

Jay Smith

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**North Alaska Peninsula Commercial Salmon Annual  
Management Report, 2008**

by

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and

**Trent G. Hartill**

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Alaska Department of Fish and Game

Divisions of Sport Fish and Commercial Fisheries



**APPENDIX C. NORTH ALASKA PENINSULA  
MANAGERS NOTES, 2008**

The following notes are observations made by the lead author of events or general trends that have been observed. These observations are based on 19 years of experience in the Port Moller area while spending four months per year observing more than just commercial fisheries. By no means is this section substantiated with other than my observations and general conclusions. The information presented here may not be found elsewhere and it is that reason that it is documented in this report. It is my opinion that this information may be of value to others either now or in the future.

In late November and early December 2007, an exceptionally large flood event occurred in areas of the North Alaska Peninsula. The flood was the result of a rain on snow event; a large warm weather system brought 100+ mph winds and large amounts of rain, causing much of the snow in the mountains to melt. Little is known about the specifics of the flood as there are no weather stations in the area and few witnesses. However, there were folks located at Bear Lake Lodge when the storm occurred. The entire lodge and ADF&G cabin were surrounded by water. The lodge suffered damage to outbuildings some of which were either destroyed or were moved down river. ADF&G suffered substantial losses to the wooden weir tripods that were located on the southwest bank; all were swept downriver several miles and ruined. Aluminum weir panels and stringers were also scattered around. The flooding and damage by the storm was evident on an ADF&G preliminary flight to assess the damage in April 2008, as well as observations throughout the summer months in 2008.

Landslides and channel scouring in the upper Bear River watershed deposited a large amount of fine sediment in Bear Lake. This sediment remained suspended in the water column throughout the summer of 2008. Due to the reduced visibility in Bear Lake, modifications had to be made to the weir so that fish could be counted in the turbid water. These modifications forced fish to swim closer to the surface of the water while going through the weir. Due to channel scouring near the traditional weir site, placement of the weir in 2008 was several hundred yards downstream of the traditional site.

The outlet channel at Bear Lake changed substantially from this event. The channel is much deeper now and has caused the water level of Bear Lake to drop several feet exposing substrate along the lake bank that I have never seen before. Much of this substrate has been important beach spawning sites for sockeye salmon.

Based on a flood line around King Salmon River, it appears that much of the low land valley around King Salmon River was under water. This flood line indicates the river likely came up about 10 feet. Because of mud/landslides in the mountains at the head of King Salmon River, the King Salmon River remained murky throughout the 2008 field season and was unfishable for sport fishermen. Escapement surveys were not possible because of the excessive turbidity of the river. Although there was some flooding at Sandy River, it did not appear to be as severe as what occurred at Bear River. In the Ilnik River system there was no large scale debris buildup and since the Ilnik system consists of many spring fed creeks, it is doubtful there was any flooding in this system. There was flooding at the Nelson (Sapsuk) River weir site, but it did not appear to be as severe as what happened at Bear River.

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The impact to the salmon resource in the area is unknown at this time but there were large amounts of scouring that occurred on the upper spawning grounds of Bear Lake especially around Red, Cub, and Clear creeks, as well as the outlet channel at Bear Lake. There were large land slides at the head of Bear Lake as well as Port Moller Bay. This all occurred while the eggs were still deposited in the gravel and surely resulted in egg loss. As mentioned, the landslides increased turbidity in Bear Lake, which likely has reduced overall lake production. The full impact of the flood and resulting affects on the 2007 production will be more fully understood in 2012 and 2013 and after.

Based on my extensive experience with the local area ptarmigan population, in 2008 the population was low and has been declining and getting worse over the past five years or so. There have been good berry crops so the decline is likely due to other factors. The wolf population is the highest in my 19 years in the area. It is almost routine to see fresh wolf tracks throughout the area and for the first time in 2008 tracks have been observed within 50 yards of the ADF&G office in Port Moller. Field camp personnel at the Nelson, Bear, Sandy, and Inik rivers all reported seeing wolves which is uncommon. The caribou population is still low and it is uncommon to see them. The fox population appears to be declining. They are still observed, but not as common as they have been in past years. Porcupine, although uncommon in the past, have not been observed in about 10 years. The occasional Arctic Hare that was observed in the Port Moller area are also less abundant than in past years. The annual migration of waterfowl through the Port Moller area in August and September had a noticeable increase in the numbers of Emperor Geese. Emperor Geese typically stop and rest in and around Port Moller and did so in greater numbers than in past years. Sandhill Crane populations appear to be the same as in past years.

Bob Murphy

Commercial Fisheries Area Management Biologist

Port Moller

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# Nelson Lagoon Sockeye Total Run in Thousands

## 1962 to 2022

■ Sockeye escapement   ■ Sockeye catch

Source ADFG  
Prepared by CAMF

