

Is the Conservation Corridor Working?  
Submitted by  
Mat Su Borough Fish and Wildlife Commission

RC 126

The Conservation Corridor provides strategic time and area closures in the center of Cook Inlet and expands the terminal fishing areas based on abundance of Kenai and Kasilof Sockeye salmon. Following the move to terminal stock management and the creation of the Conservation Corridor in 2011 and revised in 2014 significant increases in were observed in coho and sockeye salmon runs to the Mat Su.

Before the Conservation Corridor

- Sport fishing effort in the Mat Su to the lowest levels in 37 years (PC42, pg. 7)
- Chronic inability to meet coho salmon escapements
- Coho returns in Northern Cook Inlet streams reached 20-year lows
- 8 of the State's 14 Stocks of Concern are in the Mat Su

In the Context of Conservation

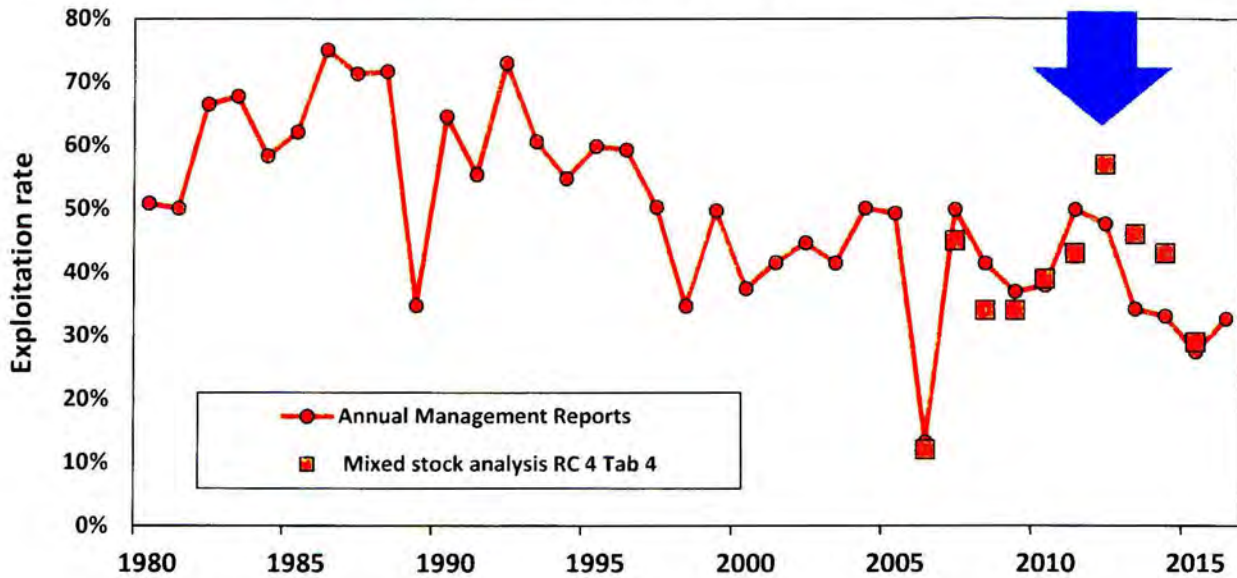
- Annual Commercial Exploitation Rates of Susitna Sockeye have dropped dramatically (Figure 1)
  - Historical rates often reached 60 -70%, but since the creation of the Conservation Corridor exploitation is less than 30% (Figure 1).
  - Left unchecked, harvests from the Central District commercial fishery will continue a pattern of over exploitation on Susitna sockeye and coho stocks
  - 57% exploitation of Susitna sockeye in the 2012 disaster is a reverse example from a year where closure of the ESSN and release of the fleet into the Conservation Corridor (RC 4, tab 4, slide 10) (Figure 1 attached)
- Conservation Corridor has proven benefits for Northern District coho salmon (Figure 2)
  - Coho catch per delivery is three times lower in the terminal fishing area relative to Central District (PC 42, Fig 17, pg 30) (Figure 2 attached)
  - Sockeye to coho catch ratios in the terminal area (expanded corridor) are almost double those seen in the Central district the last three weeks of July (Figure 3 attached)
  - Reduction in exploitation rates in the drift fishery as evidenced by the genetic stock ID sampling (RC 4, tab 10) (Figure 1 attached)
  - From 2014-2016, drift fleet harvested 25.6 coho per delivery in the Conservation Corridor versus 6.3 coho per delivery in the terminal harvest area. (Figure 2, attached)

In the Context of the Commercial Fishery

- Rumors of Commercial Fishery Demise are Greatly Exaggerated
  - Exvessel values of the UCI salmon harvest since 2011 are more than double the 20-year average. (Figure 4, attached)
  - Drift gillnet harvests produced some of the highest values in the last 20 years while fishing in the terminal areas (expanded corridor) where ESSN fishery was closed for king conservation. (Figure 4, attached)
- Commercial fisheries are less efficient in the terminal areas (expanded corridor) compared to fishing the central district, however, that can be made up for by increasing fishing time when necessary. (Table 1)
- "Uptick" in Susitna sockeye harvest in the Northern district set net fishery (RC 4, tab 3, slide 18)
  - Increase in numbers and (Figure 5, attached)
  - Improvement in fish quality (less net marked fish)

**Exploitation rates on Susitna sockeye have been substantially reduced from historical levels since implementation of the expanded terminal fishing areas.**

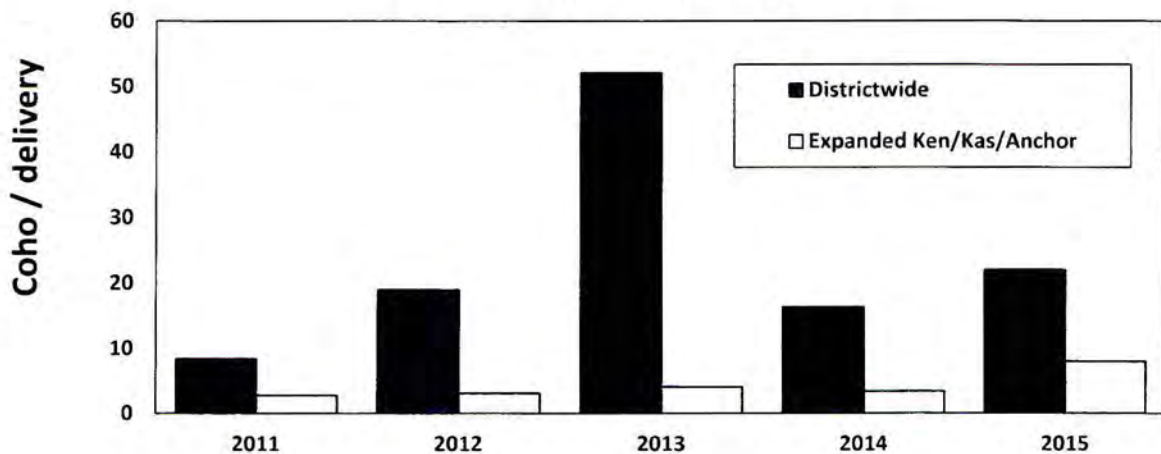
**Figure 1 - Susitna Sockeye exploitation rates.**



**Coho catches are substantially reduced in the expanded corridor relative to district-wide openers.**

**Figure 2**

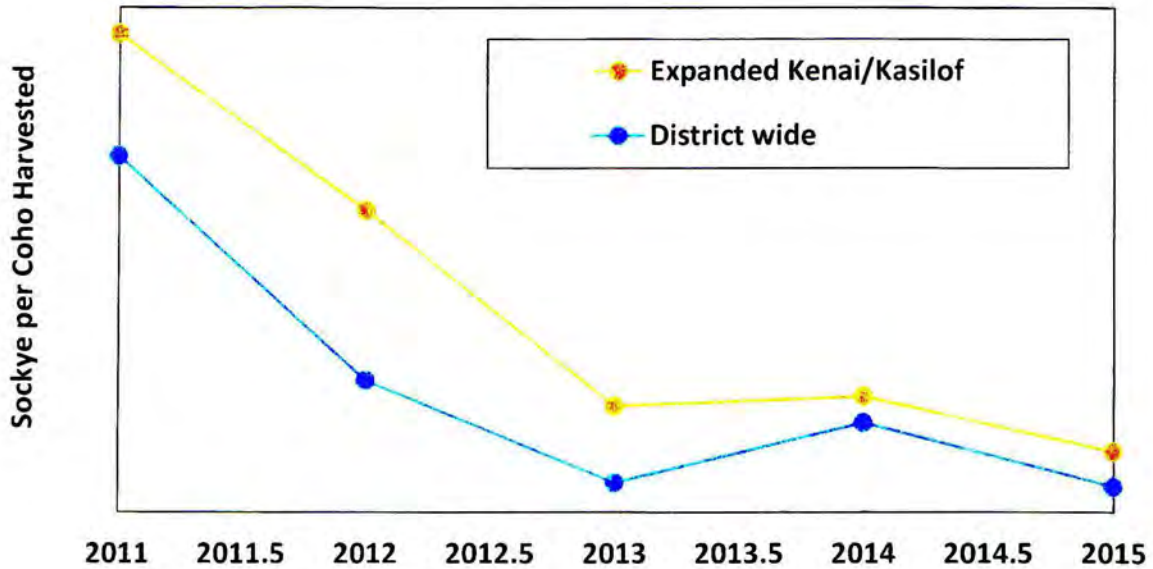
**Central District Drift - July 9-31**





**Sockeye: Coho catch ratios are much higher in the expanded corridor than districtwide.**

**Figure 3**



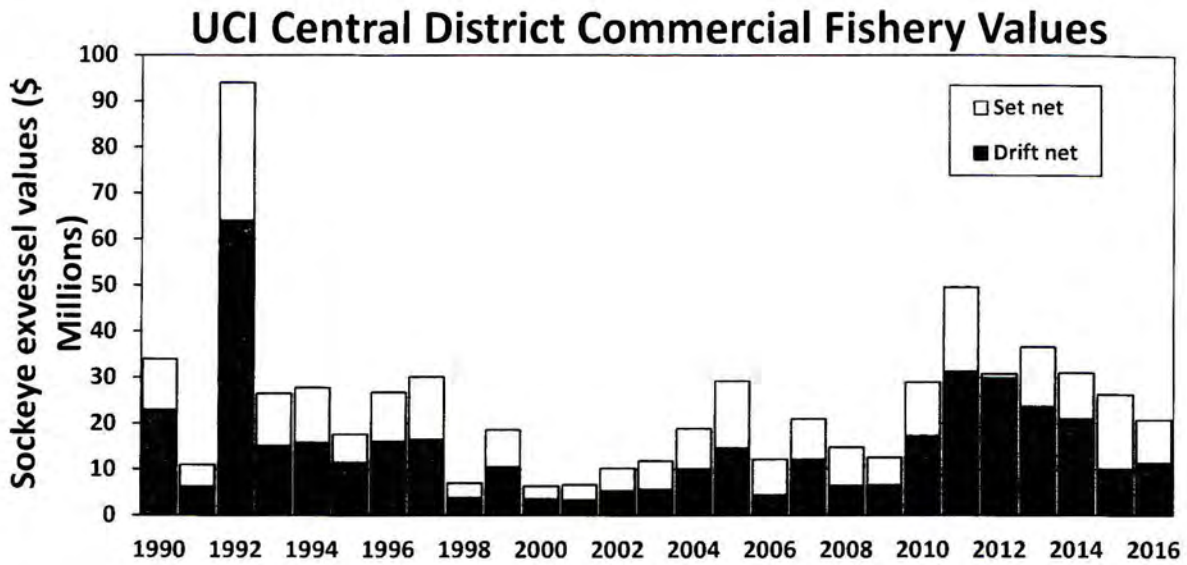
**The expanded terminal fishery harvest areas have proven very effective in harvesting sockeye.**

**Table 1. Commercial Drift Gillnet Harvest of Sockeye**

Year	Districtwide Number	Expanded Kenai/Kasilof
2011	2,262,108	930,119
2012	2,337,161	586,803
2013	1,313,908	333,012
2014	1,041,994	440,196
2015	522,762	458,772
2016	725,000	538,000

Commercial fishery values in recent years remain high.

Figure 4



Sockeye harvests in the northern district set net fishery have improved substantially since the expanded corridors were implemented.

Figure 5

