



Advisory Announcement

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2023 Lower Cook Inlet Commercial Salmon Fishery Season Summary

The 2023 Lower Cook Inlet Area commercial salmon harvest was 3.1 million fish. The harvest was composed of 350 Chinook, 338,000 sockeye, 850 coho, 2.7 million pink, and 39,000 chum salmon (Table 1), of which 1.0 million (32%) were commercial harvest and 2.1 million (68%) were hatchery cost recovery. Total commercial harvest value was estimated to be \$1.6 million. In 2023, the Cook Inlet Aquaculture Association (CIAA) cost recovery goal of \$4.6 million was not attained with approximately \$2.6 million achieved. All data in this summary are preliminary.

Southern District

The 2023 preseason commercial harvest forecast for the Southern District was 78,200 sockeye and 75,000 pink salmon with an additional 75,400 hatchery-produced sockeye and 1.6 million hatchery pink salmon available in special harvest areas (SHAs). The purse seine harvest was 54 Chinook, 75,490 sockeye, 203 coho, 542,642 pink, and 380 chum salmon with 10 permit holders reporting deliveries. This compares to previous 10-year average harvests of 96 Chinook, 54,315 sockeye, 1,406 coho, 130,358 pink, and 1,235 chum salmon. Total hatchery sockeye salmon returns to the Southern District was estimated at 123,242 fish with approximately 61% harvested by commercial permit holders with the balance (47,893 fish) harvested for cost recovery by CIAA. Total pink salmon return to the Tutka hatchery was 2.5 million fish with approximately 22% of those harvested by commercial permit holders and the remainder (78% or 1.9 million fish) taken for cost recovery. Hatchery returns for both species were above preseason projections.

The 2023 set gillnet harvest was 193 Chinook, 19,470 sockeye, 451 coho, 5,838 pink, and 2,489 chum salmon with 20 permits reporting deliveries. The previous 10-year average harvests for this gear type were 383 Chinook, 25,990 sockeye, 2,719 coho, 20,884 pink, and 4,482 chum salmon.

There are eight sustainable escapement goals (SEGs) in the Southern District: six for pink salmon, one for chum salmon, and one for sockeye salmon. Escapement at the English Bay River weir was 23,661 sockeye salmon which is above the SEG range of 6,000–13,500 for this system. Pink salmon escapements were below the SEGs range for Humpy and China Poot Creeks, and above the SEGs for Barabara, Seldovia, and Tutka Creeks, as well as the Port Graham River. Chum salmon escapement in the Port Graham River was within the SEG.

Outer District

The 2023 preseason commercial harvest forecast for the Outer District was 9,000 sockeye, 1.7 million pink, and 23,500 chum salmon. The harvest, from the five permit holders that participated, was 73 Chinook, 47,580 sockeye, 7 coho, 158,341 pink, and 33,207 chum salmon. This harvest compares to previous 10-year average harvests of 23 Chinook, 5,904 sockeye, 384 coho, 1.3 million pink, and 55,370 chum salmon. Outer District harvest came to an abrupt end in mid-August when processors suspended operations due to low salmon prices. As a result of this excess fish were not harvested. This was reflected in higher escapements in many Outer District pink and chum salmon index systems.

There are 15 SEGs in the Outer District: nine for pink salmon, four for chum and two for sockeye salmon. Pink salmon escapements were within their respective SEG at South Nuka and Desire Creeks, as well as in the Rocky River. Pink salmon were above their respective SEGs at Windy Left, Windy Right, and Dogfish Lagoon creeks as well as in Port Chatham creeks, Port Dick and Island Creeks. Pink salmon returns were within the SEGs for South Nuka Island and Desire Lake Creeks, as well as in the Rocky River. Chum salmon escapement was above the SEG range for the Rocky

River, Port Dick, and Island Creeks, and below the SEG at Dogfish Creek. The sockeye salmon escapement to Desire Lake was above the SEG and within the SEG for Delight Lake.

Kamishak Bay District

The 2023 preseason commercial harvest forecast for the Kamishak Bay District was 59,200 sockeye, 600 coho, 63,600 pink, and 8,900 chum salmon. CIAA forecasted a run of 32,000 sockeye salmon to the Kirschner Lake remote release site. The Kamishak Bay District commercial harvest estimate is confidential due to fewer than three permit holders reporting deliveries from this area. The previous 10-year average commercial harvest is 41,219 sockeye, 1,321 coho, 46,879 pink, and 10,080 chum salmon harvested in the commercial fishery. In addition, 31,348 sockeye salmon were harvested by CIAA from the Kirschner Lake SHA for cost recovery.

There are 13 SEGs in the Kamishak District: seven for chum salmon, three for sockeye, and three for pink salmon. Chum salmon escapement was within the SEG for Cottonwood Creek, Big Kamishak, and McNeil Rivers. Chum salmon escapement was above the SEG in the Little Kamishak River, Bruin River, Ursus Cove Creek, and Iniskin River. Pink salmon escapements were above SEG in Sunday and Brown's Peak Creeks, and within the SEG for Bruin River. Sockeye salmon escapement to Chenik Lake and Amakdedori Creek were within the SEGs. Sockeye salmon escapement to Mikfik Lake was not fully enumerated due to an issue with the remote video monitoring system.

Eastern District

Due to small runs in the last 10 years, no wild stock sockeye or pink salmon were forecasted to be available for commercial harvest from the Eastern District in 2023. CIAA forecasted a total run of 89,900 sockeye salmon to Resurrection Bay release sites with 74,400 fish needed for broodstock and cost recovery. Total cost recovery harvest from this district was 74,759 sockeye salmon. An additional 3,539 sockeye salmon were donated to the public by CIAA. Commercial harvest numbers for this district are confidential due to fewer than three permit holders reporting harvests. The previous 10-year commercial harvest average for sockeye salmon is 5,471 fish. CIAA passed 10,004 sockeye salmon through the Bear Creek weir in 2023. However, 2,029 sockeye salmon were subsequently removed from Bear Lake for broodstock, leaving a final spawning escapement of 7,975 fish, which is within the SEG of 700–8,300. Hatchery returns of sockeye salmon to this district were comparable to preseason anticipated levels. The only other index stock in the Eastern District is Aialik Lake sockeye salmon which exceeded the SEG.

Table 1. Lower Cook Inlet commercial salmon harvest based on preliminary fish ticket data, 2023.

District (or hatchery)	Permits	Chinook	Sockeye	Coho	Pink	Chum	Total
Southern District	10	54	75,490	203	542,642	380	618,769
Outer District	5	73	47,580	7	158,341	33,207	239,208
Eastern District	<3*	---	---	---	---	---	---
Kamishak Bay District	<3*	---	---	---	---	---	---
Purse seine total	11	127	160,888	210	752,268	36,764	950,257
Southern District	20	193	19,470	451	5,838	2,489	28,441
Set gillnet total	20	193	19,470	451	5,838	2,489	28,441
Commercial total		320	180,358	661	758,106	39,253	978,698
Hatchery cost recovery harvests							
Tutka Lagoon SHA		0	20,196	15	1,934,470	57	1,954,738
Port Graham SHA							0
China Poot SHA		0	27,697	0	15	0	27,712
Resurrection Bay SHA		0	74,759	0	0	123	74,882
Kirschner Lake SHA		0	31,348	0	898	6	32,252
Hatchery total			154,000	15	1,935,383	186	2,089,584
Hatchery donated fish		0	3,539	0	0	0	3,539
Commercial homepack		8	250	181	54	2	495
LCI total harvest		328	338,147	857	2,693,543	39,441	3,072,316

*Note: Harvests from areas where there were fewer than 3 permit holders reporting deliveries are confidential.