PROPOSAL 192– 5 AAC 21.382. Kenai River Late-Run King Salmon Stock of Concern Management Plan.

PROPOSED BY: Alaska Board of Fisheries

WHAT WOULD THE PROPOSAL DO? This would remove commercial set gillnet fishing opportunity from the East Side Set Gillnet fishery (ESSN) and replace it with provisions for set beach seine nets under the *Kenai River late-run king salmon stock of concern management plan* (5AAC 21.382). The commercial set beach seine net fishery would only occur when the preseason forecast of large, 75 cm mid eye to tail fork (METF) and longer, king salmon is greater than 14,250 fish.

WHAT ARE THE CURRENT REGULATIONS? Set beach seine is not a defined gear type nor an allowable gear type in the Upper Subdistrict commercial fishery. The ESSN fishery is managed in accordance with the *Kenai River Late-Run King Salmon Stock of Concern Management Plan (5 AAC 21.382)* which prescribes management actions for sport, personal use, and commercial fisheries within Cook Inlet until the Kenai River Late-run king salmon stock is delisted as a stock of concern. Under the provisions of this management plan the commercial dip net fishery is prosecuted based on sockeye salmon abundance while commercial set gillnet opportunity is only provided when the Kenai River late-run king salmon recovery goal of 14,250 large fish (METF >75cm) is projected to be met.

WHAT WOULD BE THE EFFECT IF THE PROPOSAL WERE ADOPTED? Set beach seine would replace set gillnet as legal commercial fishing gear in the Upper Subdistrict (ESSN) of Upper Cook Inlet (Figure 192-1). The commercial harvest of salmon during open periods would likely be reduced by an unknown amount. Removal of set gillnet gear would reduce the number of permits that could participate in the ESSN fishery due to not all permit holders having on shore DNR lease sites (Figure 192-2). Beach seines are likely an effective alternative method for harvesting target species while releasing non-target species although there are unknown aspects of how effective the gear would be across the subdistrict and the fate of fish that are released.

Adding beach seine as an alternative gear type to S04H permits would require action by the Commercial Fisheries Entry Commission prior to the department implementing the fishery for the 2026 season.

BACKGROUND: The ESSN fishery was historically managed primarily under provisions found in *Kenai River Late Run Sockeye Salmon Management Plan* and *Kasilof River Salmon Management Plan.* However, the Board of Fisheries (board) listed the Kenai River late-run king salmon as a stock of concern in the spring of 2024. Under the stock of concern management plan the ESSN fishery is managed to meet a recovery goal of 14,250 large late-run king salmon. The board added dip nets as an additional gear type to the S04H permits under the stock of concern management plan to give ESSN commercial fishing opportunity for more abundant salmon species while king salmon abundance is below the recovery goal and set gillnet fishing is closed. There was no set gillnet commercial fishing in the ESSN fishery in 2024 due to low abundance of Kenai River late-run king salmon. In 2025, two set gillnet commercial fishing periods were opened on August 5 and August 6 for 8-hours each. The department was confident that projections of king

salmon abundance were greater than the recovery goal including predicted harvest and projection error. The harvest of those periods totaled 7 king, 43,207 sockeye, 1,561 coho, 82 pink, and 40 chum salmon (Table 192-1). Of the king salmon harvested, 6 were determined to be large Kenai River fish.

Kenai River king salmon abundance increased to 15,641 large fish in 2025 up from the record low of 6,906 large fish in 2024 and remains below historical levels (Table 192-2). In 2025, the recovery goal, optimal escapement goal, and sustainable escapement goal (SEG) were all achieved. The Kenai River late-run sockeye salmon preliminary sonar passage estimate of 4.2 million fish, exceeded the inriver run goal of 1.2 million–1.6 million fish and will exceed the SEG of 750,000–1,300,000 sockeye salmon once the estimated upriver sport harvest is subtracted from the sonar estimate (Table 192-3). The preliminary Kasilof River sockeye salmon sonar passage was 1.2 million fish which exceeded the sustainable escapement goal of 140,000–320,000 fish (Table 192-4).

The department issued three commissioners permits in 2024 to test beach seines as a new gear type to be utilized in the ESSN fishery to harvest abundant sockeye salmon and release king salmon. Of the three permits, two were fished in the 2024 season. Both permits utilized a similar gear and operational procedure by deploying and retrieving a beach seine net on running lines. The permits stipulated third party observers be on site and data was collected on deployment time, stage of tide, environmental conditions, by species catch, and harvest. Salmon except king salmon were allowed to be sold for cost recovery if the Upper Subdistrict was open for commercial fishing with dip net gear.

At the March 2025 statewide board meeting, RC 072—which proposed replacing set gillnet gear with beach seine gear in the ESSN fishery—did not pass. The department interpreted this outcome as indicating the Board did not intend to establish beach seine gear as a commercial fishery. Based on that interpretation, the department determined that fish harvested under a commissioner's permit intended to explore alternative methods or gear types should not be sold. Accordingly, stipulations for commissioner's beach seine permits were revised to prohibit the sale of fish. Additionally, with set gillnet fishing closed, there was a high level of interest in commissioner's permits, raising concerns about exceeding the commissioner's authority by effectively creating a commercial fishery. In 2025, six commissioner's permits were issued; two of those permit holders reported deploying a beach seine.

Review of the commissioners permits operations showed beach seining could be a viable method to commercially harvest sockeye salmon in the ESSN fishery while releasing king salmon. The combined total of salmon caught in 2024 was 20,981 fish which consisted of 16 king, 20,653 sockeye, 46 coho, 266 pink, and zero chum salmon (Table 192-5). All 16 king salmon were released. The experimental operations both took place primarily within the North K-Beach statistical area (244-32) with 22 days of effort and an additional four days of fishing effort took place within the Salamatof statistical area (244-41) (Figure 192-1). The highest catches were largely concentrated during the peak of the Kenai River sockeye salmon run from July 16 to July 25. Effort in 2025 was minimal and took place early in the season which resulted in few fish being caught but the gear was successfully deployed and all salmon were released alive (Table 192-6).

The beach seine gear type is sensitive to weather, stage of tide, and water conditions that limit the duration and length of gear that can be fished. Site bathymetric profiles along the beach may also greatly influence the availability of this gear type for use across the ESSN fishery. For example, the presence of obstructions, steep vs. shallow beaches, and extended shallow tidal flats may all determine the viability of this gear type for individual operations.

DEPARTMENT COMMENTS: The department encourages the development of methods and additional gear types that would allow harvest of more abundant species during times of conservation for weak stocks. The department is **NEUTRAL** on this allocative proposal.

The proposal has inconsistent stipulations between the allowable amount of gear and the allowable locations fishing with beach seines can take place, specifically the reference to historically fished locations as an allowable location is not specified for allowable gear. Additionally, the proposal does not address how the department should adapt management to inseason run information. The department recommends the board clarify these issues if the proposal is adopted.

COST ANALYSIS: Approval of this proposal is expected to result in an additional direct cost for a private person to participate in this fishery by requiring the acquisition of beach seine gear. Approval of this proposal is not expected to result in an additional cost to the department.

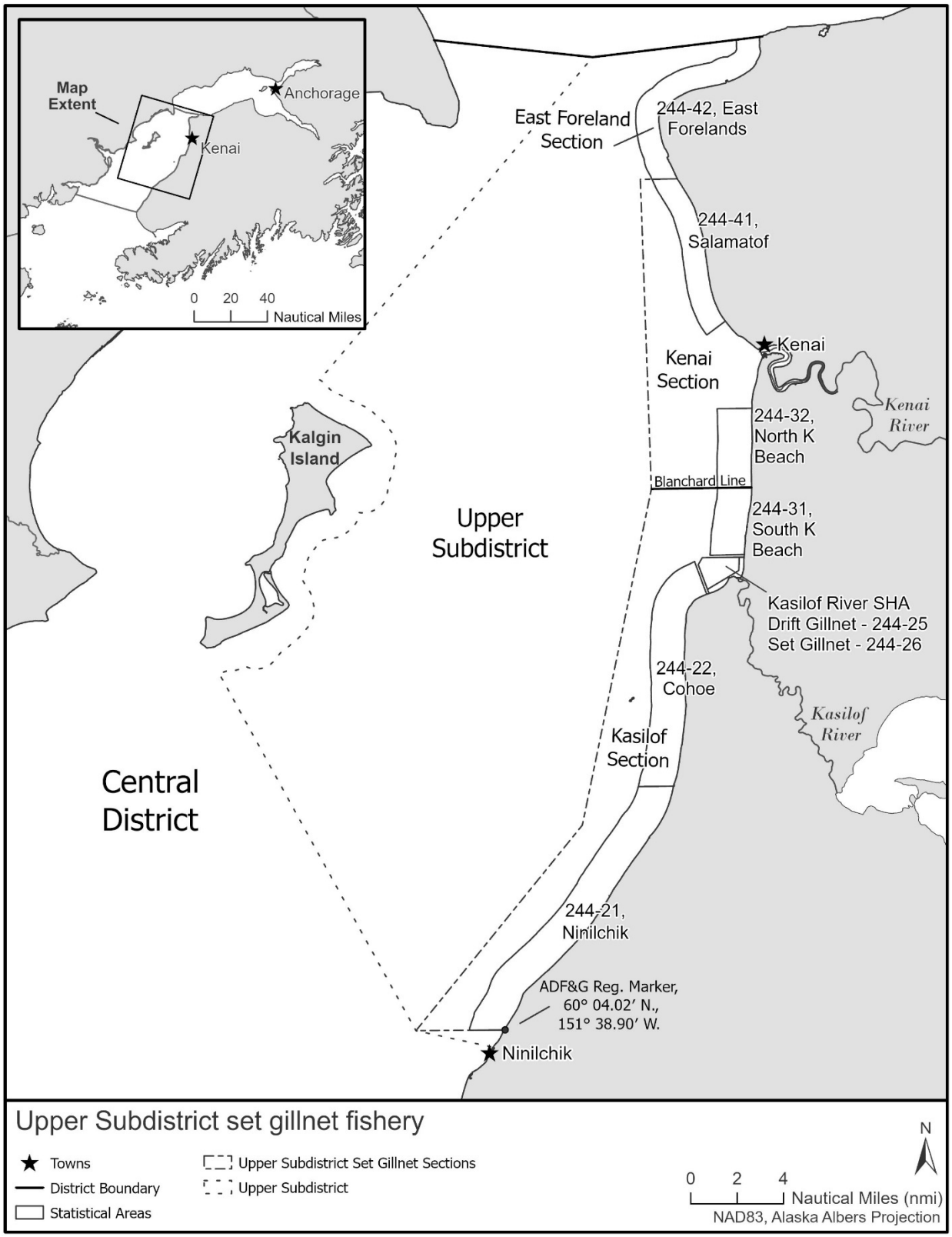

Figure 192-1.– Upper Subdistrict set gillnet fishery (ESSN) statistical areas.

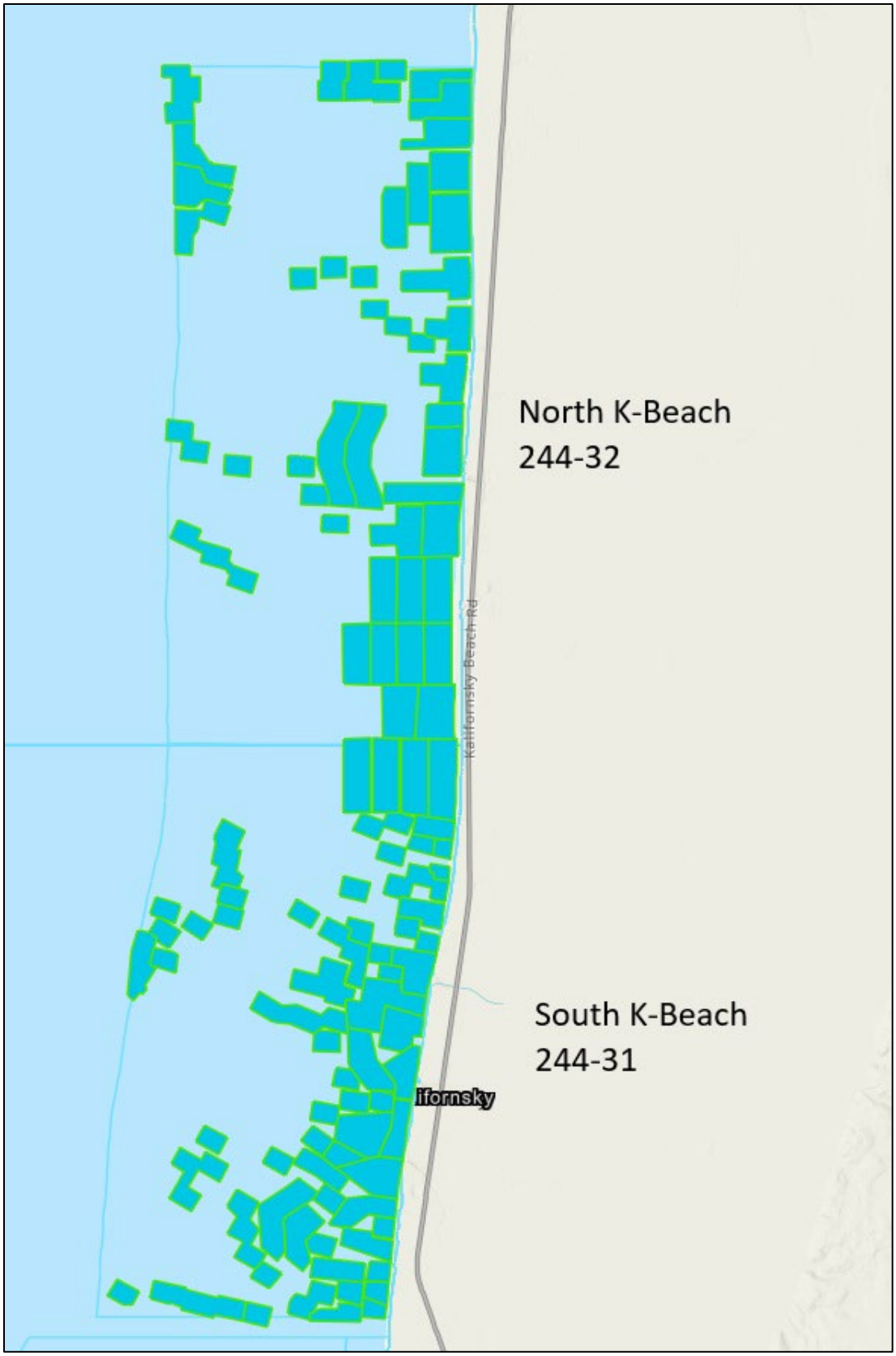

Figure 192-2.– Example of DNR shore fishery lease distribution within the ESSN fishery.

Table 192-1.– Upper Subdistrict commercial set gillnet salmon harvest by section and date, Upper Cook Inlet 2025.

Section	Date	Permits	Landings	king	Sockeye	Coho	Pink	Chum	Total
Kasilof Section	Aug 5	29	32	0	3,983	395	17	9	4,404
244-21, 244-22, 244-31	Aug 6	27	31	0	4,053	376	38	16	4,483
	Section Total	40	63	0	8,036	771	55	25	8,887
Kenai Section	Aug 5	22	23	2	13,551	221	4	1	13,779
244-32, 244-41	Aug 6	22	24	5	17,746	308	7	4	18,070
	Section Total	27	47	7	31,297	529	11	5	31,849
East Foreland	Aug 5	7	7	0	1,277	142	3	6	1,428
244-42	Aug 6	9	10	0	2,597	119	13	4	2,733
	Section Total	11	17	0	3,874	261	16	10	4,161
ALL	Aug 5	58	62	2	18,811	758	24	16	19,611
	Aug 6	58	65	5	24,396	803	58	24	25,286
	Upper Subdistrict Total	78	127	7	43,207	1,561	82	40	44,897

Note: Of the Chinook salmon harvested, 6 of 7 were determined to be large fish (>75 cm METF).

Table 192-2.– Kenai River late-run king salmon escapement goal history, 1998–2025.

Year		Escapement	SEG/BEG	OEG	Recovery goal
1998		39,000	**15,500–22,300**	-	
1999		30,563	**17,800–35,700**	-	
2000		32,550	**17,800–35,700**	-	
2001		37,641	**17,800–35,700**	-	
2002		45,457	**17,800–35,700**	-	
2003		67,187	**17,800–35,700**	-	
2004		63,683	**17,800–35,700**	-	
2005		60,246	**17,800–35,700**	-	
2006		48,950	**17,800–35,700**	-	
2007	**All Sizes of Fish**	37,010	**17,800–35,700**	-	
2008		32,342	**17,800–35,700**	-	
2009		21,410	**17,800–35,700**	-	
2010		11,375	**17,800–35,700**	-	
2011		16,340	**17,800–35,700**	-	
2012		21,417	**17,800–35,700**	-	
2013		19,342	**15,000–30,000**	-	
2014		17,451	**15,000–30,000**	-	
2015		22,642	**15,000–30,000**	**≥ 22,500**	
2016		22,535	**15,000–30,000**	**≥ 22,500**	
2017		20,583	**13,500–27,000**	-	
2018		17,405	**13,500–27,000**	-	
2019		11,709	**13,500–27,000**	-	
2020	**Large Fish**	11,854	13,500–27,000	**15,000–30,000**	
2021		12,238	13,500–27,000	**15,000–30,000**	
2022		13,911	13,500–27,000	**15,000–30,000**	
2023[a]		14,502	13,500–27,000	**15,000–30,000**	
2024		6,906	13,500–27,000	15,000–30,000	**14,250–30,000**
2025		15,641	13,500–27,000	15,000–30,000	**14,250–30,000**

Note: Bold font indicates the escapement goal for management, and shading indicates that the goal was achieved.

Table 192-3.– History of Kenai River sockeye salmon personal use/subsistence, educational, and sport harvest and esc goals, 2005-2025.

Year	PU & education harvest [a]	Sport harvest below sonar	Kenai River sonar count [c]	Sport harvest above sonar	Total Sport Harvest	Total Inriver Harvest	Spawning escapement	Total Run (millions)	Inriver goal (thousands)	BEG/SEG (thousands)	OEG (thousands)
2005	300,105	58,017	1,376,452	254,818	312,835	612,940	1,121,634	5.6	850-1,100	500-800	**500-1,000**
2006	130,486	30,964	1,499,692	172,638	203,602	334,088	1,327,054	2.5	750-950	500-800	**500-1,000**
2007	293,941	60,623	867,572	265,718	326,341	620,282	601,854	3.4	750-950	500-800	**500-1,000**
2008	236,355	46,053	614,946	208,526	254,579	490,934	406,420	2.3	650-850	500-800	**500-1,000**
2009	343,302	45,868	745,170	241,999	287,867	631,169	503,171	2.4	650-850	500-800	**500-1,000**
2010	393,317	59,651	970,662	256,624	316,275	709,592	714,038	3.3	750-950	500-800	**500-1,000**
2011	543,043	92,225	1,599,217	318,542	410,767	953,810	1,280,675	6.2	1,100-1,350	700-1,200	**700-1,400**
2012	530,128	102,376	1,581,555	368,720	471,096	1,001,224	1,212,835	4.7	1,100-1,350	700-1,200	**700-1,400**
2013	350,302	78,837	1,359,893	379,685	458,522	808,824	980,208	3.5	1,000-1,200	700-1,200	**700-1,400**
2014	384,018	78,057	1,520,340	301,998	380,055	764,073	1,218,342	3.3	1,000-1,200	700-1,200	**700-1,400**
2015	384,095	83,112	1,709,051	309,004	392,116	776,211	1,400,047	3.9	1,000-1,200	700-1,200	**700-1,400**
2016	266,506	79,465	1,383,692	263,704	343,169	609,675	1,119,988	3.5	1,000-1,350	700-1,200	**700-1,400**
2017	308,017	67,233	1,308,498	237,434	304,667	612,684	1,071,064	4.6	1,000-1,300	**700-1,200**	Repealed
2018	173,609	41,122	1,035,761	149,000	190,122	363,731	886,761	1.6	900-1,100	**700-1,200**	
2019	338,952	103,700	1,849,054	392,023	495,723	834,675	1,457,031	3.9	1,000-1,300	**700-1,200**	
2020	259,282	62,665	1,814,252	208,625	271,290	530,572	1,605,627	2.5	1,000-1,200	**750-1,300**	
2021	335,396	138,740	2,441,825	435,535	574,275	909,671	2,003,373	3.8	1,000-1,200	**750-1,300**	
2022	288,453	100,802	1,570,395	364,392	465,194	753,647	1,203,196	2.5	1,000-1,400	**750-1,300**	
2023	334,051	127,425	2,343,976	458,560	585,985	920,036	1,882,901	3.8	1,000-1,400	**750-1,300**	
2024	344,536	138,072	1,926,350	551,675	689,747	1,034,283	1,374,675	3.9	1,000-1,400	**750-1,300**	
2025[c]	532,398	ND	*4,252,497*	ND	ND	ND	*3,848,740*	*8.0*	1,100-1,600	**750-1,300**	
5-Year AVG											
2015-2019	294,236	74,926	1,457,211	270,233	345,159	639,395	1,186,978	3.5			
2020-2024	312,344	113,541	2,019,360	403,757	517,298	829,642	1,613,954	3.3			

Note: ND = no data available. Bold font indicates the escapement goal for management, and shading indicates that the goal was achieved.

[a] From 1999 to present, Personal use harvest is from Kenai River dipnet fishery and the educational harvest is from the Kenaitze Educational fishery after July 1.

[b] In 1994 and 1995 a creel survey was conducted to estimate harvest below the sonar. In 1994, 49.7% of the below Soldotna Bridge harvest was taken below the sonar. In 1995, 68.6 % was taken below the sonar. The average of these two percentages is applied to all other year's below-bridge harvest to estimate the harvest below the sonar.

[c] Bendix sonar counts for 1999-2010; DIDSON counts beginning in 2011.

Table 192-4.– Kasilof River sockeye salmon escapement goal history, 2002 –2025.

Year[a]	Escapement	BEG	OEG
2002	226,682	BEG	150,000–250,000
2003	359,633	BEG	150,000–250,000
2004	577,581	BEG	150,000–250,000
2005	348,012	BEG	150,000–250,000
2006	368,092	OEG	150,000–300,000
2007	336,866	BEG	150,000–250,000
2008	301,469	OEG	150,000–300,000
2009	297,125	OEG	150,000–300,000
2010	267,013	BEG	150,000–250,000
2011	245,721	160,000–340,000	160,000–390,000
2012	374,523	160,000–340,000	160,000–390,000
2013	489,654	160,000–340,000	160,000–390,000
2014	440,192	160,000–340,000	160,000–390,000
2015	470,677	160,000–340,000	160,000–390,000
2016	239,981	160,000–340,000	160,000–390,000
2017	358,724	160,000–340,000	160,000–390,000
2018	394,309	160,000–340,000	160,000–390,000
2019	378,416	160,000–340,000	160,000–390,000
2020	545,654	140,000–320,000	140,000–370,000
2021	521,859	140,000–320,000	140,000–370,000
2022	968,148	140,000–320,000	140,000–370,000
2023	932,896	140,000–320,000	140,000–370,000
2024	1,048,092	140,000–320,000	140,000–370,000
2025	1,197,471	140,000–320,000	140,000–370,000
Averages			
2011–2024	529,203		

Note: shading indicates that the goal was achieved.

[a] 2002-2010 are Bendix sonar estimates; 2011-2023 are DIDSON estimates.

Table 192-5.– Salmon catch summary, Upper subdistrict beach seine commissioners permits, 2024.

Permit	Date Range	# Sets		King Small	King Large*	Sockeye	Coho	Pink	Chum
UCI-2024-01	June 30 -July 31	249	Harvested	0	0	15,294	15	58	0
			Released	12	1	131	0	2	0
UCI-2024-02	July 20 - July 31	115	Harvested	0	0	5,228	0	205	0
			Released	3	0	0	31	1	0
	Total Catch	364		15	1	20,653	46	266	0

Note: Fish harvested were allowed to be sold commercially. Large king salmon are those greater than 34 inches in length

Table 192-6.– Salmon catch summary, Upper subdistrict beach seine commissioners permits, 2025.

Permit	Date	# Sets	King Small	King Large*	Sockeye	Coho	Pink	Chum
UCI-2025-01	July 9	2	0	0	0	0	0	0
UCI-2025-02	Did not Fish	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
UCI-2025-03	June 24	3	0	0	11	0	0	0
	June 27	3	0	0	9	0	0	0
	July 1	4	4	0	25	0	1	
UCI-2025-04	Did not Fish	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
UCI-2025-05	Did not Fish	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
UCI-2025-06	Did not Fish	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
	Total Catch	12	4	0	45	0	1	0

Note: All fish were required to be released alive from beach seines in 2025. Large king salmon are those greater than 34 inches in length