

Division of Commercial Fisheries
Sam Rabung, Director

Dillingham Area Office
PO Box 230
Dillingham, AK 99576



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: March 11, 2024

CONTACTS:

Tim Sands
(907) 842-5227

Travis Elison and Aaron Tiernan
(907) 267-2105

BRISTOL BAY 2024 COMMERCIAL SALMON FISHING OUTLOOK

INTRODUCTION

This document provides general information to fishermen, processors, and the public concerning the upcoming Bristol Bay salmon season. Included is the general framework for management of each of the five major districts and the 2024 sockeye salmon forecast.

During the season, Bristol Bay salmon fishing announcements are broadcast on marine VHF channel 07A. Current fishing announcements are aired on local radio stations—KAKN and KDLG. As conditions in the fishery change, for the most current information, fishermen should stand by at regular announcement times: 9:00 a.m., 12:00 noon, 3:00 p.m., 6:00 p.m., and 8:00 p.m., unless otherwise stated. Information is also available via telephone; for eastside fisheries (Naknek-Kvichak, Egegik, and Ugashik), dial 907-246-INFO (4636), for westside fisheries (Nushagak and Togiak) dial 907-842-5226. Fishermen are asked to note that regular office hours at the Dillingham (Alaska Department of Fish and Game) office will be 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. Monday thru Friday, except from June 17 thru July 17, the office will be open seven days a week from 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. In King Salmon, the office hours are as follows: June 1 to June 17 and after July 17: 8:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m., and 1:00 p.m. to 4:30 p.m., closed for lunch and weekends. From June 17 thru July 17: 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. seven days per week.

ADF&G Forms

All relevant Bristol Bay forms are available online and can be submitted in various ways including by email (contacts are listed on ADF&G's Bristol Bay home page, [here](#)). To avoid problems and processing delays, please submit forms early. Contact your processor for a digital copy of your Permit Holder's Agent Authorization (PHAA) form. Set gillnet permit holders are only required to fill out and return set gillnet registration cards if they fish in the Nushagak District. Drift gillnet permit holders must fill out and return district registration cards prior to commercial fishing in any district in Bristol Bay. PDF files of district registration cards, permit holder agent authorization forms, and dual drift registration forms are posted online on the department Bristol Bay homepage and can be printed, completed, then mailed to the address on the printout, or submitted electronically to DFG.BristolBay.CF.Forms@alaska.gov. If electronic submission or mail submission is not possible, forms will be available from, and may be submitted to, Anchorage, King Salmon, or Dillingham office personnel.

These resources are available online at:

<http://www.adfg.alaska.gov/index.cfm?adfg=commercialbyareabristolbay.salmon#management>

Inseason Fishery Information

Fishery updates, announcements, catch and escapement information, and Port Moller Test Fishery genetic stock composition estimates will be available at:

<http://www.adfg.alaska.gov/index.cfm?adfg=commercialbyareabristolbay.salmon>

The Port Moller Test Fishery daily catch updates and interpretations of the data will be posted at the following web site once the project becomes operational on June 10:

<https://www.bbsri.org/port-moller-test-fishery>

Alaska Wildlife Troopers – Summer 2024 Outlook – Bristol Bay

Enforcement Priorities:

-The Department is concerned about underreporting of king salmon harvested in the Bristol Bay fishery. Tenders can expect to be boarded and checked for undocumented king salmon on their vessels. All salmon, including king and coho, are required by regulation to be reported on fish tickets at the time of delivery even when taken but not sold – see 5AAC 39.130 and 5AAC 06.377(b) for details.

-Strong focus on fishing district lines and open/closed fishing periods in all districts using all available assets.

-Troopers will conduct routine boardings of drift gillnet and processor vessels as well as conduct beach patrols to verify licensing and permitting regulations are met. Vessel length, net length, net depth, and vessel and gear identification markings will also be checked.

-Fishermen and processors are reminded that at the time of delivery of fish, a fish ticket must be generated and must include the signature of a company representative and the full name and signature of the CFEC permit holder (BOTH permit holders if dual drift operation). The permit holder(s) must be present at the time of delivery to sign the fish ticket. Crew members cannot sign fish tickets for permit holders. Fish tickets also must include the number or pounds of fish, by species, retained by a commercial fisherman for that person's own use.

-Fishermen are reminded to review regulations on gillnet specifications and operations. Be aware, regulations prohibit drift gillnet fishing when the net, or vessel to which it is attached, is grounded.

-Loss of a gillnet or portion of a gillnet, must be reported directly to a local ADF&G department office in Dillingham or King Salmon within 15 hours of the gear loss.

-Drift fishermen are reminded when registering or reregistering (changing districts) under 5AAC 06.370 with an agent authorization on file, the CFEC permit holders are still responsible for ensuring that the registration was accomplished by their agent.

-Termination of joint operation of drift gillnet gear is not effective until at least one of the permit holders register the date and time of termination with the department in the manner specified for reregistration in 5AAC06.370(b).

-Continued enforcement of state boating safety laws in cooperation with the U.S. Coast Guard.

- Fishermen should ensure their GPS waypoints and boundary lines match 2023-2026 regulations for fishing districts and sections.

SALMON OUTLOOK

BAYWIDE

The 2024 Bristol Bay inshore sockeye salmon run is forecasted to be approximately 37.9 million fish (<https://www.adfg.alaska.gov/static/applications/dcfnewsrelease/1547483758.pdf>). Based on the forecasted run size to each district and accounting for escapement there is a potential inshore surplus of 25.0 million sockeye salmon (Table 1). The department manages fisheries based on inseason abundance information. The inseason management approach uses a suite of assessment tools to provide information on abundance and run timing in each district, which will be used by the department to determine fishing opportunity.

The commercial salmon season in Bristol Bay opens June 1 by regulation. Fishing in eastside districts and the Togiak District will be allowed using a weekly schedule that varies by section. The schedules are in place to balance fishing opportunity with escapement in the early part of the season, particularly for king salmon. Fishing time will be adjusted within individual districts as each run develops and sockeye salmon run characteristics become defined. In the Nushagak District, management will follow the Nushagak King Salmon Action Plan with focus on king salmon in the early part of the season, and then switch to sockeye salmon management as abundance and regulation dictates.

NAKNEK-KVICHAK DISTRICT

An inshore run of approximately 15.0 million sockeye salmon is expected for the Naknek-Kvichak District in 2024. Based on the forecast and escapement goals, the projected surplus in the Naknek-Kvichak District is approximately 8.1 million sockeye salmon: 2.5 million from the Kvichak River, 1.1 million from the Alagnak River, and 4.4 million from the Naknek River (Table 1). Sockeye salmon returning to the Naknek-Kvichak District are predicted to be 53% age-1.2, 32% age-1.3, 10% age-2.2, and 5% age-2.3 fish.

The Naknek River escapement goal range is 800,000 to 2.0 million sockeye salmon. The Kvichak River escapement goal range is 2.0 million to 10.0 million sockeye salmon. The Alagnak River escapement goal is a minimum of 210,000 sockeye salmon. Escapements will be managed within the lower or upper portions of the escapement goals, proportional to the run size based on the pre-season forecast and inseason assessment of run size.

Fishing in the entire Naknek-Kvichak District for both drift and set gillnets will be open four days per week from 9:00 a.m. Monday to 9:00 a.m. Friday, beginning 9:00 a.m. Monday, June 3 and

ending 9:00 a.m. Friday, June 21. From June 21 until July 17, fishing periods will be based on sockeye salmon escapements, abundance in the district, and gear group harvest percentages. District test fishing for inseason management may be conducted periodically depending on run characteristics. As in previous years, some openings may occur on short notice.

EGEGIK DISTRICT

The 2024 Egegik River inshore run is forecast to be approximately 5.5 million sockeye salmon. With an escapement goal of 800,000 to 2.0 million fish, the potential surplus is 4.4 million (Table 1). Approximately 43% of the run is expected to be age-2.2 fish, followed by age-1.2 (32%), age-2.3 (14%), and age-1.3 (11%).

The season will start with a three day per week schedule to provide for king salmon escapement. Commercial fishing will be allowed in the Egegik District from 9:00 a.m. Monday, until 9:00 a.m. Wednesday and from 9:00 a.m. Thursday until 9:00 a.m. Friday. This schedule will begin at 9:00 a.m. Monday, June 3 and run through 9:00 a.m. Friday, June 14, after which additional fishing time for both gear groups will be scheduled according to sockeye salmon run strength. As in previous years, some openings may occur on short notice. Separate gear openings and adjusting length of commercial periods will be used to achieve gear group allocations in 2024.

UGASHIK DISTRICT

The 2024 forecasted inshore run of sockeye salmon to Ugashik River is 4.6 million fish. With an escapement goal of 500,000 to 1.4 million sockeye salmon, the potential surplus is 3.5 million (Table 1). Approximately 64% of the run is expected to be age-1.2, 17% age-2.2, 14% age-1.3, and 4% age-2.3 fish.

Beginning 9:00 a.m. Monday, June 3, commercial fishing in the Ugashik District will be allowed on a 9:00 a.m. Monday to 9:00 a.m. Friday schedule through 9:00 a.m. Friday, June 21. Additional fishing time after June 21 will depend on fishery performance and run strength indicators. Separate gear openings and adjusting length of commercial periods will be used to achieve gear group allocations in 2024. Permit holders should note that the regulation restricting opportunity to no more than 48 hours between June 16 and June 23 will not be in effect for 2024.

As a reminder, Registration Area T permit holders may fish in the inner portion of the Cinder River Section (river and lagoon) and the Inner Port Heiden Section during all months when open by regulation. For further information, contact ADF&G in Port Moller at 907-375-2716. Registration Area T permit holders who fish the Cinder River and Port Heiden sections and deliver their catch in the Ugashik District are reminded to report the section of catch on the appropriate fish tickets and note that transporting fish from the sections mentioned above to deliver in the Ugashik District is not permitted in July.

WALRUS

It is unknown at this time whether walrus will return to the Cape Greig area. If they do, the department will use the adjusted line as with previous years. If they do not, the district boundaries will revert to those in regulation at 5 AAC 06.200(d). The first announcement of the 2024 season will clarify which boundary will be in place for the summer.

NUSHAGAK DISTRICT

The Nushagak District sockeye salmon inshore run forecast is approximately 12.1 million fish: 3.8 million for escapement with a potential surplus of 8.3 million (Table 1). Under the guidance of the Nushagak River King Salmon Action Plan it is possible that the potential surplus may not be completely harvested. The total inshore run by river system is as follows: Wood River, 7.8 million (escapement goal range 700,000 to 3.0 million), Igushik River, 1.1 million (escapement goal range 150,000 to 400,000), and Nushagak River, 3.5 million (escapement goal range of 370,000 to 1.4 million; Table 1). Approximately 50% of the forecasted run is expected to be age-1.2 sockeye salmon, followed by 43% age 1.3, 3% age 2.2, and 6% age-2.3 fish.

There are three triggers that guide when to start fishing under the Nushagak King Salmon Action Plan regulations. Commercial fishing with drift gillnets in the Nushagak District and set gillnets in the Nushagak Section may begin once any one of the following triggers is met:

- The Nushagak River trigger is 210,000 sockeye salmon projected past the sonar.
- The Wood River trigger is 780,000 sockeye salmon projected past the counting tower.
- If neither of the above conditions are met by 9:00 a.m. June 28, then fishing may be allowed in the Nushagak District at that time.

In addition to the triggers that regulate the start of fishing, the board adopted Optimal Escapement Goals (OEGs) larger than department SEGs that reduce effort after commercial fishing starts. Those OEGs are structured such that 15% of the preseason forecast is added to the upper end of each SEG range. Lower bounds of both SEGs remain unchanged.

- The 2024 upper bound of the Wood River OEG is 3.0 million sockeye salmon.
- The 2024 upper bound of the Nushagak River OEG is 1.4 million sockeye salmon.

The strategy for 2024 is to start directed sockeye salmon openings once one or more of the triggers has been met. From that point on, the department will make tide by tide decisions attempting to balance escapements of king, chum, and sockeye salmon with fishing opportunity. It is important to represent escapement from all parts of the run and achieve king and chum salmon minimum escapement goals if possible. Set gillnet fishermen should expect to have occasional closures into the second week of July. Drift gillnet openings will be timed to give opportunity for king and chum salmon to pass through the district. Fishermen are asked to avoid areas where they may catch higher numbers of king and chum salmon.

Openings will be scheduled based on sockeye salmon escapement levels in the Nushagak and Wood rivers. Mesh size will be limited to 5.5 inches or smaller beginning June 1 for the conservation of king salmon. If the run comes in as forecast, it is likely that the Wood River Special Harvest Area will be used in 2024 to harvest surplus sockeye salmon in the Wood River. In this case, fishing opportunity will be afforded to the gear type that is behind on harvest percentage relative to the allocation.

Igushik River sockeye salmon will be managed independently of the Nushagak and Wood River sockeye salmon stocks. Set gillnet fishing will begin in the Igushik Section when there is a market available, likely mid-June. Initial openings will be 15 hours per day and additional time will be added if large harvests or escapement information indicate more time is warranted. Drift gillnet openings in the Igushik Section will be added as needed to control sockeye salmon escapement, but only after triggers in the Nushagak Section have been met. Tower count information should be

available by June 25. Once this information is available managers will incorporate it into the decision-making process.

The department will switch to coho salmon management in the Nushagak District around July 23, when sockeye salmon harvest decreases. Nushagak sonar counts will cease approximately July 25; after that, management decisions will be based on catch per unit effort, subsistence reports, and possible aerial surveys.

TOGIAC DISTRICT

The 2024 inshore run of Togiak River sockeye salmon is forecast to be approximately 680,000 fish with a potential surplus of 520,000 fish (Table 1). The escapement goal range is 120,000 to 270,000 sockeye salmon. Approximately 63% is expected to be age 1.3; 36% of the run is expected to be age 1.2; <1% of the run is expected to be ages 2.2 and 2.3.

Unlike other fishing districts in Bristol Bay that require emergency orders to announce fishing periods, the Togiak District follows a regular weekly schedule that allows fishing in the Togiak Bay Section four days per week, fishing in the Kulukak Section two and a half days per week, and fishing in the Matogak, Osviak, and Cape Peirce Sections five days per week. Following the new Registration and Reregistration regulations, permit holders are restricted from fishing in the Togiak District until the mid-point of the Togiak River escapement goal has been achieved, as announced by the department, if they have fished in any other district in Bristol Bay. Conversely, permit holders are restricted from fishing in any other district until the mid-point of the Togiak River escapement goal has been achieved, as announced by the department, if they have fished in the Togiak District. Regulation 5AAC 06.370 requires vessel transfers to be restricted in Togiak District similarly to the restriction of permit transfers. Regulation also prevents drift gillnet fishing effort near the Togiak River mouth through July 15 and restricts mesh size to 5.5 inches or smaller between June 15 and July 15 for the conservation of king salmon.

King salmon run strength to the Togiak River has been below average for several years. The department anticipates another poor king salmon run, and permit holders can expect emergency orders to reduce the weekly fishing schedule in the last two weeks of June in the Togiak River Section.

If a market for coho salmon is present, the department will continue to follow the regular weekly schedule unless it is determined that a more conservative management approach is needed.

Acknowledgements

The department would like to acknowledge the Bristol Bay Fisheries Collaborative (BBFC) for continued financial, operational, and logistical support of Bristol Bay salmon fishery management. BBFC is an agreement between the department and the Bristol Bay Science and Research Institute (BBSRI) to work together with stakeholders to support fisheries management. Additionally, the department would like to thank BBSRI and Bristol Bay Regional Seafood Development Association for their funding and efforts to operate the Port Moller Test Fishery.

Table 1.–Forecast of total run, escapement, and surplus of major age classes of sockeye salmon returning to Bristol Bay River systems in 2024.

DISTRICT	River	Millions of Sockeye Salmon								
		Forecasted Production by Age Class				Total	Forecasted		South Peninsula ^a	BB Inshore
		1.2	2.2	1.3	2.3		Escapement	Surplus		
NAKNEK-KVICHAK										
	Kvichak	4.39	0.92	1.12	0.25	6.68	4.00	2.50	0.19	6.50
	Alagnak	1.30	0.17	1.46	0.08	3.02	1.81	1.13	0.08	2.93
	Naknek	2.55	0.41	2.38	0.37	5.70	1.10	4.44	0.16	5.54
	Total	8.23	1.50	4.96	0.71	15.40	6.91	8.06	0.43	14.97
EGEGIK										
		1.81	2.46	0.61	0.82	5.70	1.10	4.44	0.16	5.54
UGASHIK										
		3.08	0.81	0.69	0.20	4.78	0.95	3.69	0.13	4.64
NUSHAGAK										
	Wood	4.81	0.24	2.52	0.27	7.84	2.41	5.21	0.22	7.62
	Igushik	0.39	0.01	0.66	0.02	1.08	0.21	0.83	0.03	1.05
	Nushagak	1.04	0.13	2.18	0.04	3.50 ^b	1.16	2.24	0.10	3.40
	Total	6.24	0.39	5.36	0.34	12.42	3.78	8.29	0.35	12.07
TOGIAC										
		0.25	0.00	0.44	0.01	0.70 ^c	0.16	0.52	0.02	0.68
BRISTOL BAY										
		19.61	5.17	12.06	2.07	39.00	12.89	25.01	1.10	37.90
		50%	13%	31%	5%	100%				

Note: This table is a summary. Slight differences may appear due to rounding.

^a Projected harvest is based on the current 5-year running average exploitation rate of 2.8%.

^b Nushagak River forecast total includes approximately 93,000 age-1.4 fish.

^c Forecasts for Kulukak, Kanik, Osviak, and Matogak river systems are not included. These systems contribute approximately 50,000 sockeye salmon to Togiak District harvest each year.