

Division of Commercial Fisheries
Forrest Bowers, Acting 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 12, 2026

CONTACT: Lucas Stumpf
Acting Area Management Biologist
(907) 262-9368

UPPER COOK INLET 2026 OUTLOOK FOR COMMERCIAL SET GILLNET SALMON FISHING

Sockeye Salmon Forecast

In 2026, a run of approximately 7.6 million sockeye salmon is forecast to return to Upper Cook Inlet (UCI) with an estimate of 5.6 million available for harvest (commercial, sport, personal use, and subsistence).

The Kenai River sockeye salmon forecast is approximately 4.45 million fish. The 2026 Kenai River forecast is 464,500 (12%) fish more than the historical (1986–2025) average run of 3.98 million, but 833,000 (23%) fish more than the recent 10-year (2016–2025) average run of 3.61 million. 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 1.46 million fish. The 2026 forecast is 515,000 fish (54%) greater than the historical (1986–2025) average run of 954,000 fish and 439,000 fish (43%) greater than the recent 10-year (2016–2025) average run of 1.02 million fish.

Approximately 489,000 and 100,000 sockeye salmon are forecast to return to the Susitna River and Fish Creek respectively in 2026. The 2026 Susitna River sockeye salmon forecast is approximately 93,000 fish (24%) above the historical (2006–2025) average run of 396,000 fish and approximately 126,000 fish (35%) greater the recent 10-year (2016–2025) average run of 363,000 fish. The 2026 Fish Creek sockeye salmon forecast is approximately 10,000 (9%) fish fewer than the recent 10-year average run size of 110,000.

2026 Sockeye Salmon Forecasts and Escapement Goals

System	Forecast	Goals ^a
Kenai River ^{b,c}	4,450,000	1,100,000–1,400,000
Kasilof River ^{b,d}	1,460,000	140,000–320,000
Susitna River	489,400	
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	100,000	15,000–45,000
Unmonitored Systems ^e	1,100,600	N/A
Total	7,600,000	

^a Goals listed here are as follows: Kenai River: Inriver; Kasilof River: Biological Escapement Goal (BEG); Susitna River: Sustainable Escapement Goal (SEG); and Fish Creek: SEG

^b Kenai and Kasilof River goals are 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 ~17% of monitored systems.

Set Gillnet Season Opening Dates

Season opening dates in 2026 for the set gillnet fisheries of Upper Cook Inlet (UCI) are as follows:

- *Northern District directed king salmon fishery*: The directed king salmon fishery is closed to start the 2026 season (EO # 2-F-H-1-26).
- *Northern District set gillnet fishery*: June 25, unless modified by emergency order. Weekly fishing periods are Mondays and Thursdays from 7:00 a.m. to 7:00 p.m. (Figure 1).
- *Big River set gillnet fishery*: The Big River fishery will begin closed (EO #2-F-H-03-26) through June 11 due to forecasted poor king salmon returns, restrictions to subsistence fishing, and consecutive years of not meeting escapement goals in Northern Cook Inlet. The first commercial fishing period will be on June 12, 2026.
- *Western Subdistrict set gillnet fishery*: The first period will be on June 18 and weekly fishing periods are Mondays and Thursdays from 7:00 a.m. to 7:00 p.m.
- *Upper Subdistrict set gillnet fishery*: The east side setnet fishery (ESSN) fishery will begin closed (EO # 2-F-H-2-26). At the special Board of Fish (BOF) meeting on May 1, 2026, set gillnet opportunity was removed and replaced with set beach seine gear as an alternative gear type to S04H permit holders in the Upper Subdistrict under the *Kenai River late-run king salmon stock of concern management plan* (KLKSOC). Under these new regulations there is no avenue for opening the set gillnet fishery in 2026. Use of beach seine gear this year will be dependent upon required CFEC action.
- *All remaining set gillnet fisheries, except the Upper Subdistrict fishery*: Will begin on June 25 and weekly fishing periods are Mondays and Thursdays from 7:00 a.m. to 7:00 p.m. (Figure 2).

Northern District Set Gillnet Salmon Fishery Overview

- The 2026 Deshka River preseason king salmon forecasted total run of 3,414 fish is 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-2-12-26) 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 2026 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 25, 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 Alaska 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, two, or three 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. Commercial fishing periods may be further restricted for conservation of coho salmon dependent upon inseason run strength assessment.
- The UCI set gillnet fishery will be closed for the season by EO when catch and effort cease for multiple open commercial periods.

Central District Set Gillnet Fisheries in Chinitna Bay, Western, Kustatan, and Kalgin Island Subdistricts 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.
- The Kalgin Island Subdistrict may also be given up to one extra fishing period per week if the harvest rates are consistent with years that the Packers Creek escapement goal (15,000–30,000) was achieved.
- The fisheries will be closed for the season by EO when catch and effort cease ~ October 1.

Upper Subdistrict Fishery Overview

- The 2026 Kenai River late-run king salmon forecast projects a total run of 12,718 large (>75cm mid eye to tail fork) fish. The recovery goal for Kenai River late-run king salmon is 14,250–30,000 large fish. The KLLKSO established regulations that close 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 February 9, 2026, the department issued an EO 2-KS-1-7-26 closing the king salmon sport fishery in the Kenai River from its mouth upstream to ADF&G markers located at the outlet of Skilak Lake beginning June 20, 2026, until August 15, 2026. Subsequently, the department issued an EO 2-F-H-2-26, closing set gillnet fishing in the Kenai, East Forelands, and Kasilof sections to start the 2026 season.

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

Set Beach Seine (Pending required CFEC action)

- Set beach seine commercial fishing regulations were adopted by the BOF in May of 2026, to provide a live release gear type for set gillnet permit holders. The Upper Subdistrict set beach seine fishery is closed to begin the 2026 season unless the forecast or inseason projections of Kenai River late-run king salmon exceed 14,250 large fish, including harvest and forecast error.
 - The department may allow two 12-hour periods per week, from June 20 until July 31, established by emergency order.
 - Retention of king and coho salmon is prohibited.
 - A king salmon that is retained due to being mortally wounded must be delivered to a shore-based processor or floating processor, and made available to the department for sampling.
 - Participation is limited to SO4H permit holders. Each permit holder may operate up to one set beach seine at a time.
 - All standard CFEC reporting requirements apply in addition to the stock of concern requirements.
 - The number of any king or coho salmon that are released must be recorded on a fish ticket under the disposition code (94) for live release.
 - A set beach seine maximum legal limit is 70 fathoms in length, 110 mesh in depth, including border and chaffing strips, and three and one-half-inch mesh throughout.
 - Fishing must occur from shore or waterline, with one end anchored on shore and the outside end set and retrieved back to the shore or waterline using a running line.
 - A commercial dip net may not be operated within 600 feet a set beach seine, and set beach seine gear must not be operated within 600 feet of any part of another set beach seine.

Commercial Dip Net 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.

- The department may allow up to five, 12-hour commercial dip net periods per week, Monday through Friday from June 20 – July 31 when set gillnet fishing is not open. The area allowed for both shore and vessel-based fishing is the current set gillnet statistical areas excluding the Kasilof River Special Harvest Area. Shore-based fishing may only occur from DNR and City of Kenai shore lease sites.
- Retention of king and coho salmon is prohibited. King and coho salmon caught may not be removed from the water and 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.
- All standard CFEC reporting requirements apply in addition to the stock of concern requirements listed for the set gillnet fishery above.
- The number of any king or coho salmon that are released must be recorded on a fish ticket under the disposition code (94) for live release.
- A legal dip net is defined as (5 AAC 39.105 (d)(24)):
 - 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 set gillnet 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: <https://www.adfg.alaska.gov/index.cfm?adfg=commercialbyareauci.salmon#/management.%20#management> Any permit holder that plans to fish in the Upper Subdistrict with **set beach seine** or **dip net gear** will need to register with ADF&G at the Soldotna office prior to fishing in 2026.

Central District Drift Gillnet Fishery Update:

The 2026 Central District drift gillnet fishery outlook is released as a separate document.

General information and Contact Numbers

The UCI commercial fisheries information line will again be available by calling 907-262-9611. 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 posted online at:

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

If you would like all EOs and News Releases to be emailed to you as soon as they are released, you can subscribe at this website for that service

<https://www.adfg.alaska.gov/index.cfm?adfg=cfnews.search>.

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 907-262-9368, or 907-420-7740, by fax at 907-262-4709, or by mail at 43961 Kalifornsky Beach Road, Suite B, Soldotna, 99669.

UCI Commercial Fisheries Acting Area Management Biologist Lucas Stumpf

Office Phone: 907-260-2916 – Email: Lucas.Stumpf@alaska.gov

Cook Inlet Finfish Regional Management Coordinator Colton Lipka

Office Phone: 907-260-2907 – Email: Colton.Lipka@alaska.gov

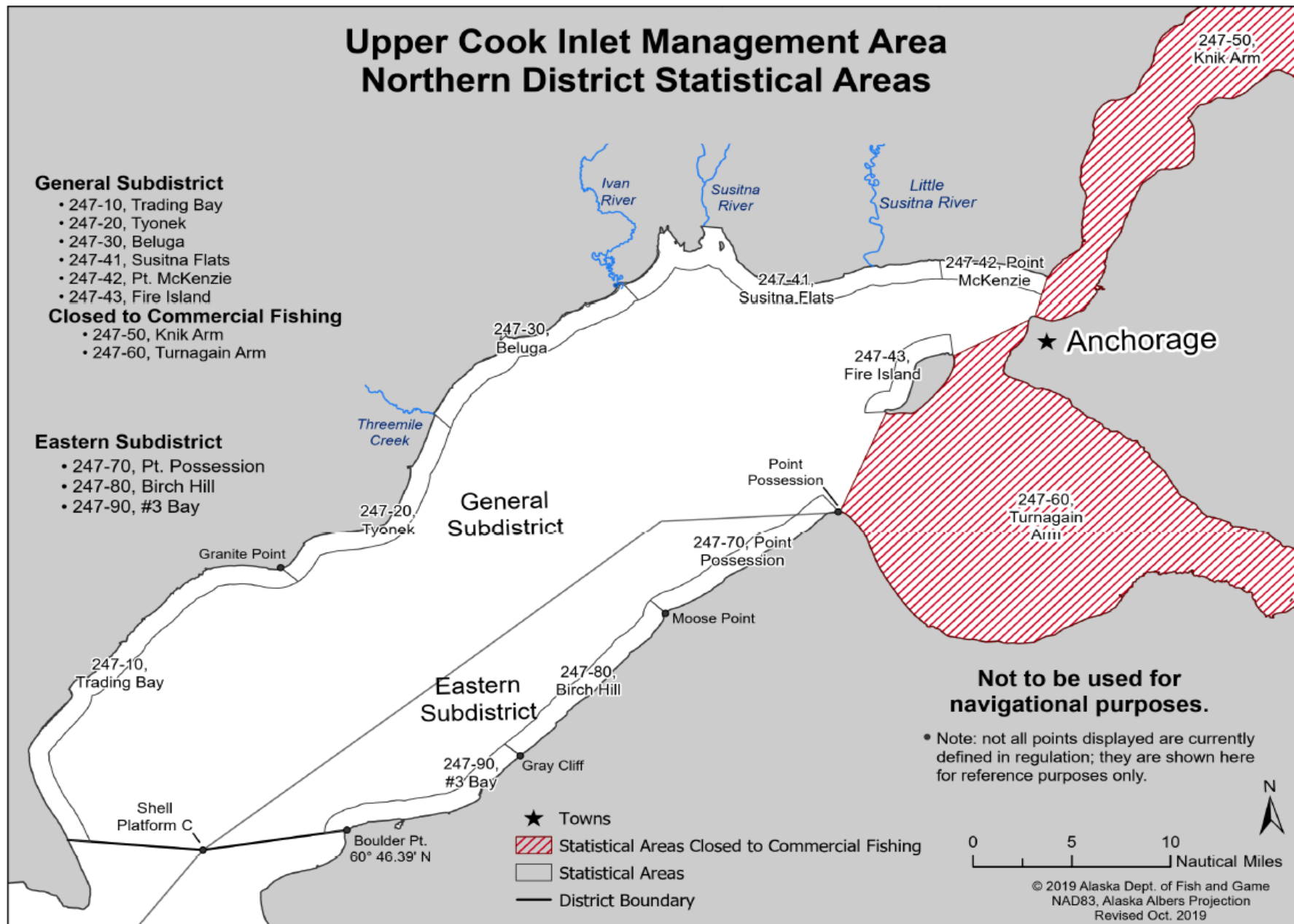


Figure 1.—Upper Cook Inlet Northern District commercial set gillnet subdistricts and statistical areas.

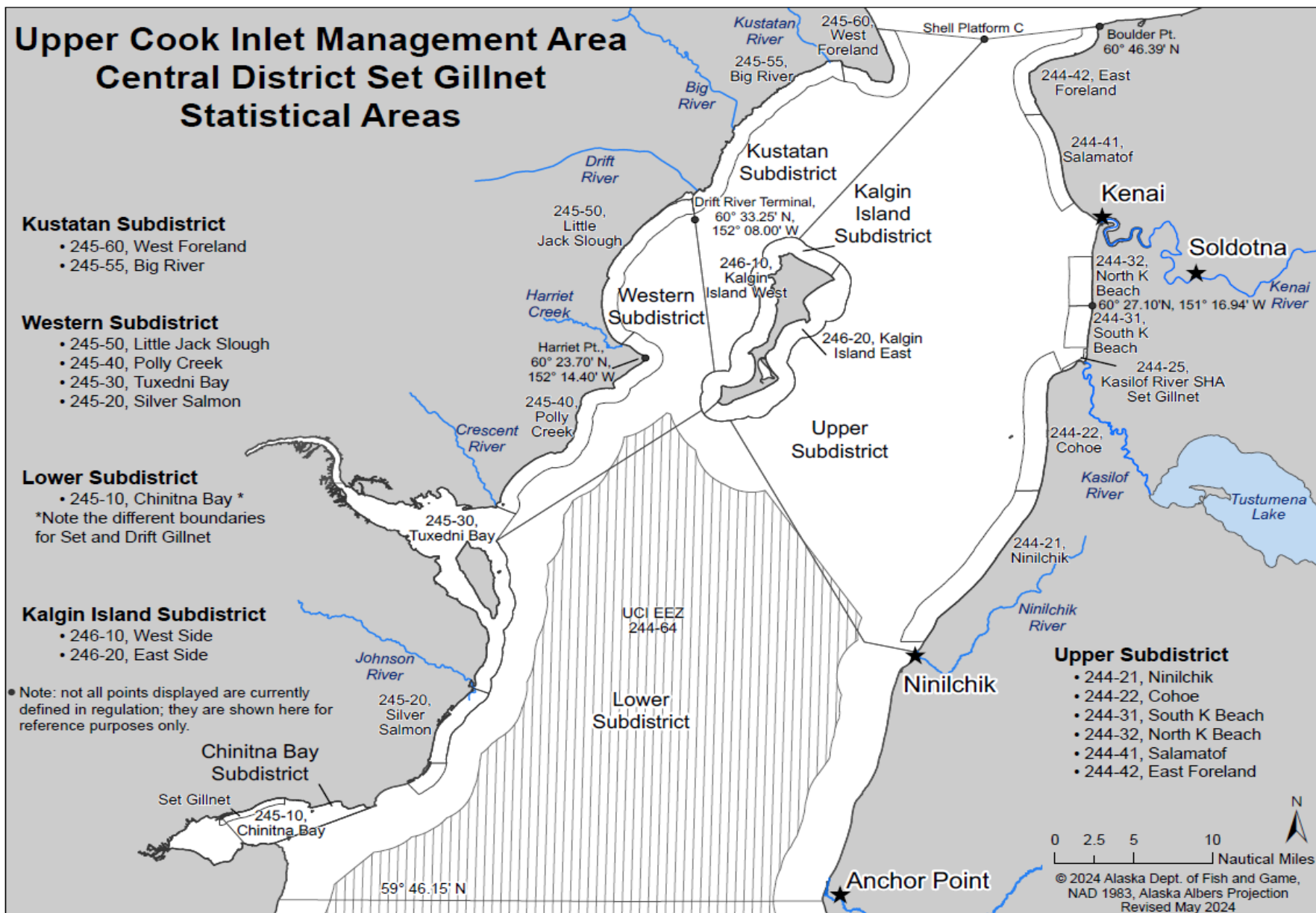


Figure 2.—Upper Cook Inlet Central District commercial set gillnet subdistricts and statistical areas.