

Division of Commercial Fisheries
Sam Rabung, Director

Kuskokwim Area Office
P.O. Box 1467
Bethel, AK 99559



Alaska Department of Fish and Game
Doug Vincent-Lang, Commissioner

PO Box 115526
Juneau, AK 99811-5526
www.adfg.alaska.gov

Advisory Announcement
For Immediate Release: June 9, 2022
Time: 4:15 p.m.

CONTACT: Nick Smith and Ross Renick
Kuskokwim Area Management Biologists
(907) 543-2433

Kuskokwim River Salmon Fishery Announcement #3

Emergency Order #3-S-WR-03-22

This is an announcement from the Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ADF&G) in Bethel for subsistence fishermen in the Kuskokwim Area.

- **Subsistence Sections 4 and 5** (From a line between regulatory markers at the Yukon Delta National Wildlife Refuge boundary near Aniak to the headwaters of the Kuskokwim River):
 - **Subsistence fishing will open with 6-inch or less mesh gillnets (set or drift), not to exceed 25 fathoms in length and 45 meshes in depth beginning 12:01 a.m. June 12, 2022, until further notice.**
 - King salmon may be retained if caught with fish wheels, dip nets, beach seines, and hook and line beginning **12:01 a.m. June 12, 2022 until further notice.**
 - **Aniak Box:** The waters of the Kuskokwim River from the Yukon Delta NWR boundary at Aniak upstream to a line formed between two points lat 61° 35.308' N, long 159° 29.167' W and lat 61° 34.731' N, long 159° 28.939' W (Figure 1) **will remain closed to subsistence fishing with gillnets until further notice.** Subsistence fishing with hook and line, fish wheels equipped with a live box or chute, beach seines and dip nets is allowed, **but all king salmon caught must be returned to the water alive.** These closed waters are in place to help provide protection for king salmon bound for the Aniak River.

As previously announced:

- Subsistence fishing with gillnets closed in Sections 4 and 5 on June 9, 2022.
- Subsistence fishing with gillnets and harvest of king salmon in selective gears will continue to be closed in the Aniak River drainage to the ADF&G regulatory markers at its confluence with the Kuskokwim River.
- Sections 1-3 will remain closed for state subsistence fishing until further notice.

The department manages Kuskokwim River salmon fisheries as directed by the Alaska Board of Fisheries under 5 AAC 07.365 Kuskokwim River Salmon Management Plan. The management plan provides guidelines for management of the Kuskokwim River salmon fisheries that result in the sustained yield of salmon stocks large enough to meet escapement goals. The department uses the best available data, including pre-season and in-season run projections, test fishing indices, age and sex composition, harvest reports, sonar estimates, and recognized uncertainty, to assess run abundance for the purpose of implementing the plan. Kuskokwim River salmon stocks shall be managed in a conservative manner consistent with the Policy for the Management of Sustainable Salmon Fisheries under 5 AAC 39.222 to meet escapement goals and the subsistence harvest priority on identified surplus.

The pre-season forecast of Kuskokwim River king salmon is for a range of 99,000 to 161,000 fish. Current assessment and harvest reports indicate that the king salmon run is just beginning to build in the lower Kuskokwim River, which is similar to the last couple of years. As of June 8, the Bethel test fishery cumulative CPUE for king salmon was 17 and, as of June 6, the total estimated king salmon passage past the sonar was 450 king salmon. Bethel test fishery CPUE and sonar passage are tracking the 2018, 2020, and 2021 king salmon runs, which had total runs of 135,711, 124,540, and 129,751 fish, respectively. Drainage-wide escapement in 2018, 2020, and 2021 was 112,980, 88,339, and 101,000 fish, respectively.

Harvest reports indicate that non-salmon fishes, such as sheefish and broad whitefish, are being caught in subsistence sections 4 and 5 with the occasional king salmon also being caught. Annual king salmon harvest in these sections has ranged from 1,303 to 3,234 fish since 2015. When factoring in the number of households in these sections of the Kuskokwim River, the annual harvest of king salmon is less than 7 fish per household. This level of harvest is less than the 10 fish per household stipulated in the subsistence king salmon permit that has been issued in the past. Given the current assessment of the king salmon run and the ability to provide for the additional harvesting of non-salmon species, providing fishing opportunity in subsistence sections 4 and 5 is warranted.

The Yukon Delta National Wildlife Refuge through Emergency Special Action 3-KS-01-22 issued on May 2, 2022, announced two 12-hr drift, or set gillnet fishing periods on June 12 and June 16 in the Kuskokwim River downriver from Aniak. The Alaska Department of Fish and Game does not support these fishing periods being offered as announced. These two fishing periods will unduly target the same cohort of fish. After review of previous years' fishing periods, current assessment, local knowledge, and past tagging projects, ADF&G is electing to take a conservative approach to protect early headwaters Kuskokwim River king salmon sub stocks knowing the harvest potential of these two federal fishing periods. It is understood from local knowledge and past tagging projects that fishing early in the run has greater potential to target the headwaters spawning fish that middle and headwaters subsistence fishermen rely on. The median passage of headwaters migrating king salmon through lower Kuskokwim is around June 15. Escapement in 2021 at the headwaters Salmon River (Pitka Fork) weir was the lowest observed since project operations began 2015. The Takotna River also had another below average escapement in 2021. The 2021 harvest in the upriver communities that depend on these headwaters migrating king salmon was the lowest observed since 2017.

Kuskokwim River Salmon Working Group:

The next Working Group meeting is scheduled for Wednesday, June 15, 2022, at 10:00 a.m., by teleconference or in-person, at the Bethel ADF&G office. This meeting is open to the public. Please call 1-800-315-6338, passcode: 58756#, to attend via teleconference.

Further announcements will be made from the Bethel Fish and Game office, on the State of Alaska web site (<http://www.adfg.alaska.gov/index.cfm?adfg=cfnews.main>), local radio stations, and Kuskokwim River Facebook Page (<https://www.facebook.com/KuskoRiverFishingADFG/>). Advisory Announcements will be faxed to area villages. For additional information or questions regarding Kuskokwim Area fisheries, contact the Alaska Department of Fish and Game office in Bethel at 543-2433 or toll free at 1-855-933-2433.

For information regarding federal subsistence fishing regulations and any announcements, please contact the Yukon Delta NWR at (907) 543-3151 or (907) 543-1002.

For additional information concerning this advisory announcement:
ADF&G: Nicholas Smith 907-543-2709 or Ross Renick 907-543-2331



Figure 1.– Map of Aniak area closed waters.

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