,250 large fish when incorporating estimated harvest/mortality and projection error.

- On March 14, 2024, the department issued an EO (# 2-KS-1-09-24) closing the king salmon sport fishery in the Kenai River beginning July 1, 2024. Subsequently, the department issued an EO (# 2-F-H-2-24) closing set gillnet fishing in the Kenai, East Forelands, and Kasilof sections to start the 2024 season.

Kenai Late-Run King Salmon Stock of Concern Management Plan Regulations for ESSN Fishery

Kasilof Section from June 20 – June 30

- The ESSN fishery is closed to begin the 2024 season until projections of Kenai Rive late-run king salmon exceed 14,250 large fish. If inseason projections of large late-run Kenai king salmon are greater than forecasted and indicate the recovery goal can be achieved, then fisheries may be opened for two eight-hour periods with one set gillnet that is not more than 35 fathoms in length and 29 meshes in depth.

Full ESSN From July 1 – July 14:

- **Closed until Kenai Rive late-run king salmon are delisted from stock of concern status.**

Kasilof, Kenai, and East Foreland Sections from July 15 – July 27

- The ESSN fishery is closed to begin the 2024 season until projections of Kenai Rive late-run king salmon exceed 14,250 large fish. If inseason projections of large late-run Kenai king salmon are greater than forecasted and indicate the recovery goal can be achieved, then fisheries may be opened for four eight-hour periods with one set gillnet that is not more than 35 fathoms in length and 29 meshes in depth.

Kasilof, Kenai, and East Foreland Sections from July 28 – August 15

- The ESSN fishery is closed to begin the 2024 season until projections of Kenai Rive late-run king salmon exceed 14,250 large fish. If inseason projections of large late-run Kenai king salmon are greater than forecasted and indicate the recovery goal can be achieved, then fisheries may be opened for two eight-hour periods with one set gillnet that is not more than 35 fathoms in length and 29 meshes in depth.

Commercial Dipnet Fishing

- Dip net commercial fishing opportunity was instituted to provide a live release gear type for set gillnet permit holders to utilize while set gillnet fishing is closed. This gear may be allowed only when set gillnet fishing is closed and based on abundance of sockeye salmon. While the board approved the use of the gear type and established regulations to guide the fishery, **the fishery may not be opened until the Commercial Fisheries Entry Commission (CFEC) modifies regulation to add dipnets as a legal gear type to S04H permits.**
 - The department may allow up to three 12-hour commercial dip net periods per

week from June 20 – July 31 when set gillnet fishing is not open.

- The area allowed for both shore and boat based fishing is the current set gillnet open areas excluding the Kasilof River Special Harvest Area. Shore based fishing may only occur from DNR shore lease sites.
- Retention of king and coho salmon is prohibited. King and coho salmon caught must be immediately released unless the fish is mortally wounded or dead and brought on board.
- Participation is limited to SO4H permit holders. Each permit holder may operate up to four dip nets at a time, each dipnet must be operated by the permit holder or a licensed crew member.
- All standard CFEC reporting requirements apply in addition to the stock of concern requirements listed for the set gillnet fishery above.
- A legal dipnet is defined as:
 - a dip net is a bag-shaped net supported on all sides by a rigid frame; the maximum straight-line distance between any two points on the net frame, as measured through the net opening, may not exceed five feet; the depth of the bag must be at least one-half of the greatest straight-line distance, as measured through the net opening; no portion of the bag may be constructed of webbing that exceeds a stretched measurement of 4.5 inches; the frame must be attached to a single rigid handle and be operated by hand.

Set Gillnet Registration and Buoy Stickers

All Cook Inlet setnet permit holders are required to register prior to fishing for one of three areas of Cook Inlet prior to fishing for the season: 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, permit holders 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>. Permit holders 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 may be completed online. Permit holders will need to create an ADF&G profile to access the new registration/sticker application.

Permit holders that purchased buoy stickers in 2023 will not be charged for 2024 buoy stickers. ADF&G will roll forward funds from previous years until set gillnet opportunity is provided and

buoy stickers are utilized. Any permit holder that plans to fish in the Upper Subdistrict with set gillnet or dipnet gear will need to register with ADF&G prior to fishing in 2024.

Central District Drift Gillnet Fishery Update:

The 2024 Central District drift gillnet fishery outlook will be released in the coming weeks as the department finalizes this seasons fishing strategy with the addition of federal management in Cook Inlet.

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.

UCI Commercial Fisheries Area Management Biologist

Colton Lipka office 907-260-2907 Colton.Lipka@alaska.gov

UCI Commercial Fisheries Assistant Area Management Biologist

Lucas Stumpf office 907-260-2916 Lucas.Stumpf@alaska.gov

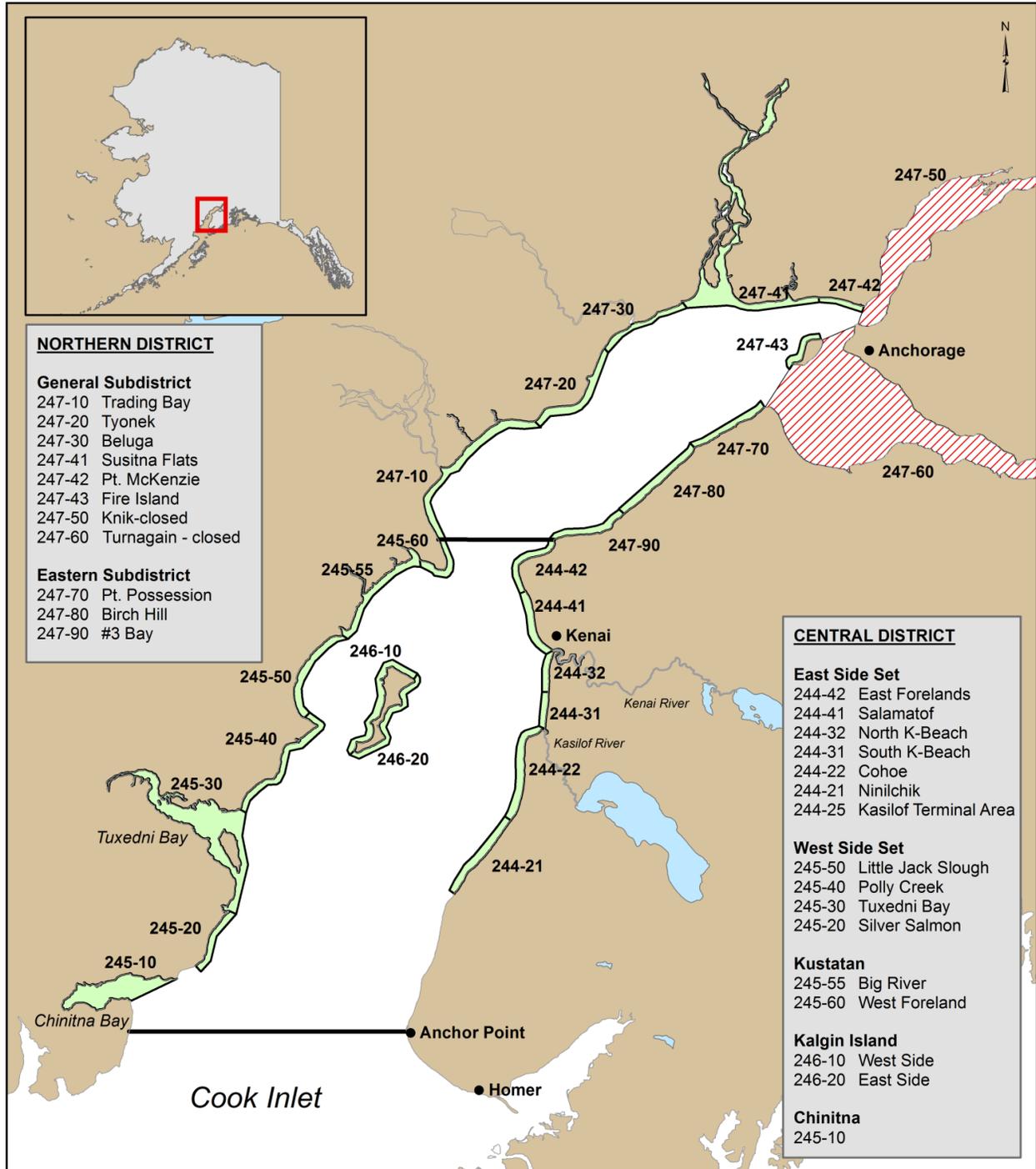


Figure 1. – Upper Cook Inlet commercial set gillnet statistical areas.