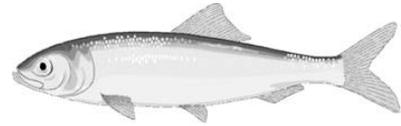


ALASKA DEPARTMENT OF FISH AND GAME
DIVISION OF COMMERCIAL FISHERIES
NEWS RELEASE



Denby S. Lloyd, Commissioner
John Hilsinger, Director



Contact:

Jim Menard, Nome Area Manager (907) 443-5167
Steve Hayes, Yukon Area Manager (907) 267-2383
Jeff Estensen, Kuskokwim Area Manager (907) 267-2303
Fax: (907) 267-2442

Anchorage Regional Office
333 Raspberry Road
Anchorage, AK, 99518
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Arctic-Yukon-Kuskokwim Herring Outlook and Management Strategy for 2010

Projections from postseason escapement estimates suggest that the 2010 spawning biomass for northeastern Bering Sea herring stocks (Security Cove to Norton Sound Districts) will be 71,907 tons, with an anticipated allowable harvest of 14,227 tons. Only the Goodnews Bay District biomass was based upon a good aerial survey biomass estimate in 2009. The remaining districts have not had reliable biomass estimates for several years. There has been no commercial herring sac roe fishery in AYK Region since 2006. Limited test fishing was conducted by the department the last 3 years at Goodnews Bay and at Cape Denbigh in Norton Sound. The age composition from this limited test fishing suggests younger age classes, ages 5-8 may be expected to dominate the biomass. Age 9 and older herring may comprise less than 20% of the returning biomass.

At this time, it is anticipated that some level of commercial sac roe herring fishing may occur in most of the AYK Region in 2010. This news release is to inform fishermen of projected biomass, guideline harvest levels, and the strategies to be employed if commercial fishing does occur.

Variability in the quality of aerial survey assessments of biomass and deviations from the assumed survival or recruitment rates may result in the observed biomass being either above or below these projections. Therefore, guideline harvest levels may be adjusted during the season according to observed herring spawning biomass. If determining herring abundance using aerial survey methods is not possible, stock abundance will be assessed using information from the projected biomass, test, and commercial catches, and spawn deposition observations. In accordance with the AYK Region harvest strategy, the commercial fishery will not target newly recruited age classes (age 2 through age 5 herring). In districts where a buyer is available, fishing will be opened by emergency order after it has been determined that the threshold herring biomass is present or significant spawning activity is observed. Furthermore, the department will work cooperatively with fishermen and buyers to optimize roe recovery by opening fishing by emergency order once it has been determined herring are of marketable quality and the buyer allowed to direct the fleet to maintain roe quality.

Security Cove District

The 2010 projected return to the Security Cove District is 6,014 tons. A 20% exploitation rate would result in a harvest of 1,203 tons. Commercial fishing will not be allowed until the observed biomass reaches 1,200 tons, or significant spawning activity is observed.

Goodnews Bay District

The management strategy for the Goodnews Bay District will be similar to that of Security Cove. The season will open and close by emergency order when a biomass of 1,200 tons or significant spawning activity is observed. The 2010 projected return of herring to the Goodnews Bay District is 5,736 tons. A 20% exploitation rate would result in a harvest of 1,147 tons. Age 5-8 herring are expected to comprise a majority of the biomass.

Cape Avinof District

Either significant spawning activity or a biomass of 500 tons must be observed before the commercial herring season can be opened. The 2010 projected biomass for the Cape Avinof District is 2,393 tons. The exploitation rate will be no greater than 15% because of the limited database for this area and to ensure the subsistence fishing priority. A 15% commercial exploitation rate would result in a harvest of 359 tons.

Nelson Island District

In the Bering Sea Herring Fishery Management Plan, the Alaska Board of Fisheries set a minimum biomass threshold of 3,000 tons for the Nelson Island District. The inseason estimate of herring biomass must exceed the threshold level before a commercial fishery can be allowed. The spawning biomass projected to return in 2010 to the Nelson Island District is 5,449 tons. At a total exploitation rate of 20%, minus 200 tons for subsistence harvest, the commercial harvest guideline will be 890 tons.

Nunivak Island District

The biomass of herring projected to return to the Nunivak Island District in 2010 is 3,322 tons. A 20% exploitation rate would result in a harvest of 664 tons. If there is buyer interest, the commercial season will open when the biomass reaches 1,500 tons or when significant spawning is observed.

Cape Romanzof District

The projected biomass of herring to return to Cape Romanzof District in 2010 is expected to be 5,538 tons. At a 20% exploitation rate, the allowable harvest is expected to be 1,108 tons and will be based on inseason indicators of abundance. Since water turbidity in the Cape Romanzof area generally prevents aerial observations of herring, spawn deposition, test fishing and commercial catch rates, and the amount of fishing effort will be used to determine the timing and duration of commercial fishing periods.

Norton Sound District

The biomass of herring projected to return in 2010 to Norton Sound is 42,889 tons. A 20% exploitation rate would result in a harvest guideline of 8,578 tons. A maximum of 320 tons of herring are reserved to allow for the pound fishery to harvest a maximum of 90 tons of product (combined weight of herring roe and kelp). This leaves 8,258 tons for sac roe harvest. The beach seine harvest is, by regulation, 10% of the sac roe projected harvest, or 826 tons. The 2010 herring fishery will be opened by emergency order once it has been determined herring are of

marketable quality and the buyer will be allowed to direct the fleet to maintain roe quality. The fishery will close by emergency order when up to 20% of the available herring biomass has been harvested. Ages 5-8 are expected to dominate the returning population.

Port Clarence District

The department does not project an outlook for the Port Clarence fishery because of the lack of data for Port Clarence herring and the limited scope of the fishery. The guideline harvest of 165 tons established by the Alaska Board of Fisheries in 1981 will determine the allowable harvest in 2010. This harvest guideline is based on two years of research conducted by the department in both the Port Clarence and Kotzebue Districts. Even though this guideline has not appeared in the regulation book since 1984, it still represents the best estimate of allowable harvest.

Table 1. Projections of Pacific herring spawning biomass and harvest guideline for commercial fishing districts in the northeastern Bering Sea, Alaska, 2010.

District	Threshold	2009 Observed Biomass (st)	2010 Projected Biomass (st)	Exploitation Rate (%)	2010 Harvest Guideline
Security Cove	1,200	5,686 ^c	6,014	20	1,203
Goodnews Bay	1,200	6,143 ^b	5,736	20	1,147
Cape Avinof	500	2,251 ^c	2,393	15	359
Nelson Island	3,000	5,152 ^c	5,449	16	890
Nunivak Island	1,500	3,141 ^c	3,322	20	664
Cape Romanzof	1,500	4,852 ^c	5,538	20	1,108
Norton Sound	7,000	36,917 ^c	42,889	20	8,578
Port Clarence	-	-	-	-	165
Totals			71,343	20	14,114

^a Nelson Island commercial harvest is 20% of projected biomass minus 200 st for subsistence harvest.

^b Good aerial survey estimates from 2009 were used to project the biomass.

^c 2009 Projected biomass was used because recent biomass estimates were unavailable.