



Advisory Announcement

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SITKA SOUND HERRING FISHERY UPDATE # 7

Today's aerial survey covered from Salisbury Sound to West Crawfish Inlet. Weather during the flight was fair with 15-knot winds, low overcast skies, and occasional rain. Viewing conditions were fair with occasional low clouds affecting visibility. No herring spawn was observed. Most herring predators were concentrated between Crow Island and Hayward Strait. Numerous whales were seen between Guide Island and Kamenoi Point in Hayward Strait, while sea lions were scattered throughout Sitka Sound.

The *R/V Kestrel* surveyed Sitka Sound for herring schools throughout the day. A very large biomass of herring was seen in the deeper waters northwest of Bieli Rocks. Numerous large herring schools were also observed in Hayward Strait, north of Middle Island, and southwest of the Siginaka Islands.

Two successful test sets were conducted today, the results are as follows:

- 9:53 a.m., Hayward Strait, 30-ton set, mature roe – 5.6%, immature roe – 2%, average weight – 103 g, and 30% female.
- 1:00 p.m., Hayward Strait, 90-ton set, mature roe – 9.2%, immature roe – 1.6%, average weight – 120 g, and 42% female.

Herring mortality associated with test sets is likely minimal and there is no evidence that the small number of fish taken has any measurable impact on the subsistence fishery. Nevertheless, to ensure reasonable opportunity for subsistence harvest of herring roe would not be negatively impacted by test setting, prior to authorizing test fishing in this area the department considered the following: 1) test setting in the area of Hayward Strait is well outside the commercial closed waters and core subsistence areas; and 2) the fish encountered during test fishing in this area would represent a small fraction of the overall biomass in the area.

The department continues to work with the Alaska Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) in response to the grounding of the vessel in Neva Strait. This includes tracking the geographic extent of the spilled fuel and assessing any potential impacts to the subsistence and commercial herring fisheries in Sitka Sound. Today's aerial survey showed the diesel sheen extended from Whitestone Narrows through Neva Strait. Dispersed traces of the spill were also seen in St. John Baptist Bay and parallel to the southern shoreline of Salisbury Sound as far north as Sinitsin Cove. Sheening was not apparent in Nakwasina Sound, Krestof Sound, or Olga Strait. Because the State of Alaska has a zero-tolerance policy with respect to fuel contamination of seafood, the department will not open a commercial fishery or conduct test fishing in areas where there is a risk of fuel contamination of gear, vessels, or harvested fish. More information can be found on the DEC website: <https://dec.alaska.gov/spar/ppr/spill-information/response/2022/01-tug-western-mariner-grounding/>

The next aerial survey and fishery update are scheduled for Thursday, March 24.

All aerial herring survey data can be reviewed online, including spawn lines and photos, in an interactive map application found at: <https://www.adfg.alaska.gov/index.cfm?adfg=commercialbyareasoutheast.herring#maps> or scan:



Advisory Announcement web site: <http://www.adfg.alaska.gov/index.cfm?adfg=cfnews.main>.

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