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For Immediate Release: Sept. 29, 2025

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2025 NORTON SOUND-PORT CLARENCE SALMON SEASON SUMMARY

COMMERCIAL SALMON FISHERY

In 2025, salmon returns to the Norton Sound District supported commercial fisheries targeting chum and coho salmon in the coastal waters of 6 subdistricts (Figure 1), and other species were harvested incidentally. The total salmon harvest was the highest in the last 3 years but was below the most recent 5-year average. The total value of the fishery was above the recent average, though commercial effort in Norton Sound was the lowest in 20 years. Salmon returns were generally below average, but some escapement goals were achieved. This summary contains preliminary numbers that will be updated in subsequent reports.

The 2025 Norton Sound commercial harvest of 38,189 salmon was below average, though the fishery value of \$449,448 was above the recent 5-year average (Table 1). The commercial effort of 76 permits was the lowest since 2007 and ranged from 3 fishermen in Subdistricts 1 and 4, to 36 fishermen in Subdistrict 6 (Table 2). The chum salmon catch of 5,969 fish was roughly a third of the recent 5-year average and the coho salmon catch of 31,523 fish was above the recent average but below the 10-year average (Table 3).

Salmon returns to Norton Sound were low, especially for chum, pink, and Chinook salmon (Table 4). Sockeye salmon, however, were abundant in the Port Clarence District and the escapement goal on the Pilgrim River was met. Northern Norton Sound rivers (Subdistricts 1–3: Nome, Golovin, and Elim) did not meet their escapement objectives for chum salmon. In southern Norton Sound (Subdistricts 4–6: Norton Bay, Shaktoolik, and Unalakleet), Chinook returns were weak, and escapement goals were not met. Throughout Norton Sound pink salmon returns were below average, though the pink salmon escapement goal was achieved on the Kwiniuk River in Subdistrict 2. Tower-based coho salmon escapement goals were met in Subdistricts 3 and 6, but the aerial survey goal in Subdistrict 2 was narrowly missed.

Only one salmon buyer operated in the region in 2025, Norton Sound Seafood Products (NSSP), with the Unalakleet processing plant being the buyer's main base of operations. NSSP also processed some commercial salmon catch at their plant in Nome. There were 2 catcher-seller permits in 2025, both in Subdistrict 1. Prices paid per pound in 2025 were \$2.20 for sockeye salmon, \$1.90 for coho salmon, \$0.75 for chum salmon, and \$0.35 for pink salmon. The price for chum salmon and coho salmon was \$0.15 and \$0.50 higher than last year, respectively. Chinook salmon were not purchased by NSSP in 2025.

SUBSISTENCE SALMON FISHERY

Subsistence salmon fishermen in the Port Clarence District and Norton Sound Subdistricts 1–3 are required to possess a subsistence permit for each household that fishes in these locations. The permit holder records

the harvest method and the catch in numbers of fish by species for each day fished. Permits are due back to the department by October 6th each year. In southern Norton Sound, census surveys in the communities of Koyuk, Shaktoolik, and Unalakleet estimate subsistence harvest and effort.

In the Port Clarence District, catch limits for Pilgrim River sockeye were waived on July 4 when escapement objectives were projected to be achieved. Due to Chinook salmon conservation concerns, the department closed subsistence fishing in the marine and fresh waters of Subdistricts 5–6 starting on June 15 and allowed only limited subsistence fishing targeting non-salmon species in freshwaters. Subsistence opportunities were liberalized on July 4, allowing beach seining with the non-retention of chum and Chinook salmon. On July 16 chum salmon retention was allowed in beach seines, and all subsistence restrictions were lifted by emergency order on August 4.

Subsistence harvest data is collected in the months after the end of the salmon season and final estimates are not available for this summary. However, anecdotal evidence from fishermen in the region indicate that, despite lackluster returns, residents were able to meet their salmon needs in the 2025 season. Subsistence fishermen in Port Clarence and the Pilgrim River used beach seines and set gillnets to harvest sockeye salmon. Northern Norton Sound subsistence users reported success catching chum, pink, and coho in marine and freshwater using gillnets and rod and reel. Fishermen in southern Norton Sound were able to put away salmon using beach seine methods to catch chum and pinks early in the season and set gillnets to catch coho salmon after restrictions were lifted.

SEASON SUMMARY BY SUBDISTRICT

Nome - Subdistrict 1

Based on low salmon returns in the previous year, a conservative management approach was taken in Subdistrict 1 for the 2025 season. There were 4 commercial fishing periods, and 3 permit holders fished. Fishing periods were scheduled for 24 hours to gauge abundance of chum salmon, with the first opener scheduled on the evening of June 25. Near-average catch rates warranted periods to be scheduled on July 2 and July 8. Encouraging catch rates in neighboring Subdistrict 2, and reports of chum salmon presence by Nome area subsistence fishermen using nets in marine waters, justified another 24-hour period on July 16. Inclement weather was likely the reason for the lack of effort in the final commercial period. Coho salmon escapement monitored by projects in Subdistrict 1 was low and did not indicate a harvestable surplus. All commercial fishing periods had gillnets restricted to 6 inches or smaller mesh size. Effort was sporadic throughout the season and catches were well below previous years. The commercial harvest was 114 sockeye, 1,068 chum, and 6 pink (Table 2).

Salmon runs were below average in the Nome Subdistrict and no chum or pink salmon escapement goals were achieved in 2025 (Table 4). Weir operations on the Nome and Snake rivers were interrupted in 2025 by high-water events that caused salmon monitoring projects to cease operations early. Coho salmon passage was below average at assessment projects when high water events caused the weirs to become inoperable early in the run, though aerial surveys of some Subdistrict 1 rivers indicated good escapement abundance in some rivers.

Golovin - Subdistrict 2

Subsistence concerns from residents on the Fish and Niukluk rivers in previous years led to a conservative management approach early in the season in Subdistrict 2. There were 15 commercial fishing periods

directed at chum or coho salmon with gillnets restricted to 6 inches or smaller mesh size. There were 10 permit holders that fished this year, which was below the historical average of 15 permits. Initial catch rates in the chum salmon commercial fishery were near the long-term historical average and escapement projections for chum salmon at the Niukluk tower were promising, but below-average catch rates during the fishing period on July 18 caused the department to end commercial opportunities targeting chum salmon. The commercial coho salmon fishery started with a 24-hour opener on July 29 and catch rates were near average. Subsequent fishing performance in the next two openers led the department to put the coho salmon fishery on a schedule that consisted of two 48-hour periods per week from August 11 until September 6. There was limited or no effort for the last 4 fishing periods, mainly due to inclement weather. The commercial harvest was 351 sockeye, 3,448 chum, and 1,691 coho salmon (Table 2).

Niukluk River tower operations ran consistently in 2025. The project started counting on June 24 and operated until high water events put counts on hold from August 13–17 and ultimately caused the project to end early on August 23. The preliminary counts from the tower are 210 Chinook, 21,711 chum, 38,360 pink, 291 sockeye, and 4,257 coho salmon (Table 4). Aerial surveys were flown on the Niukluk and Casadepaga rivers after the Niukluk River tower began operations to gauge the missed escapement at the tower project and counted an additional 5 Chinook and 1,233 chum salmon. Aerial surveys of the Niukluk River, Casadepaga River, and Ophir Creek in early September estimated a coho salmon escapement of 662, falling short of the escapement goal of 750–1,300 coho salmon.

Elim - Subdistrict 3

Due to low returns in previous years, the department took a cautious approach to scheduling chum salmon fishery openers in Subdistrict 3. There were 12 commercial fishing periods targeting chum or coho salmon with gillnets restricted to 6 inches or smaller mesh size. The 14 permit holders that fished in 2025 was below the recent 5-year average of 18 permits. Harvest rates for chum salmon during the first fishing period were lackluster and escapement counts at the Kwiniuk River tower were not projected to meet escapement objectives. This caused the department to pause commercial fishing on chum salmon to allow for additional escapement and subsistence opportunity. Commercial fishing resumed on July 29 when chum salmon were assumed to have passed through the marine waters of Subdistrict 3, with periods directed at coho salmon. The commercial harvest was 50 sockeye, 116 chum, 34 pink, and 4,424 coho salmon.

Of the four established Kwiniuk River escapement goals, two were not met and two were exceeded in 2025. Escapement counts at the Kwiniuk River tower were 46 Chinook, 1,833 chum, 26,040 pink, 1,084 sockeye, and 8,880 coho salmon (Table 4). Chinook salmon passage was below the escapement goal of 250 fish for the fifth year in a row. Chum salmon passage was below the escapement goal range of 9,100–32,600. The pink salmon escapement goal threshold of 8,400 fish was exceeded. The coho salmon aerial survey escapement goal range of 650–1,300 fish was met when 1,743 coho salmon were counted by helicopter in early September (Table 4).

Norton Bay - Subdistrict 4

Subdistrict 4 was managed in conjunction with Subdistricts 5 and 6 in 2025. There were 11 commercial fishing periods with gillnets restricted to 6-inch mesh or less. Commercial harvest totaled 1 sockeye, 6 chum, and 285 coho salmon, which were all well below average. Effort was sporadic throughout the season and only 3 permits fished, which is below the average participation of 11 permits.

A counting tower on the Ungalik River operated in 2025 but was limited by high water with periods of missed or incomplete escapement, and counts should be considered a minimum. Escapement estimates were 30 Chinook salmon, 4,428 chum, 43,443 pink, 2,796 coho, and 48 sockeye salmon (Table 4).

Shaktoolik and Unalakleet - Subdistricts 5 and 6

Shaktoolik and Unalakleet subdistricts share a common commercial fishing boundary, and management actions typically encompass both subdistricts as salmon intermingle in the marine waters of Subdistricts 5 and 6. In 2025, poor Chinook and chum salmon runs in both subdistricts caused the department to forgo early season commercial salmon openings to allow for additional escapement and subsistence opportunity. Commercial fishing started on July 29, and there were 11 commercial fishing periods targeting coho salmon with gillnets restricted to 6 inches or smaller mesh size. There were 12 permit holders that fished in the Shaktoolik Subdistrict and in Unalakleet there were 36 permit holders. The Shaktoolik commercial harvest was 74 sockeye, 729 chum, 6 pink and 11,290 coho salmon. The Unalakleet commercial harvest was 61 sockeye, 602 chum, and 13,833 coho salmon. This year's Shaktoolik and Unalakleet coho salmon catch was 3 times that of the recent 5-year average and the largest coho harvest since 2019 (Table 2).

There are two counting tower projects in these subdistricts, located on the Shaktoolik and North rivers. The Shaktoolik River counting tower started operations on July 13. However, due to high, turbid water the tower only had 10 days of salmon passage estimates for the 2025 season and counted 267 Chinook salmon, 1,233 chum, 5,464 pink, and 258 coho salmon. The North River tower began early, on June 17, and operated more consistently than other projects in southern Norton Sound but still had several periods of unmonitored escapement due to high waters. The North River Chinook salmon escapement of 234 fish was well below the lower end of the escapement goal range of 1,200–2,600 fish (Table 4) and was the lowest escapement on record. Other species counted at North River tower were 965 chum, 12,504 pink, 1,254 coho, and 6 sockeye salmon. The Unalakleet River floating resistance-board weir was discontinued in 2025.

Port Clarence District

Port Clarence District is home to the furthest north sockeye salmon run in the state. Each year, the seasonal subsistence catch limit is 25 sockeye salmon and the department can raise the limit if returns are projected to exceed escapement needs. An early, strong run of sockeye led the department to waive household sockeye limits on July 4. The Pilgrim River weir count of 18,741 sockeye salmon was within the escapement goal range of 6,800–36,000 fish. The 2025 season marks the earliest run in the history of the Pilgrim River monitoring project with 50% of sockeye salmon past the weir by July 8. To allow for a commercial fishery, an escapement of 30,000 sockeye salmon must be projected in the Pilgrim River. Sockeye escapement was inadequate for commercial fishing in 2025, and no buyer interest has existed in over 10 years.

Table 1.— Norton Sound salmon catch and dollar value, 1962–2025.

Year	Total Catch	Number of Permits	Gross Value of Catch to Permit Holders
1962	232,431		\$105,800
1963	224,378		\$104,000
1964	164,671		\$51,000
1965	39,203		\$21,483
1966	100,345		\$68,000
1967	74,818		\$44,038
1968	124,409		\$63,700
1969	178,972		\$95,297
1970	178,218		\$99,019
1971	141,977		\$101,000
1972	149,494		\$102,225
1973	176,797		\$308,740
1974	315,829		\$437,127
1975	251,861		\$413,255
1976	193,063		\$285,283
1977	257,325	164	\$546,010
1978	531,948	176	\$907,330
1979	350,401	175	\$878,792
1980	444,337	159	\$572,125
1981	441,734	167	\$761,658
1982	511,208	164	\$1,069,723
1983	456,420	170	\$946,232
1984	342,159	141	\$738,064
1985	180,200	155	\$818,477
1986	230,400	163	\$546,452
1987	136,283	164	\$517,894
1988	225,132	152	\$760,641
1989	92,811	110	\$319,489
1990	131,665	128	\$474,064
1991	156,789	126	\$413,479
1992	199,933	110	\$448,395
1993	263,670	153	\$368,723
1994	1,108,184	119	\$863,060
1995	181,393	105	\$356,164
1996	571,241	86	\$340,347
1997	79,141	102	\$363,908
1998	641,396	82	\$358,982
1999	23,051	60	\$76,860
2000	217,873	79	\$149,907
2001	30,849	51	\$56,921
2002	2,365	12	\$2,941
2003	20,653	30	\$64,473
2004	48,381	36	\$122,506
2005	89,669	40	\$296,154

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Table 1.— Page 2 of 2.

Year	Total Catch	Number of Permits	Gross Value of Catch to Permit Holders
2006	140,873	61	\$389,707
2007	152,357	71	\$572,195
2008	221,101	91	\$759,451
2009	138,737	88	\$722,167
2010	211,622	115	\$1,220,487
2011	177,167	123	\$1,269,730
2012	305,657	123	\$758,908
2013	181,247	124	\$1,183,236
2014	403,715	128	\$1,915,749
2015	369,720	128	\$1,940,408
2016	366,236	141	\$1,237,229
2017	378,561	139	\$2,788,316
2018	543,714	149	\$4,001,400
2019	381,124	145	\$2,078,034
2020	50,679	124	\$290,302
2021	303,999	131	\$451,815
2022	130,207	108	\$465,972
2023	25,096	83	\$115,762
2024	21,490	89	\$146,326
2025	38,189	76	\$449,448
Average 2020–2024	106,294	107	\$29,035
Average 2015–2024	257,083	124	\$1,351,556

Note: Blank cells represent years when data is not available.

Table 2.—Norton Sound commercial salmon harvest summary by subdistrict, 2025.

		Subdistricts						Total
		1	2	3	4	5	6	
Number of permit holders		3	10	14	3	12	36	76
Number of commercial periods		4	15	12	11	11	11	64
King	Number	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Weight (lbs)	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Sockeye	Number	114	351	50	1	74	61	651
	Weight (lbs)	688	2,152	302	6	410	326	3,884
Coho	Number	0	1,691	4,424	285	11,290	13,833	31,523
	Weight (lbs)	-	11,250	29,283	2,019	77,724	96,530	216,806
Pink	Number	6	0	34	0	6	0	46
	Weight (lbs)	25	-	196	-	18	-	239
Chum	Number	1,068	3,448	116	6	729	602	5,969
	Weight (lbs)	7,050	22,494	842	38	4,483	3,753	38,660
Total	Number	1,188	5,490	4,624	292	12,099	14,496	38,189
	Weight (lbs)	7,763	35,896	30,623	2,063	82,635	100,609	259,589

Table 3.— Norton Sound salmon catch, 1962– 2025.

Year	Chinook	Sockeye	Coho	Pink	Chum	Total
1962	7,286	18	9,156	33,187	182,784	232,431
1963	6,613	71	16,765	46,180	154,749	224,378
1964	2,018	126	98	13,567	148,862	164,671
1965	128	30	2,030	220	36,795	39,203
1966	1,553	14	5,755	12,778	80,245	100,345
1967	1,804	0	2,379	28,879	41,756	74,818
1968	1,045	0	6,885	71,179	45,300	124,409
1969	2,392	0	6,836	86,949	82,795	178,972
1970	1,853	0	4,423	64,908	107,034	178,218
1971	2,593	0	3,127	4,895	131,362	141,977
1972	2,938	0	454	45,182	100,920	149,494
1973	1,918	0	9,282	46,499	119,098	176,797
1974	2,951	0	2,092	148,519	162,267	315,829
1975	2,393	2	4,593	32,388	212,485	251,861
1976	2,243	11	6,934	87,919	95,956	193,063
1977	4,500	5	3,690	48,675	200,455	257,325
1978	9,819	12	7,335	325,503	189,279	531,948
1979	10,706	57	31,438	167,411	140,789	350,401
1980	6,311	40	29,842	227,352	180,792	444,337
1981	7,929	56	31,562	232,479	169,708	441,734
1982	5,892	10	91,690	230,281	183,335	511,208
1983	10,308	27	49,735	76,913	319,437	456,420
1984	8,455	6	67,875	119,381	146,442	342,159
1985	19,491	166	21,968	3,647	134,928	180,200
1986	6,395	233	35,600	41,260	146,912	230,400
1987	7,080	207	24,279	2,260	102,457	136,283
1988	4,096	1,252	37,214	74,604	107,966	225,132
1989	5,707	265	44,091	123	42,625	92,811
1990	8,895	434	56,712	501	65,123	131,665
1991	6,068	203	63,647	0	86,871	156,789
1992	4,541	296	105,418	6,284	83,394	199,933
1993	8,972	279	43,283	157,574	53,562	263,670
1994	5,285	80	102,140	982,389	18,290	1,108,184
1995	8,860	128	47,863	81,664	42,898	181,393
1996	4,984	1	68,206	487,441	10,609	571,241
1997	12,573	161	32,284	20	34,103	79,141
1998	7,429	7	29,623	588,013	16,324	641,396
1999	2,508	0	12,662	0	7,881	23,051
2000	752	14	44,409	166,548	6,150	217,873
2001	213	44	19,492	0	11,100	30,849
2002	5	1	1,759	0	600	2,365
2003	12	21	17,060	0	3,560	20,653
2004	22	47	42,016	0	6,296	48,381
2005	151	12	85,523	0	3,983	89,669

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Table 3.— Page 2 of 2.

Year	Chinook	Sockeye	Coho	Pink	Chum	Total
2006	20	3	130,808	0	10,042	140,873
2007	19	2	126,136	3,769	22,431	152,357
2008	83	60	120,309	75,525	25,124	221,101
2009	84	126	87,041	17,364	34,122	138,737
2010	140	103	62,079	31,557	117,743	211,622
2011	185	369	58,917	7,141	110,555	177,167
2012	197	134	37,056	205,498	62,772	305,657
2013	151	247	53,802	8,338	118,709	181,247
2014	289	519	112,756	182,406	107,745	403,715
2015	1,288	4,119	153,928	62,888	147,497	369,720
2016	321	2,888	102,890	208,961	51,176	366,236
2017	538	2,975	191,254	20,321	163,473	378,561
2018	906	3,623	260,707	40,449	238,029	543,714
2019	1,371	6,969	139,820	75,929	157,035	381,124
2020	906	1,808	14,650	6,950	26,365	50,679
2021	15	473	7,189	289,912	6,410	303,999
2022	0	1,233	13,464	84,261	31,249	130,207
2023	0	364	5,426	3,613	15,693	25,096
2024	0	294	13,878	3,229	4,232	21,633
2025	0	651	31,523	46	5,969	38,189
Average 2020–2024	184	834	10,921	77,593	16,790	106,323
Average 2015–2024	535	2,475	90,321	792,651	84,116	257,097

Table 4.—Salmon counts and associated salmon escapement goal ranges, Norton Sound and Port Clarence Districts, 2025.

Stream	Chinook salmon			Chum salmon		
	Weir/ tower count	Aerial survey count	Escapement goal range	Weir/ tower count	Aerial survey count	Escapement goal range
Salmon L.						
Grand Central R.						
Pilgrim R.	12			1,956		
Glacial L.						
Sinuk R.						
Cripple R.						
Penny R.						
Anvil Creek						
Snake R.				804		2,000 - 4,200
Nome R.	0			1,000		1,600 - 5,300
Flambeau R.					320	
Eldorado R.	13			3,971		4,400 - 14,200
Bonanza R.					330	
Solomon R.					200	
Fish R.	8				550	
Boston Cr.	14				550	
Niukluk R.	210	5		21,711	1,120	
Ophir Cr.						
Casadepaga R.		3			120	
Kwiniuk R.	46		250	1,833		9,100 - 32,600
Tubutulik R.						3,100 - 9,900
Ungalik R.	30			4,428		
Inglutalik R.						
Shaktoolik R.	267	440		1,233	1,070	
Unalakleet R.		60			300	
Old Woman R.		26				
North R.	234	395	1,200-2,600	965	650	

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Table 4.– Page 2 of 2.

Stream	Coho salmon			Sockeye salmon			Pink salmon		
	Weir/ tower count	Aerial survey count	Escapement goal range	Weir/ tower count	Aerial survey count	Escapement Goal Range	Weir/ tower count	Aerial survey count	Escapement goal range
Salmon L.					4,500				
Grand Central R.									
Pilgrim R.	346			18,741	30	6,800-36,000	321		
Glacial L.					960	800 - 1,600			
Sinuk R.									
Cripple R.		322							
Penny R.		61							
Anvil Creek									
Snake R.	98	2,309		47			1,276		
Nome R.	224	409		64			1,089		3,200
Flambeau R.		328						250	
Eldorado R.	21	263		53			778		
Bonanza R.		320					870		
Solomon R.		160						710	
Fish R.									
Boston Cr.									
Niukluk R.	4,257	194	Combined	291	190		38,360		
Ophir Cr.		261	750-1,600						
Casadepaga R.		207			350				
Kwiniuk R.	8,880	1,743	650-1,300	1,084			26,040		8,400
Tubutulik R.									
Ungalik R.	2,795			48			43,443		
Inglutalik R.									
Shaktoolik R.	258	835		0			5,464		
Unalakleet R.									
Old Woman R.		140			40				
North R.	1,254	845	550-1,100	6			12,504		25,000

Note: Blank cells indicate that no data is available.

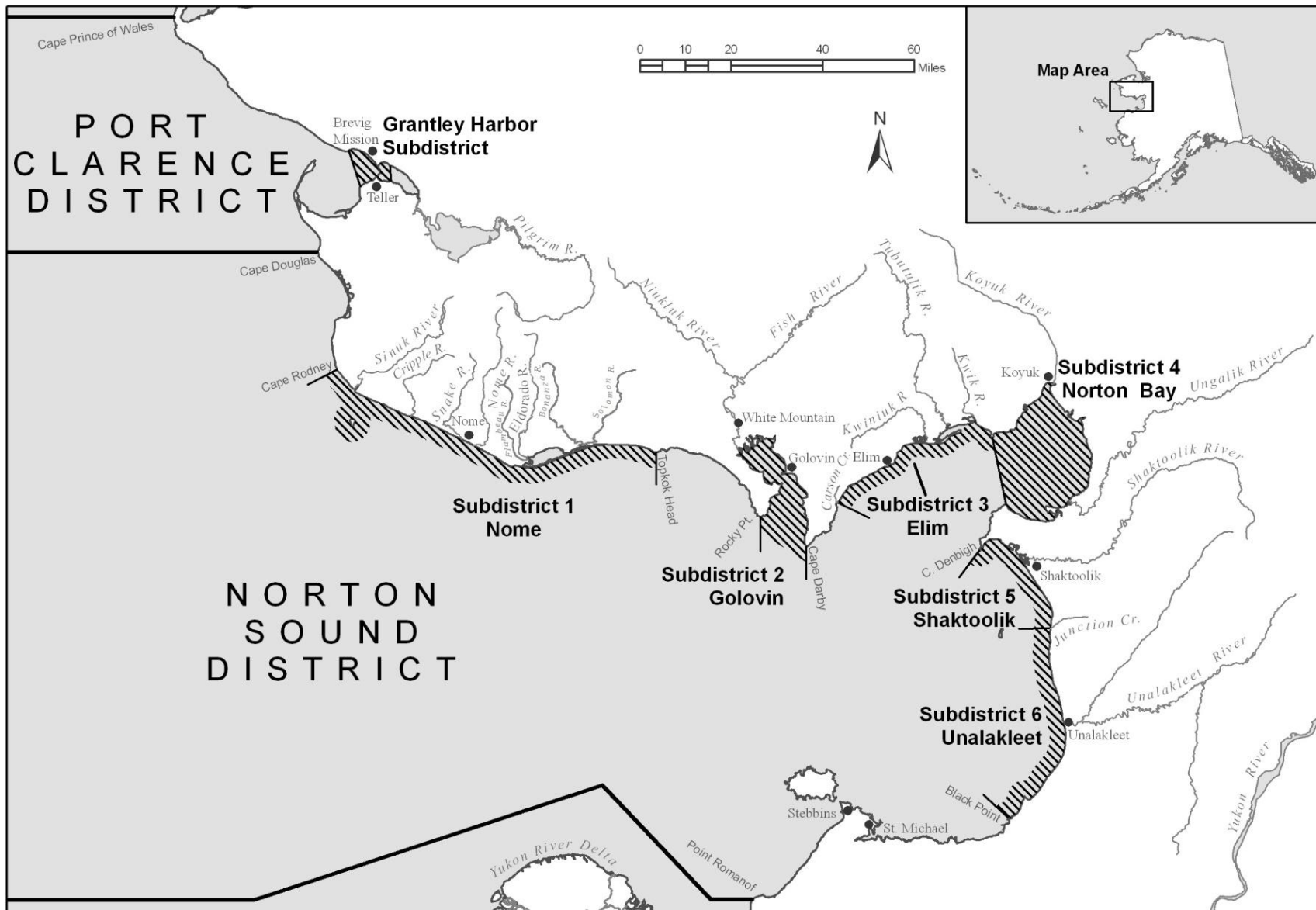


Figure 1.— Norton Sound and Port Clarence commercial salmon fishing districts and subdistricts.