

**ALASKA DEPARTMENT OF FISH AND GAME
DIVISION OF COMMERCIAL FISHERIES
NEWS RELEASE**



*Sam Cotten, Commissioner
Scott Kelley, Director*



Contact:
Cordova Management and Research Staff: Jeremy Botz,
Charles Russell, Stormy Haught, and Stacy Vega
Phone: (907) 424-3212
Fax: (907) 424-3235

Cordova ADF&G
401 Railroad Avenue
P.O. Box 669
Cordova, AK 99574
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2017 PRINCE WILLIAM SOUND SALMON SEASON SUMMARY

The following is an overview of the 2017 Prince William Sound (PWS) Area commercial salmon season. Please note that numbers in the narrative are rounded for simplicity and all data are considered preliminary.

The 2017 PWS Area commercial salmon harvest was 56.15 million fish (Table 1). Harvest was composed of 48.73 million pink, 1.43 million sockeye, 5.42 million chum, 554,000 coho, and 13,600 Chinook salmon. The 2017 harvest included 50.34 million (90%) commercial common property fishery (CCPF), and 5.82 million (10%) hatchery cost recovery and broodstock fish.

The estimated value of the combined commercial salmon harvest, including hatchery sales, was approximately \$127.98 million. During the 2017 season, 518 drift gillnet, 29 set gillnet, and 229 purse seine permit holders fished in at least one fishing period. Drift gillnet exvessel harvest value was an estimated \$38.47 million (average permit earnings of \$74,200); set gillnet exvessel harvest value was an estimated \$1.56 million (average permit earnings at \$53,800); and purse seine exvessel harvest value was an estimated \$71.79 million (average permit earnings at \$313,500). Revenue generated for hatchery operations was approximately \$16.16 million.

GILLNET FISHERIES

COPPER RIVER DISTRICT

The 2017 preseason commercial harvest forecast for the Copper River District was 4,000 Chinook, 889,000 sockeye, and 207,000 coho salmon. Gulkana Hatchery was projected to contribute 173,000 sockeye salmon to the CCPF harvest. A conservative management strategy was implemented due to the weak Chinook and sockeye salmon forecast. This strategy included reduced frequency and duration of fishing periods to match salmon run entry. The inside closure area was expanded and remained closed until mid-June. The expanded area included waters inside the barrier islands east of Kokinhenik Bar and west of Grass Island Bar. The anticipated first fishing period was skipped and the district opened on Thursday, May 18. Total fishing time through July was reduced by 40% compared to the 10-year average. The Copper River sockeye salmon harvest of 570,000 fish was 60% less than the previous 10-year (2007–2016) harvest average of 1.43 million sockeye salmon and 36% below forecast. The average sockeye salmon

weight of 5.5 pounds was the third smallest on record. The number of wild sockeye salmon in the Copper River District CCPF harvest was 530,000, or 93%. Gulkana Hatchery contribution to the sockeye salmon commercial harvest was 29,300, or 5% of the Copper River harvest, and was 90% below forecast. Main Bay Hatchery contributed 10,500 fish, or 2% of the Copper River harvest. The CCPF harvest of 13,100 Chinook salmon was below the previous 10-year (2007–2016) average harvest of 15,400. The current season total coho salmon commercial harvest of 288,000 fish is well above the previous 10-year (2007–2016) harvest average of 206,000 coho salmon. The 2017 preliminary sonar inriver estimate was 723,426 salmon and was within the 712,000–1,100,000 salmon range of the inriver goal. Spawning escapement to Copper River delta systems based on aerial survey indices was 57,000 sockeye salmon, and was within the sustainable escapement goal (SEG) range of 55,000–130,000 fish. Copper River Delta coho salmon spawning escapement monitoring is ongoing, but peak escapement counts are within the SEG range of 32,000–67,000 fish. Preliminary estimates of inriver Chinook salmon abundance are not available at this time.

BERING RIVER DISTRICT

The 2017 preseason commercial harvest forecast for the Bering River District was 4,000 sockeye, and 48,000 coho salmon. The sockeye salmon commercial harvest of 2,600 fish was 30% below the previous 10-year (2007–2016) harvest average of 3,700 fish. The coho salmon commercial harvest of 111,000 was more than double the previous 10-year (2007–2016) harvest average of 47,900 fish. Commercial fishing effort in the coho salmon fisheries was high due in part to productive fishing in the eastern portion of the Copper River Delta. The aerial escapement index of 18,800 sockeye salmon was within the SEG range of 15,000–33,000 fish. Bering River District coho salmon spawning escapement monitoring is ongoing, but peak escapement counts are within the SEG range of 13,000–33,000 fish.

COGHILL DISTRICT

Prince William Sound Aquaculture Corporation (PWSAC) forecast a 2017 run of 1.97 million chum and 230,000 coho salmon to Wally Noerenberg Hatchery (WNH) and required 818,000 (42%) chum and 2,700 (1%) coho salmon for cost recovery and broodstock. The CCPF drift gillnet harvest of chum salmon in the Coghill District was 2.17 million fish. The proportion of wild chum salmon in the Coghill District CCPF harvest was 5%. PWSAC harvested 724,000 chum salmon for cost recovery and broodstock. The total chum salmon return to WNH was 3.26 million fish and was 65% above forecast. The CCPF drift gillnet harvest of sockeye salmon in the Coghill District was 112,200 fish. The proportion of wild sockeye salmon in the Coghill District CCPF harvest was 24% (28,300 fish). Pink salmon CCPF drift gillnet harvest in the Coghill District was 662,000 fish. The proportion of wild pink salmon in the Coghill District CCPF harvest was 69%. The CCPF drift gillnet harvest of coho salmon in the Coghill District was 14,200 fish, 93% below forecast.

The sockeye salmon run forecast for Coghill River was 74,000 fish. The Coghill River weir passed 50,312 sockeye salmon, which is within the SEG range of 20,000–60,000 fish.

ESHAMY DISTRICT

PWSAC forecast a run of 1.15 million Main Bay Hatchery enhanced sockeye salmon. The CCPF harvest of sockeye salmon in the Eshamy District was 621,000 fish, 46% below the forecast. The proportion of wild sockeye salmon in the Eshamy District CCPF harvest was 9% (55,800 fish).

PWSAC utilized approximately 10,000 sockeye salmon for broodstock and culled 40,000 jack sockeye salmon. The CCPF drift gillnet harvest of chum salmon in the Coghill District was 120,000 fish. The proportion of wild chum salmon in the Eshamy District CCPF harvest was 22%. Pink salmon CCPF drift gillnet harvest in the Eshamy District was 349,000 fish. The proportion of wild pink salmon in the Eshamy District CCPF harvest was 72%.

UNAKWIK DISTRICT

Unakwik District CCPF drift gillnet harvest was 764 sockeye salmon, which was well below the 10-year average of 3,000 sockeye salmon.

PURSE SEINE FISHERIES

CHUM SALMON

The 2017 chum salmon total run forecast was 3.17 million fish, with 2.80 million fish (70%) projected to be of PWSAC origin. Of these, 456,000 chum salmon were expected to be harvested at Armin F. Koernig Hatchery (AFK) and 383,000 were expected to be harvested at Port Chalmers by the purse seine fleet. The purse seine gear group had access to the Port Chalmers Subdistrict in 2017 under the Prince William Sound Management and Salmon Enhancement Allocation Plan.

Based on the department's wild chum salmon forecast of 371,000 fish, there was a preseason expectation for the potential CCPF harvest of 171,000 wild chum salmon in PWS, leaving 200,000 fish for escapement.

Total commercial chum salmon harvest in PWS was 5.42 million fish, including 724,000 fish for WNH broodstock and cost recovery. A record 2.39 million chum salmon were harvested in the purse seine CPF compared to a 595,000 recent 10-year (2007–2016) harvest average. Purse seine chum salmon harvest in PWS was predominantly from the Montague, Southwestern, Eastern, and Coghill districts. Chum salmon commercial harvest in the Southwestern District was 446,000 fish, nearly matching the forecast. Montague District chum salmon commercial harvest was 539,000 fish, 41% above forecast, of which 299,000 fish were of WNH origin. Eastern District chum salmon commercial harvest was 317,000 fish. The purse seine fleet was allowed into the Coghill District starting on July 15 in order to harvest a buildup of poor quality fish in the WNH THA/SHA and harvested approximately 862,000 chum salmon.

PINK SALMON

The 2017 pink salmon total run forecast for PWS was 67.16 million fish, of which 58.92 million were estimated to be available for CCPF harvest. This estimate included 27.40 million PWSAC enhanced fish, a record 21.01 million wild fish, and 18.75 million Valdez Fisheries Development Association (VFDA) enhanced fish. Approximately 3.20 million (12%) of PWSAC's pink salmon forecast was projected for cost recovery and broodstock with the remaining 24.20 million PWSAC fish expected to be available for CCPF harvest. Approximately 3.30 million (18%) of VFDA's pink salmon forecast were projected for cost recovery and broodstock. The remaining 15.48 million VFDA fish were expected to be available for CPF harvest. A total harvest of 19.65 million wild stock pink salmon was forecasted for CCPF harvest in PWS, leaving 1.45 million fish for escapement.

The CCPF harvest of 43.67 million pink salmon was 9.93 million less than the 5-year odd year average, and 26% below the 58.92 million CCPF preseason forecast. Total pink salmon harvest was 48.73 million fish; including 5.06 million fish for hatchery cost recovery, broodstock, and raceway sales (3.46 million for PWSAC and 1.60 million for VFDA). The number of active permits fished in the Prince William Sound purse seine fishery was the highest number since 1991 at 229 permits. Pink salmon otolith contributions estimate CCPF harvest contributions of 20.27 million wild stock fish, 12.54 million Solomon Gulch Hatchery fish, and 10.69 million PWSAC fish. The VFDA pink salmon run was 25% (4.61 million) below the preseason forecast of 18.75 million fish. The PWSAC pink salmon run was 48% (13.26 million) below the preseason forecast of 27.40 million fish.

For the 2017 season, inseason pink salmon aerial survey escapement estimates were above anticipated escapement thresholds in most districts for most of the season. This allowed for expanded time and area for fishing effort targeting surplus wild and enhanced pink salmon. The area-under-the-curve estimate of pink salmon escapement is not yet available, but considering that inseason escapement indices were above anticipated counts, overall escapement was likely within or above the odd-year SEG range for all districts.

COHO SALMON

The VFDA coho salmon run was anticipated to be 105,000 fish. Total CCPF harvest of coho salmon in PWS (excluding Copper River and Bering River districts) was 107,000 fish.

Table 1.—Preliminary Area E salmon harvest, 2017 (10/03/2017).

District	Chinook	Sockeye	Coho	Pink	Chum	Total
Bering River	36	2,593	118,172	105	14	120,920
Copper River	13,139	569,321	304,042	68,826	11,639	966,967
Eastern	60	15,024	46,041	17,671,121	317,219	18,049,465
Northern	8	16,925	12,401	7,330,193	128,629	7,488,156
Coghill	74	118,369	14,438	1,113,153	3,036,549	4,282,583
Northwestern	2	20,564	1,341	1,451,741	46,886	1,520,534
Eshamy	89	620,999	4,077	350,317	120,221	1,095,703
Southwestern	136	50,973	20,187	11,629,000	446,044	12,146,340
Montague	94	10,000	7,425	3,381,639	539,333	3,938,491
Southeastern	5	991	732	676,741	52,037	730,506
Unakwik	0	764	0	208	70	1,042
CCPF Total	13,643	1,426,523	528,856	43,673,044	4,698,641	50,340,707
Hatchery						
Solomon Gulch	0	0	25,263	1,602,084	0	1,627,347
Cannery Creek	0	0	0	527,103	0	527,103
Wally Noerenberg	0	0	0	1,061,669	723,981	1,785,650
Main Bay	0	10,000	0	0	0	0
Armin F. Koernig	0	0	0	1,866,288	0	1,866,288
Hatchery Total ^a	0	10,000	25,263	5,057,144	723,981	5,816,388
PWS Total Harvest	13,643	1,436,523	554,119	48,730,188	5,422,622	56,157,095

^a Hatchery sales harvest for operating costs and broodstock harvest.