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Advisory Announcement

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2023 PRINCE WILLIAM SOUND SALMON FISHERY INFORMATION

General Information

This outlook is provided to assist the commercial salmon industry in planning for the 2023 Prince William Sound (PWS) Management Area (Area E) season. Forecasts for commercial harvest by species are summarized in Table 1 with detailed Area E forecasts 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:

[2023 Return Forecast Summary - Prince William Sound Aquaculture Corporation \(pwsac.com\)](http://www.pwsac.com)

Valdez Fisheries Development Association (VFDA) hatchery forecasts can be found on the VFDA web site:

<https://www.valdezfisheries.org/forecasted-returns/>

Management of PWS commercial salmon fisheries occurs from the Cordova area office. Fishery announcements from the Cordova ADF&G office will occur by 2:00 p.m. 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 can be found on the ADF&G web site at:

<http://www.adfg.alaska.gov/index.cfm?adfg=commercialbyareapws.salmon>

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

Gillnet Fishery

Copper River District

The Copper River delta sustainable escapement goal (SEG) is 55,000–130,000 sockeye salmon, and the upper Copper River SEG is 360,000–750,000 wild sockeye salmon. The 2023 inriver goal past the Miles Lake sonar is 610,000 salmon consisting of the following components:

Spawning escapement	360,000 sockeye salmon
Other salmon	17,500 salmon
Subsistence	64,000 salmon
Personal use harvest	131,400 salmon
Sport fishery	15,000 salmon
Gulkana broodstock	22,200 sockeye salmon
Gulkana Hatchery surplus	0 sockeye salmon
Total	610,100 salmon

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. Fishing effort, harvest, and escapement trends on the Copper River Delta and at Miles Lake sonar station will inform the department's decision on harvest opportunity.

The 2023 commercial harvest forecasts for the Copper River District are 987,000 sockeye and 220,000 coho salmon (Table 1). The Copper River Chinook salmon total run forecast (53,000 fish) is 15% above the 10-year (2013–2022) average (46,000 fish). The 2023 sockeye salmon harvest forecast is 9% below the 10-year (2013–2022) average of 1.09 million fish. Based on recent poor Chinook and sockeye salmon production, a conservative management approach will be implemented at the start of the season. For Chinook salmon conservation, the 'inside closure area', as defined in 5AAC 24.350(1)(B), will be closed during early season fishing periods; this area may be expanded early in 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 commercial fishing periods per week depending on escapement and harvest levels.

Individuals planning to participate in state subsistence salmon fishing activities in the Prince William Sound Management Area may obtain a permit through any ADF&G office or online (<https://www.adfg.alaska.gov/Store/>). **In Cordova, 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. Permit holders are encouraged to call the Cordova office at 907-424-3212 or report online (<https://www.adfg.alaska.gov/Harvest/>) to provide preliminary harvest reports to assist with inseason harvest tracking.

Bering River District

The recent 10-year average (2013–2022) commercial harvests for the Bering River District are 4,500 sockeye and 60,000 coho salmon. The western portion of the Bering River District may open concurrent with the Copper River District to alleviate enforcement concerns in the line fishery along the district boundary. A broader Bering River District opening is expected only after sockeye salmon escapement is tracking to achieve the Bering River District 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.

Port Chalmers Subdistrict

The drift gillnet gear group has exclusive access to the Port Chalmers Subdistrict chum salmon fishery in 2023. The commercial fishery in Port Chalmers is anticipated to begin on June 1 with a harvest forecast of 650,000 chum salmon.

Eshamy District

The 2023 sockeye salmon run to Main Bay Hatchery (MBH) is forecast to be 934,000 fish. PWSAC anticipates utilizing 132,000 (14%) sockeye salmon for cost recovery and broodstock, leaving 802,000 (86%) fish available for harvest. The management strategy in 2023 will be to provide two periods per week in the Eshamy District when possible. Extended closures and/or short duration periods are not likely due to anticipated MBH cost recovery and broodstock needs representing only a small proportion of the total run. Fishing time in the Crafton Island Subdistrict may be adjusted based on the Coghill River wild sockeye salmon escapement. Eshamy District is expected to open for the 2023 season on June 1.

Eshamy River escapement may be assessed in 2023, but no forecast was produced this year due to lack of regular assessment in recent years. Beginning in early to mid-July, fishing time and area in Crafton Island Subdistrict will be driven by harvest of wild pink and sockeye salmon in Eshamy District, and the strength of wild pink and chum salmon escapement in the Eshamy, Northwestern, Coghill, and Northern districts.

Coghill District

The 2023 Coghill Lake sockeye salmon total run forecast is 453,000 fish with an SEG of 20,000–75,000 fish. The chum salmon run to Wally Noerenberg Hatchery (WNH) is forecast to be 2.21 million fish. PWSAC anticipates utilizing 969,000 (44%) chum salmon for cost recovery and broodstock, leaving 1.24 million (56%) fish available for harvest. Coghill District is expected to open for the 2023 season on June 1.

The management strategy in 2023 will be to provide two periods per week in the Coghill District. WNH cost recovery and broodstock needs may necessitate extended closures of hatchery subdistricts. Based on the strong Coghill Lake sockeye salmon forecast and recent trend in annual escapement near to or above the upper end of the Coghill Lake escapement goal, 60-to-84-hour periods are likely in waters of north Port Wells and College Fiord. If the Coghill River weir counts start to exceed the daily weir passage objectives, fishing area will be expanded to the mouth of Coghill River. If sustained weir passage above daily objectives continues to occur and/or wild sockeye salmon harvest patterns indicate rapidly increasing run entry, portions of hatchery subdistricts may be opened to target Coghill Lake sockeye salmon. Hatchery cost recovery and broodstock needs will be regularly evaluated and management adjusted to the extent practicable. 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 College Fiord.

WNH coho salmon are present in the Coghill District fishery from early August through late September. PWSAC projects the 2023 run to WNH to be 122,000 coho salmon, requiring 2,700 fish for broodstock, with all remaining fish (119,000) available for harvest.

Unakwik District

The wild stock sockeye salmon commercial harvest 10-year average (2013–2022) in Unakwik Inlet is 7,270 fish. During the sockeye salmon runs to Miners and Cowpen lakes, the management strategy will be to provide two periods per week concurrently with openings in the Coghill and Eshamy districts. Unakwik District is expected to open for the 2023 season on June 15.

Purse Seine Fishery

The 2023 pink salmon total run forecast for PWS is 64.81 million fish, with a potential commercial harvest of 55.34 million fish. This pink salmon total run forecast includes 20.32 million wild stock fish, 20.38 million Valdez Fisheries Development Association (VFDA) fish, and 24.20 million PWSAC hatchery fish. Approximately 3.74 million (18%) of the projected VFDA pink salmon return will be needed for cost recovery and broodstock, leaving 16.65 million fish available for commercial harvest. Approximately 3.92 million (16%) of the projected pink salmon run to the PWSAC hatcheries will be needed for cost recovery and broodstock, leaving 20.28 million fish available for commercial harvest. The department will manage for each district's aerial index escapement goal for a cumulative SEG of 575,000–992,000 pink salmon. Using the overall midpoint of the SEG, 783,500 fish, there will be approximately 18.39 million wild fish available for commercial harvest.

The 2023 chum salmon forecast is 3.44 million fish. The majority of fish, 3.05 million (89%), are from PWSAC hatchery production, with 190,000 fish returning to the Armin F. Koernig hatchery (AFK), and 650,000 fish returning to Port Chalmers. Based on the department's wild chum salmon forecast of 389,000 fish and subtracting the 10-year average escapement, 169,000, there is a potential harvestable surplus of 220,000 wild chum salmon.

The PWS purse seine fishery will begin on Thursday, June 1 targeting the enhanced chum salmon return to the AFK hatchery. The fishery at AFK will begin the season on a schedule of three fishing periods per week. A reduction in time and/or area will be implemented, if necessary, to limit the harvest of salmon bound for other areas of PWS. In late July, AFK will transition to pink salmon management, purse seine fishing opportunity in the Southwestern District will be based on PWSAC cost recovery and broodstock needs, and wild stock escapement performance.

The general waters of the eight purse seine districts will be managed based on the strength of wild stocks. Hatchery subdistricts will be managed based on the strength of both wild and enhanced stocks. Pink and chum salmon

escapement trends and fishery performance data will be evaluated inseason and compared to average historical performance to determine the frequency and duration of openings.

The department will use yellow Salmon Harvest Task Force markers, if needed, to close terminal wild stock areas for either escapement or quality concerns. The coordinates for these markers are available to the public at the Cordova ADF&G office, online, and will be included in advisory announcements. There may be additional area and time manipulations throughout the season to provide commercial fishing opportunity, disperse the fleet, maintain fish quality, and obtain fishery performance data.

Valdez Arm, Valdez Narrows, and Port Valdez will be managed for VFDA's cost recovery and broodstock needs. Commercial purse seine openings in Valdez Arm and Port Valdez targeting 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. Typically, openings targeting VFDA fish generally start during the first week of July with regularly scheduled 14-hour periods (6 a.m. to 8 p.m.). In the remainder of the Eastern District, openings will be based on wild stock escapement trends. On August 15, Port Valdez will be closed to commercial fishing north of a line from Entrance Point to Potato Point. Commercial fishing in the Valdez Narrows Subdistrict will open on September 6 to target surplus VFDA coho salmon. The VFDA enhanced coho salmon forecast is 80,000 fish with a forecasted commercial harvest of 35,000 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 commercial fishery harvest to maintain pink salmon quality. Once PWSAC initiates cost recovery, they typically intend to complete at least 70–80% of their pink salmon cost recovery harvest goal prior to recommending any commercial fishery openings in the hatchery subdistricts. To allow for an orderly and consistent commercial fishery, ADF&G will work closely with PWSAC to achieve the pink salmon cost recovery goal as efficiently as possible. The department evaluates late pink salmon run progress based on cost recovery harvest, commercial fishery harvest and effort, broodstock collections, sex ratios, stock composition estimates, and wild stock escapement data.

Table 1.–ADF&G, PWSAC, and VFDA commercial harvest forecast for the 2023 salmon fishery in the Prince William Sound and Copper/Bering River areas.

PINK SALMON - HARVEST ESTIMATE (Thousands)

Wild Stocks	18,392
Hatchery Stocks ^a	
Solomon Gulch	16,645
Armin F. Koernig	5,704
Wally Noerenberg	5,017
Cannery Creek	9,556
Wild & Hatchery	55,314

CHUM SALMON - HARVEST ESTIMATE (Thousands)

Wild Stocks	220
Hatchery Stocks ^a	
Wally Noerenberg	1,241
Armin F. Koernig	190
Port Chalmers	650
Wild & Hatchery	2,301

COHO SALMON - HARVEST ESTIMATE (Thousands)

PWS Wild Stocks	No Projection
Copper River	220
Bering River	60
Hatchery Stocks ^a	
Solomon Gulch	35
Wally Noerenberg	119
Wild & Hatchery	434

SOCKEYE SALMON - HARVEST ESTIMATE (Thousands)

Copper River Wild & Hatchery	987
Bering River	5
Coghill Lake	423
PWS Remainder	No projection
PWS Hatchery Stocks ^a	
Main Bay	802
Wild & Hatchery	2,217

CHINOOK SALMON - HARVEST ESTIMATE (Thousands)

Wild Stocks	
Copper River	No Projection

^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.