

Division of Commercial Fisheries
Forrest Bowers, Acting Director

Cordova Area Office
401 Railroad Ave.
Cordova, AK 99574



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 1, 2026

CONTACT: Jeremy Botz and Todd Johnson
Area Management Biologists
(907) 424-3212

2026 PRINCE WILLIAM SOUND SALMON FISHERY INFORMATION

General Information

This outlook is provided to assist the commercial salmon industry in planning for the 2026 Prince William Sound (PWS) Management Area (Area E) season. Forecasts for commercial harvest by species are summarized in Table 1 with detailed Area E forecasts on ADF&G's website:

<http://www.adfg.alaska.gov/index.cfm?adfg=commercialbyareapws.salmon#forecasts>

Prince William Sound Aquaculture Corporation (PWSAC) hatchery forecasts can be found on the PWSAC website:

[2026 Return Forecast Summary - Prince William Sound Aquaculture Corporation \(pwsac.com\)](http://www.pwsac.com)

Valdez Fisheries Development Association (VFDA) hatchery forecasts can be found on the VFDA website:

<https://www.valdezfisheries.org/forecasted-returns/>

Management of PWS commercial salmon fisheries occurs from the Cordova area office. Fishery announcements from the Cordova ADF&G office will occur by 2:00 p.m. Announcement recordings will be available for gillnet fisheries at 907-424-7535 and seine fisheries at 907-424-7345. Additionally, announcement recordings are available in Anchorage at 907-267-2843. Daily announcements can be found on the ADF&G website at:

<http://www.adfg.alaska.gov/index.cfm?adfg=commercialbyareapws.salmon>

Gillnet Fishery

Copper River District

The Copper River District commercial salmon drift gillnet fishery will open at 7:00 am, Friday, May 22, for a 12-hour fishing period. Between 12:00 am, Friday, May 15, and 7:00 am, Friday, May 22, the Copper River District subsistence salmon fishing season will be closed except for a single 16-hour period from 6:00 am to 10:00 pm on Saturday, May 16. Specifics on the open area for these fisheries will be announced at a later date.

The Copper River delta sustainable escapement goal (SEG) is 55,000–130,000 sockeye salmon, and the upper Copper River SEG is 360,000–750,000 wild sockeye salmon. The 2026 inriver goal past the Miles Lake sonar is 632,700 salmon, consisting of the following components (rounded to the nearest hundred):

Spawning escapement	360,000 sockeye salmon
Other salmon	17,500 salmon
Subsistence	70,200 salmon
Personal use harvest	150,000 salmon
Sport fishery	15,000 salmon
Gulkana broodstock	20,000 sockeye salmon
Gulkana Hatchery surplus	0 sockeye salmon
Total	632,700 salmon

The standard commercial fishing schedule has two evenly spaced fishing periods per week, with the first period typically starting on Mondays at 7:00 a.m. Fishing effort, harvest, passage, and escapement trends on the Copper River Delta and at the Miles Lake sonar station will inform the department's decision on harvest opportunity.

The 2026 Copper River District sockeye salmon commercial harvest forecast is 728,000 fish, and the coho salmon commercial harvest 10-year average (2016–2025) is 184,000 (Table 1). The Copper River Chinook salmon total run forecast (33,000 fish) is 27% below the 10-year (2016–2025) average (45,000 fish). The 2026 sockeye salmon harvest forecast is on par with the 10-year (2016–2025) average of 733,000 fish. Based on recent poor Chinook salmon production, a conservative management approach will be implemented at the start of the season. For Chinook salmon conservation, the 'inside closure area', as defined in 5AAC 24.350(1)(B), will be closed during early season fishing periods; this area may be expanded early in the season to include waters inside the barrier islands east of Coffee Creek West (60° 14.13' N. lat., 144° 58.31' W. long.). Depending on the relative strength of the sockeye and Chinook salmon runs, additional management measures may be necessary to provide additional fishing opportunity on sockeye salmon while minimizing Chinook salmon harvest.

The existing large-fish sonar apportionment program at Miles Lake will be the primary in-season tool for monitoring Chinook salmon abundance to guide management decisions this season. This is the same large fish measurement process that has been refined and used since 2018. The continued transition from mark–recapture to Miles Lake sonar apportionment represents a shift to a more reliable, timelier, and more management-relevant assessment system for inseason management.

Beginning in early to mid-August, when coho salmon harvest becomes predominant, the Copper and Bering River Districts will be managed for coho salmon. The standard management strategy for coho salmon is one or two 24-hour commercial fishing periods per week, depending on escapement and harvest levels.

Individuals planning to participate in state subsistence salmon fishing activities in the Prince William Sound Management Area may obtain a permit through any ADF&G office or online (<https://www.adfg.alaska.gov/Store/>). **In Cordova, permits will be available during regular business hours Monday through Friday from 8:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m. and 1:00 p.m. to 5:00 p.m.** ADF&G staff will not be available to issue permits before hours, after hours, on state holidays, or weekends. Permit holders are encouraged to call the Cordova office at 907-424-3212 or report online (<https://www.adfg.alaska.gov/Harvest/>) to provide preliminary harvest reports to assist with inseason harvest tracking.

Bering River District

The recent 10-year average (2016–2025) commercial harvests for the Bering River District are 11,800 sockeye and 54,400 coho salmon. The western portion of the Bering River District may open concurrent with the Copper River District to alleviate enforcement concerns in the line fishery along the district boundary. A broader Bering River District opening is expected only after sockeye salmon escapement is tracking to achieve the Bering River District SEG. Beginning in early August, the Bering River District will be managed for coho salmon, and management strategies will be like those used for the Copper River District.

Eshamy District

The 2026 sockeye salmon run to Main Bay Hatchery (MBH) is forecast to be 431,000 fish. PWSAC anticipates utilizing 142,000 (33%) sockeye salmon for cost recovery and broodstock, leaving 289,000 (67%) fish available for harvest. The management strategy in 2026 will be to provide two periods per week in the Eshamy District when possible. Extended closures and/or short-duration periods may be necessary due to anticipated MBH cost recovery and broodstock needs representing almost a third of the total run. Fishing time in the Crafton Island Subdistrict may be adjusted based on the Coghill River wild sockeye salmon escapement. Eshamy District is expected to open for the 2026 season on Monday, June 1.

Eshamy River escapement may be assessed in 2026, but no forecast was produced this year due to a lack of regular assessment in recent years. Beginning in early to mid-July, fishing time and area in Crafton Island Subdistrict will be driven by the harvest of wild pink and sockeye salmon in Eshamy District and the strength of wild pink and chum salmon escapement in the Eshamy, Northwestern, Coghill, and Northern districts.

Coghill District

The 2026 Coghill Lake sockeye salmon total run forecast is 104,000 fish with an SEG of 20,000–75,000 fish. This is 53% below the 10-year (2016–2025) average of 223,000 fish. The chum salmon run to Wally Noerenberg Hatchery (WNH) is forecast to be 1.87 million fish. PWSAC anticipates utilizing 1.09 million (58%) chum salmon for cost recovery and broodstock, leaving 785,000 (42%) fish available for harvest. Coghill District is expected to open for the 2025 season on Monday, June 1.

The management strategy in 2026 will be to provide two periods per week in the Coghill District. WNH cost recovery and broodstock needs may necessitate extended closures of hatchery subdistricts. Based on the weak Coghill Lake sockeye salmon forecast, a reduced schedule of 36-to-48-hour periods are likely in north Port Wells and College Fiord waters. If the Coghill River weir counts start to exceed the daily weir passage objectives, fishing time will be expanded. If sustained weir passage above daily objectives continue to occur and/or wild sockeye salmon harvest patterns indicate rapidly increasing run entry, fishing area will be expanded to the mouth of Coghill River and portions of hatchery subdistricts may be opened to target Coghill Lake sockeye salmon. Hatchery cost recovery and broodstock needs will be regularly evaluated and management adjusted to the extent practicable. If the drift gillnet fleet does not appear to be able to harvest available surplus Coghill Lake sockeye salmon, the purse seine fleet may be allowed to fish north of 61° latitude in College Fiord.

WNH coho salmon are present in the Coghill District fishery from early August through late September. PWSAC projects the 2026 run to WNH to be 37,000 coho salmon, requiring 2,400 fish for broodstock, with all remaining fish (34,600) available for harvest.

Unakwik District

The wild stock sockeye salmon commercial harvest 10-year (2016–2025) average in Unakwik Inlet is 7,500 fish. During the sockeye salmon runs to Miners and Cowpen lakes, the management strategy will be to provide two periods per week concurrently with openings in the Coghill and Eshamy districts. Unakwik District is expected to open for the 2026 season on Monday, June 15.

Purse Seine Fishery

The 2026 pink salmon total run forecast for PWS is 21.31 million fish, with a potential commercial harvest of 14.03 million fish. This pink salmon total run forecast includes 4.73 million wild stock fish, 10.18 million Valdez Fisheries Development Association (VFDA) fish, and 6.40 million PWSAC hatchery fish. This ranks as one of lowest forecasts for hatchery returns in recent history. Approximately 3.62 million (36%) of the projected VFDA pink salmon return will be needed for cost recovery and broodstock, leaving 6.56 million fish available for commercial harvest. Approximately 3.50 million (55%) of the projected pink salmon run to the PWSAC hatcheries will be needed for cost recovery and broodstock, leaving 2.89 million fish available for commercial harvest. The department will manage for each district's aerial index escapement goal for a cumulative SEG of 575,000–992,000 pink salmon. Using the overall midpoint of the SEG, 784,000 fish, there will be approximately 3.94 million wild fish available for commercial harvest.

The 2026 chum salmon forecast is 3.62 million fish. Most fish, 3.04 million (84%), are from PWSAC hatchery production, with 330,000 fish returning to the Armin F. Koernig hatchery (AFK), and 840,000 fish returning to Port Chalmers. Based on the department's wild chum salmon forecast of 586,000 fish and subtracting the 10-year average escapement, 173,000, there is a potential harvestable surplus of 413,000 wild chum salmon.

The PWS purse seine fishery will begin on Monday, June 1 targeting the enhanced chum salmon runs to the AFK hatchery and Port Chalmers remote release site. Both Port Chalmers and the AFK hatchery will begin the season on a concurrent schedule of three fishing periods per week. A reduction in time and/or area will be implemented, if necessary, to limit the harvest of salmon bound for other areas of PWS. Port Chalmers will close in late July, after which purse seine fishing periods will be opened based on the strength of wild pink salmon stocks returning to the Montague District. Also, in late July, AFK will transition to pink salmon management; purse seine fishing opportunity in the Southwestern District will be based on PWSAC cost recovery, broodstock needs, and wild-stock

escapement performance. Anadromous stream closures and regulatory closed waters within the open areas at AFK and Port Chalmers will be suspended during June and July to facilitate the harvest of enhanced chum salmon.

The general waters of the eight purse seine districts will be managed based on the strength of wild stocks. Hatchery subdistricts will be managed based on the strength of both wild and enhanced stocks. Pink and chum salmon escapement trends and fishery performance data will be evaluated inseason and compared to average historical performance to determine the frequency and duration of openings.

The department will use yellow Salmon Harvest Task Force markers to close terminal wild stock areas for escapement or quality concerns if needed. The coordinates for these markers are available to the public at the Cordova ADF&G office, in advisory announcements, and online at:

https://www.adfg.alaska.gov/static/fishing/PDFs/commercial/pws/SHTF_waters_NAD83_2014.pdf.

Additional area and time manipulations may be made throughout the season to provide commercial fishing opportunities, disperse the fleet, maintain fish quality, and obtain fishery performance data.

Valdez Arm, Valdez Narrows, and Port Valdez will be managed for VFDA's cost recovery and broodstock needs. Commercial purse seine openings in Valdez Arm and Port Valdez targeting VFDA pink salmon will be based on the strength of the enhanced run and VFDA's progress toward achieving the pink salmon cost recovery goal. Typically, openings targeting VFDA fish generally start during the first week of July with regularly scheduled 14-hour periods (6 a.m. to 8 p.m.). In the remainder of the Eastern District, openings will be based on wild stock escapement trends. On August 15, Port Valdez will be closed to commercial fishing north of a line from Entrance Point to Potato Point. Commercial fishing in the Valdez Narrows Subdistrict may open on September 3 to target surplus VFDA coho salmon. The VFDA-enhanced coho salmon forecast is 53,800 fish, with a forecast commercial harvest of 14,700 fish.

The AFK, Cannery Creek Hatchery (CCH), and WNH pink salmon runs will be managed collectively to achieve PWSAC's cost recovery and broodstock goals. Prior to run entry sustaining consistent hatchery cost recovery harvest, the department may open the WNH, CCH, and AFK Hatchery THAs and SHAs to commercial fishery harvest to maintain pink salmon quality. Once PWSAC initiates cost recovery, they typically intend to complete at least 70–80% of their pink salmon cost recovery harvest goal before recommending any commercial fishery openings in the hatchery subdistricts. To allow for an orderly and consistent commercial fishery, ADF&G will work closely with PWSAC to achieve the pink salmon cost recovery goal as efficiently as possible. The department evaluates late pink salmon run progress based on cost recovery harvest, commercial fishery harvest and effort, broodstock collections, sex ratios, stock composition estimates, and wild stock escapement data.

Table 1.—ADF&G, PWSAC, and VFDA commercial harvest forecast for the 2026 salmon fishery in the Prince William Sound and Copper/Bering River areas.

PINK SALMON - HARVEST ESTIMATE (Thousands)

Wild Stocks	3,942
Hatchery Stocks ^a	
Solomon Gulch	6,558
Armin F. Koernig	834
Wally Noerenberg	836
Cannery Creek	1,226
Wild & Hatchery	13,396

CHUM SALMON - HARVEST ESTIMATE (Thousands)

Wild Stocks	413
Hatchery Stocks ^a	
Wally Noerenberg	785
Armin F. Koernig	330
Port Chalmers	840
Wild & Hatchery	2,368

COHO SALMON - HARVEST ESTIMATE (Thousands)

PWS Wild Stocks	No Projection
Copper River	184
Bering River	54
Hatchery Stocks ^a	
Solomon Gulch	15
Wally Noerenberg	35
Wild & Hatchery	288

SOCKEYE SALMON - HARVEST ESTIMATE (Thousands)

Copper River Wild & Hatchery	728
Bering River	12
Coghill Lake	74
PWS Remainder	63
PWS Hatchery Stocks ^a	
Main Bay	289
Wild & Hatchery	1,166

CHINOOK SALMON - HARVEST ESTIMATE (Thousands)

Wild Stocks	
Copper River	No Projection

^a Potential hatchery contributions to the commercial common property harvest are based on the forecast of total hatchery runs minus preseason estimates of cost recovery and broodstock harvest that will be required by hatchery operators.