

PROPOSAL 181

5 AAC 27.195. Sitka Sound commercial sac roe herring fishery.

Establish provisions for conducting test setting in the Sitka Sound herring sac roe fishery.

The recommended solution is to limit the number of test sets and released sets and require the Department to keep a log of the number and size of released sets during commercial openings. In 2022, the Department used a “three strikes and you’re out” strategy to close the fishery on one occasion but appears to have subsequently moved away from that strategy.

Suggested limits for test fishing below are derived from long-term medians of available test set data (1995-2023) for the Sitka Sound sac roe herring fishery.

5 AAC 27.195 – Sitka Sound commercial sac roe herring fishery

(a) In managing the commercial sac roe herring fishery in section 13-B north of the latitude of Aspid Cape (Sitka Sound), the department shall

(1) manage the fishery consistent with the applicable provisions of 5 AAC 27.160(g) and 5 AAC 27.190;

(2) distribute the commercial harvest by fishing time and area if the department determines that it is necessary to ensure that subsistence users have a reasonable opportunity to harvest the amount of herring spawn necessary for subsistence uses specified in 5 AAC 01.716(b).

(3) allow no more than three test sets per day.

(4) limit the number of test sets over the season to 29 sets or an estimated biomass of no more than 2,600 tons.

(5) test fishing must be conducted via jig sampling until the average mature roe content is at least 10%. If the average mature roe content falls below 10% during subsequent test samples collected via seine or during commercial openings, test fishing must revert to jig sampling until the average mature roe content reaches 10%.

(6) maintain a log of number, size, and location of released sets and allow no more than three released sets in one day during a commercial opening

What is the issue you would like the board to address and why? The number and magnitude of test sets and released sets prior to Sitka Sound sac roe herring openings has increased in recent years. In 2022, there were 26 test sets totaling an estimated 1,275 tons (roughly 8% of the record-high harvest). In 2023, there were 51 test sets totaling an estimated 6,425 tons (roughly 59% of the harvest). In other words, in 2023, the fleet had to catch and release at least three herring for every five they kept. In 2000, the estimated volume captured and released during test sets exceeded the total harvest! **Currently, the Department does not keep data on sets released during commercial openers, so the values above are minimum estimates of the volume of herring handled and released.** The test sets and released sets can needlessly stress sensitive fish preparing to spawn and cause direct or indirect mortality. Released sets or “slips” can cause high (though variable) direct mortality rates and induce behaviors that are detrimental to the long-term health and well-being of small pelagic fishes (Anders et al. 2019). Unnecessary handling of herring should be minimized.

Did you develop your proposal in coordination with others, or with your local Fish and Game Advisory Committee? Explain.

PROPOSED BY: Sitka Tribe of Alaska

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