



Advisory Announcement
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2025 KOTZEBUE SOUND SALMON MANAGEMENT OUTLOOK

INTRODUCTION

The Kotzebue District salmon fisheries management outlook is to inform fishermen, processors, and other interested people of the management strategies for the commercial salmon fishery. The Kotzebue District includes all waters from Cape Prince of Wales to Point Hope. The Kotzebue District is divided into three subdistricts. Subdistrict 2, near the mouth of the Noatak River is closed to commercial fishing by regulation. Most fishing occurs in Subdistrict 1, which is subdivided into six statistical areas to help managers determine catch location (Figure 1). Within the Kotzebue District, chum salmon *Oncorhynchus keta* are the most abundant anadromous fish. Other salmon species (Chinook *O. tshawytscha*, pink *O. gorbuscha*, coho *O. kisutch*, and sockeye salmon *O. nerka*) occur in small numbers, as do Dolly Varden *Salvelinus malma*, and sheefish (inconnu) *Stenodus leucichthys*.

2025 RUN OUTLOOK

The outlook for the 2025 season is based on the parent-year returns and returning age classes observed in the commercial catch samples in 2024. During the 2024 season, the salmon return was weak and the 2025 return is expected to mirror that weakness to some extent with the 4-year-old component near average percentage of harvest based on the previous season's 3-year-old return. The 5-year-old component of the run is expected to be above average percentage of the harvest based on the 4-year-old return last season. The 3-year-old and 6-year-old age classes are generally minimal components of the run and not expected to influence overall harvest significantly. The commercial harvest is expected to fall within the range of 50,000 to 150,000 chum salmon.

MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES

The fishery is scheduled to open July 10 and close August 31 by regulation, unless extended by emergency order because of an unexpected strong late run. The department expects there will be buyers this year with operations likely ceasing prior to the regulatory closure date.

Primary commercial fishery management objectives are to provide adequate chum salmon passage through the commercial fishery: (1) to ensure sustained runs by allowing adequate escapement, and (2) to meet subsistence harvest needs. Fishery management will be dependent on comparing period and cumulative season catch rates to prior years.

Age composition of commercial salmon catches will be monitored to determine the strength of age classes in the run.

During the first week of the fishery, there are expected to be daily 8-hour fishing periods, except Saturday. Effort is expected to be minimal during these initial openings in the Kotzebue District as most fishermen do not start to participate until catches start building. If harvest rates are weaker than expected the department may reduce fishing time in the following weeks or forgo commercial harvest to allow for escapement and subsistence needs.

If commercial catches indicate adequate run strength, the department will allow commercial fishing to continue based on escapement indicators and subsistence reports .

In 2024, the department opened commercial fishing for 3 days then for 6 days per week 8 hours per day. Harvest rates for these openings were poor with catch per unit effort (CPUE) remaining in the single digits. Fishing time was reduced to 5 8-hour openings per day on July 22. Effort remained below average and catch rates showed little improvement from the previous weeks. The fishery was opened with 3 periods the next week for 8-hours, except that the final opening for the week was extended to 11 hours to allow fishermen to fish with optimum tidal conditions to maximize the potential CPUE; however, catch rates did not show significant improvement. The final commercial openings in 2024 occurred on August 7 and 8 with 12-hour openings per day. Catch rates continued to be poor and no additional commercial periods were announced in 2024.

No subsistence fishing restrictions are expected in 2025.

ESCAPEMENT OBJECTIVES

Inseason escapement-based management will consist of commercial catch rates and reports from subsistence fishermen.

Management strategies provide for escapement within sustainable escapement goal ranges (SEG) for each river system. These ranges, developed in 2018, are based on an analysis of historical harvest and escapement information of specific index areas within major drainages. These aerial survey escapement objectives are: (1) subject to continued review, (2) intended to evaluate escapement trends between years, and (3) are not a total count of the salmon escapement. The department intends to renew aerial surveys on the Noatak and upper Kobuk Rivers, which have not been flown in the Kotzebue District since 2014. The chum salmon escapement goals are as follows: Noatak River (mouth to Kelly Bar, including the Eli River) 43,000–92,800 fish, and upper Kobuk River and Selby River 12,000–32,100 fish.

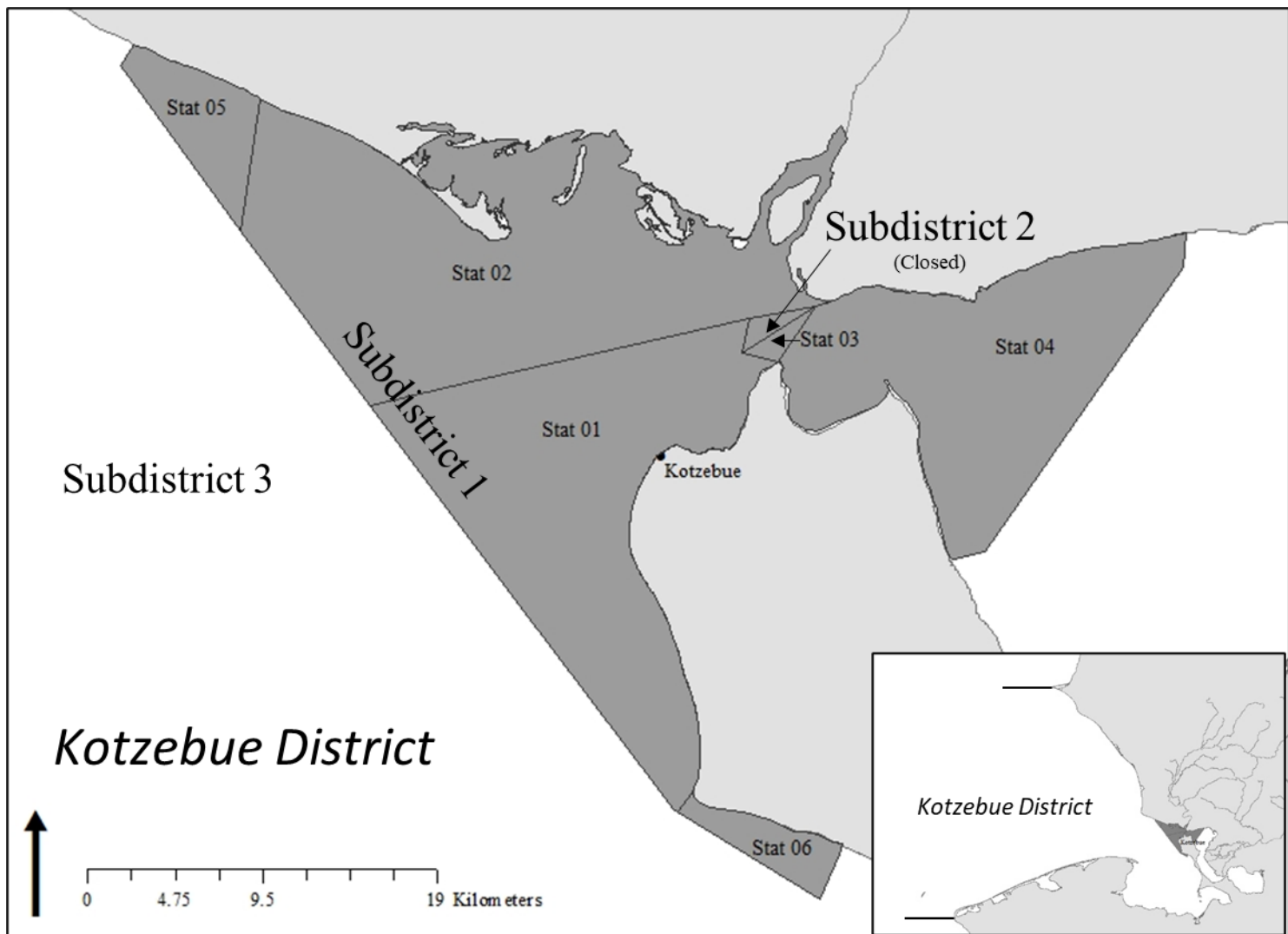


Figure 1.—Kotzebue Sound salmon subdistricts.