

ALASKA DEPARTMENT OF FISH AND GAME

DIVISION OF COMMERCIAL FISHERIES

NEWS RELEASE



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2017 PRINCE WILLIAM SOUND SALMON FISHERY INFORMATION

General Information

This outlook is provided to assist the commercial salmon industry in planning for the 2017 season in the Prince William Sound (PWS) Management Area (Area E). Forecasts for commercial common property fishery (CCPF) harvests by species are summarized in Table 1. Preseason forecasts are the basis for the information provided. Detailed Area E total run forecasts can be found on ADF&G's web site:

<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 web site:

<http://pwsac.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/2017-PWSAC-Forecast.pdf>

Management of PWS commercial salmon fisheries occurs from the Cordova area office. As in past years, fishery announcements from the Cordova ADF&G office will routinely occur at 2:00 p.m. and will normally provide a minimum of 15 hours advanced notice. 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 are compiled and can be found on the ADF&G web site at:

<http://www.adfg.alaska.gov/index.cfm?adfg=cfnews.main>

The first announcement concerning the Copper River District will be issued between May 1 and May 8.

Gillnet Fishery

Copper River District

The first commercial fishing period of the season in the Copper River District is anticipated to occur during the week of May 14. The 2017 CC PF harvest projections for the Copper River District are 889,000 sockeye, 207,000 coho, and 4,000 Chinook salmon (Table 1). The 2017 inriver goal past the Miles Lake sonar is 690,000 to 1.08 million salmon. The upper Copper River

sustainable escapement goal (SEG) is 360,000 to 750,000 natural sockeye salmon, and the Copper River delta SEG is 55,000 to 130,000 natural sockeye salmon. The department's goal is to maintain the long-term average of 450,000 sockeye salmon in the upper Copper River spawning escapement and 84,500 sockeye salmon in the Copper River Delta spawning escapement. The components of the inriver goal are as follows:

Spawning escapement	360,000 to 750,000 sockeye
Other salmon	17,500 salmon
Subsistence	77,900 salmon
Personal Use harvest	130,300 salmon
Sport fishery	15,000 salmon
Gulkana broodstock	20,000 sockeye
Gulkana Hatchery surplus	69,000 sockeye
Total	690,000 to 1.08 million

The initial management strategy will be based on anticipated weekly sockeye and Chinook salmon harvests for the Copper River District and additional assessments of river conditions, fishing effort, harvest location, and consistency of harvest. Once the Miles Lake sonar is deployed, the inriver goal becomes one of the primary factors in management decisions. By late June, aerial estimates of Copper River Delta sockeye salmon escapement are also considered.

The standard commercial fishing schedule is two evenly-spaced fishing periods per week with the first period each week starting on Mondays at 7:00 a.m. Depending on fishing effort, harvest, and escapement trends on the Copper River Delta and at Miles Lake sonar station, a decision on a possible second weekly fishing period will be made by 2:00 p.m. on Wednesday. The second period will typically begin at 7:00 a.m. on Thursday. The 2017 sockeye salmon harvest forecast is smaller than average and the frequency and duration of fishing periods may be lessened to match sockeye salmon run entry. Based on anticipated low Chinook salmon abundance, the 'inside closure area', as defined in 5AAC 24.350(1)(B), is anticipated to be closed for all fishing periods until mid-June; it is also anticipated that this area will be expanded at the start of the season to include waters inside the barrier islands east of Coffee Creek West (60° 14.13' N. lat., 144° 58.31' W. long.).

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 periods per week depending on escapement and harvest levels.

Individuals planning to participate in subsistence fishing activities in Copper River District are required to obtain a subsistence permit through the Cordova ADF&G office. **Permits will be available during normal 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 on weekends.

Bering River District

The 2017 CCPF harvest projections for the Bering River District are 4,000 sockeye and 48,000 coho salmon. Bering River District is expected to open for the 2017 season only after sockeye salmon escapement is consistently above the minimum weekly target necessary to achieve the

SEG. Beginning in early August, the Bering River District will be managed for coho salmon and management strategies will be similar to those used for Copper River District.

Eshamy District

PWSAC's Main Bay Hatchery forecast is 1.10 million sockeye salmon. The management strategy in 2017 will be to provide two periods per week in the hatchery subdistrict. Short duration periods are anticipated in the Crafton Island Subdistrict based on the recent trend in Coghill River natural sockeye salmon escapement. Eshamy District is expected to open for the 2017 season on June 1.

Eshamy River escapement will be assessed with a video monitoring system in 2017. No forecast is available this year for the natural stock sockeye salmon run to Eshamy Lake. Beginning in early to mid-July, fishing time and area in Crafton Island Subdistrict will be driven by escapement of natural pink and sockeye salmon in Eshamy District, and the strength of natural pink and chum salmon runs to the Northwestern, Coghill, and Northern districts.

Coghill District

The 2017 Coghill Lake sockeye salmon total run forecast is 74,000 fish with an SEG of 20,000–60,000 fish and an anticipated harvest of 44,000 fish. The chum salmon run to Wally Noerenberg Hatchery (WNH) is forecast to be 1.97 million fish. PWSAC requires 818,000 (42%) chum salmon for cost recovery and broodstock, leaving 1.09 million (58%) for the CCPF. Coghill District is expected to open for the 2017 season on June 1.

Granite Bay Subdistrict will be managed to achieve PWSAC cost recovery and broodstock goals when management of Esther and Perry Island subdistricts is not adequately achieving these goals.

Area restrictions may be implemented by emergency order for the conservation of Coghill Lake sockeye salmon and Port Wells natural stock chum and pink salmon. The management strategy in 2017 will be to provide two periods per week. Based on the recent trend in Coghill River natural sockeye salmon escapement, short duration periods are anticipated in areas outside the WNH terminal area. If sockeye salmon escapement is within the anticipated range and sockeye salmon harvest rates in Coghill District indicate a strong run, the Port Wells area will be regularly opened north to the markers near Coghill Lagoon. If the Coghill River weir counts exceed the escapement goal, fishing area may be expanded to the mouth of Coghill River. 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 the Coghill District.

WNH coho salmon are present in the Coghill District fishery from early August through late September. The 2017 run to WNH is expected to be 230,000 coho salmon. PWSAC will require 2,700 fish for broodstock with all remaining fish available to the CCPF.

Unakwik District

The 2017 natural stock sockeye salmon commercial harvest in Unakwik Inlet is forecast at 3,300 fish. During the sockeye salmon run to Miners and Cowpen lakes, the management strategy will be to provide two periods per week. This schedule is expected to begin in early June and run concurrently with openings in Coghill District. Unakwik District is expected to open for the 2017 season on June 15.

Purse Seine Fishery

The 2017 pink salmon total run forecast for PWS is 67.16 million fish, of which 58.92 million will be available for CCPF harvest. This pink salmon total run forecast includes 21.10 million natural stock fish, 18.75 million Valdez Fisheries Development Association (VFDA) fish, and 27.40 million PWSAC hatchery fish. Approximately 3.30 million (18%) of the projected 18.75 million pink salmon run to VFDA's Solomon Gulch Hatchery will be needed for cost recovery and broodstock leaving 15.48 million for CCPF. Approximately 3.20 million (12%) of the projected 27.40 million pink salmon run to the PWSAC hatcheries will be needed for cost recovery and broodstock. The remaining 24.20 million PWSAC pink salmon will be available for common property harvest. Based on the department's natural stock pink salmon forecast of 21.10 million fish, there is a potential CCPF of 19.65 million natural pink salmon. The department will manage for each district's escapement goal for a combined total of 1.45 million pink salmon.

The 2017 chum salmon forecast total run in PWS is 3.17 million fish. The majority, 2.80 million (70%), are from PWSAC hatchery production, with 456,000 fish returning to the Armin F. Koernig hatchery (AFK). Based on the department's natural chum salmon forecast of 371,000 fish, there is a potential common property harvest of 171,000 natural chum salmon. The department will manage for each district's escapement goal, aiming for each district's long-term average, for a combined total of 200,000 fish.

The PWS purse seine fishery will begin on Thursday, June 1 targeting the enhanced chum salmon run to the AFK hatchery and Port Chalmers remote release site. At AFK hatchery, a regular schedule of two fishing periods per week is anticipated for the start of the season; an 84-hour fishing period from 8:00 a.m. Thursdays to 8:00 p.m. Sundays, and a 60-hour fishing period, from 8:00 a.m. Mondays to 8:00 p.m. Wednesdays. Due to recent trends in Coghill Lake sockeye salmon escapement, as well as the harvest of salmon destined for other areas of PWS, a reduced schedule will be implemented to allow for the passage of natural stock fish if necessary. Starting on Thursday, June 15 daily fishing periods will be used to allow for more frequent monitoring of purse seine harvests.

In the Port Chalmers Subdistrict, a regular schedule of two fishing periods per week is anticipated; an 84-hour fishing period from 8:00 a.m. Thursdays to 8:00 p.m. Sundays, and a 60-hour fishing period, from 8:00 a.m. Mondays to 8:00 p.m. Wednesdays. Daily 14-hour fishing periods will commence for the open area at Port Chalmers on Thursday, June 15, which will provide more frequent updates of pink salmon run entry. Areas open to the Port Chalmers CCPF will close in late July, after which purse seine fishing periods will be opened based on the strength of natural pink salmon stocks. Anadromous stream closures and regulatory closed waters within the open area 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 natural stocks. Hatchery subdistricts will be managed based on the strength of both natural and enhanced stocks. If the 2017 natural stock pink salmon forecast is realized it would be the second largest natural run on record, and well above the 1997–2015 odd-year average return of 12.29 million fish. The 2017 pink salmon forecast is the largest on record and liberal fishing time and area is anticipated if returns are as strong as expected. Pink and chum salmon escapement will be evaluated during weekly aerial surveys to determine the frequency and duration of openings. The department has used yellow salmon harvest task force (SHTF) markers in the past to close terminal

natural stock areas, both for escapement and quality concerns. The coordinates for these markers are available to the public at the Cordova ADF&G office, online, and are included in an annual fishery news release. Valdez Arm, Valdez Narrows, and Port Valdez will be managed for VFDA's cost recovery and broodstock needs. Openings in Valdez Arm and Port Valdez designed to target VFDA pink salmon will be based on the strength of the enhanced run and VFDA's progress towards achieving the pink salmon cost recovery goal. CCPF openings targeting VFDA fish generally start during the first week of July with daily 14-hour periods (6 a.m. to 8 p.m.). In the remainder of the Eastern District, openings will be based on natural stock escapements. Port Valdez will be closed to the CCPF north of a line from Entrance Point to Potato Point beginning on August 15. Valdez Narrows Subdistrict will open on September 5 to target surplus VFDA coho salmon. The VFDA enhanced coho salmon forecast is 104,537 fish with an anticipated CCPF harvest of 40,247 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 a CCPF harvest to maintain pink salmon quality. Once PWSAC initiates cost recovery, they intend to complete at least 70–80% of their pink salmon cost recovery harvest goal prior to recommending an opening of the CCPF in the hatchery subdistricts. ADF&G will work closely with PWSAC to achieve the pink salmon cost recovery goal as rapidly as possible to allow for an orderly and consistent CCPF. The department evaluates late pink salmon run progress based on cost recovery and CCPF harvest rates, broodstock collections, sex ratios, stock composition estimates, and natural stock escapement data.

Table 1.—ADF&G, PWSAC, and VFDA commercial common property harvest projections for the 2017 salmon fishery in the Prince William Sound and Copper/Bering River areas.

PINK SALMON - HARVEST ESTIMATE (Thousands)	
Natural Stocks	19,650
Hatchery Stocks ^a	
Solomon Gulch	15,477
Armin F. Koernig	7,194
Wally Noerenberg	9,307
Cannery Creek	7,296
Natural & Hatchery	58,924
CHUM SALMON - HARVEST ESTIMATE (Thousands)	
Natural Stocks	171
Hatchery Stocks ^a	
Wally Noerenberg	1,152
Armin F. Koernig	456
Port Chalmers	383
Natural & Hatchery	2,162
COHO SALMON - HARVEST ESTIMATE (Thousands)	
PWS Natural Stocks	No Forecast
Copper River	207
Bering River	48
Hatchery Stocks ^a	
Solomon Gulch	40
Wally Noerenberg	227
Natural & Hatchery	523
SOCKEYE SALMON - HARVEST ESTIMATE (Thousands)	
Copper River	889
Bering River	4
Coghill Lake	44
PWS Remainder	22
PWS Hatchery Stocks ^a	
Main Bay	1,138
Natural & Hatchery	2,097
CHINOOK SALMON - HARVEST ESTIMATE (Thousands)	
Natural Stocks	
Copper River	4

^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.