

SPORT FISHING

Emergency Order

ALASKA DEPARTMENT
OF FISH & GAME

Under Authority of AS 16.05.060

Emergency Order No. 2-KS-1-10-23

Issued at: Soldotna, Thursday, March 02, 2023

Effective Date: 12:01 a.m. Monday, May 1, 2023

Expiration Date: 11:59 p.m. Monday, July 31, 2023, unless superseded by subsequent emergency order.

EXPLANATION:

This emergency order closes sport fishing for king salmon of all sizes in the Kenai River from the mouth upstream to the outlet of Skilak Lake from 12:01 a.m. Monday, May 1 through 11:59 p.m. Friday, June 30, 2023. Fishing for king salmon will remain closed from 12:01 a.m. Saturday, July 1 through 11:59 p.m. Monday, July 31, 2023, in waters of the Kenai River drainage from an ADF&G regulatory marker located approximately 300 yards downstream from the mouth of Slikok Creek, upstream to the outlet of Skilak Lake. This closure prohibits all sport fishing for king salmon, including catch-and-release fishing. King salmon may not be retained or possessed; king salmon accidentally caught while fishing for other species may not be removed from the water and must be released immediately.

REGULATION:

The provisions of 5 AAC 57.120. (a)(2)(A)(i) and (a)(3)(A) are superseded by this emergency order. Under this emergency order, the following provisions are effective 12:01 a.m. Monday, May 1 through 11:59 p.m. Monday, July 31, 2023.

5 AAC 57.120. General provisions for seasons, bag, possession, annual, and size limits, and methods and means for the Kenai River Drainage Area.

(a)(2) king salmon 20 inches or greater in length as follows:

(A) may be taken only from January 1 – July 31, in the Kenai River from its mouth upstream to an ADF&G regulatory marker located at the outlet of Skilak Lake, as follows:

(i) from May 1 – June 30, from its mouth upstream to an ADF&G regulatory marker located at the outlet of Skilak Lake, is closed to sport fishing for king salmon; from July 1 – July 31, from an ADF&G regulatory marker located approximately 300 yards downstream from the mouth of Slikok Creek upstream to an ADF&G regulatory marker located at the outlet of Skilak Lake, is closed to sport fishing for king salmon; a person may not remove a king salmon from the water before releasing the fish;

(a)(3) king salmon less than 20 inches in length as follows:

(A) from May 1– June 30, flowing waters and unstocked lakes and ponds and in the Kenai River from its mouth upstream to an ADF&G regulatory marker at the outlet of Skilak Lake, are closed to sport fishing for king salmon; from July 1 – July 31, flowing waters and unstocked lakes and ponds and that portion of the Kenai River from an ADF&G regulatory marker located approximately 300 yards downstream from the mouth of Slikok Creek, upstream to an ADF&G regulatory marker at the outlet of Skilak Lake, are closed to sport fishing for king salmon;

Doug Vincent-Lang,
Commissioner



By delegation to:

Jenny Gates
Acting Area Management Biologist

JUSTIFICATION:

Consistent with 5 AAC 57.160. *Kenai River and Kasilof River Early-Run King Salmon Management Plan*, From January 1 – June 30, from its mouth upstream to an ADF&G regulatory marker located approximately 300 yards downstream from the mouth of Slikok Creek, if the preseason forecast projects the inriver run to be above the lower end of the sustainable escapement goal, but below the lower end of the optimal escapement goal, the commissioner shall, by emergency order close the sport fishery to the taking of king salmon. In addition, from January 1 – July 31, from an ADF&G regulatory marker located approximately 300 yards downstream from the mouth of Slikok Creek upstream to an ADF&G regulatory marker located at the outlet of Skilak Lake, if preseason forecast projects the inriver run to be above the lower end of the sustainable escapement goal, but below the lower end of the optimal escapement goal, the commissioner shall close, by emergency order, the sport fishery to the taking of king salmon.

The sustainable escapement goal (SEG) for early-run Kenai River king salmon is 2,800-5,600 large king salmon (75 cm mid eye to tail fork length and longer) and the optimal escapement goal (OEG) for king salmon is 3,900 – 6,600 large king salmon (75 cm mid eye to tail fork length and longer).

Kenai River king salmon and other king salmon stocks throughout Cook Inlet are experiencing a period of low productivity and below average run strength. The 2023 forecast for the stock of large (≥ 75 cm mid-eye-to-tail-fork-length [METF] or approximately ≥ 34 inches in total length) early-run king salmon in the Kenai River is 2,914 fish. This total run forecast is less than the OEG range of 3,900 to 6,600 fish. The forecast is well below the 1986–2022 average run of approximately 8,700 fish and is slightly less than the recent 5-year average run of approximately 3,200 fish. If realized, this forecast would be the 3rd largest run in the past five years but rank as the 5th lowest run in the past 38 years. With no fishing mortality, the escapement from this forecasted run would be less than the optimum escapement goal. Closing the early-run king salmon sport fishery preseason is warranted until data from inseason assessment projects indicate that fishing opportunity can be afforded without jeopardizing the achievement of the OEG.

DISTRIBUTION:

The distribution list for this emergency order is on file at the Region 2 Office of Alaska Department of Fish and Game, Division of Sport Fish, 333 Raspberry Road, Anchorage, AK 99518, (907) 267-2218.