

ALASKA DEPARTMENT OF FISH AND GAME
DIVISION OF COMMERCIAL FISHERIES
NEWS RELEASE



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2019 Togiak Herring Season Summary

The following is a summary of the 2019 Togiak herring fishery in the Togiak District, Bristol Bay. Herring are harvested for sac roe using gillnets and purse seines, while herring spawn on wild kelp is harvested by hand. In July, a food and bait fishery occurs near Dutch Harbor primarily on the Togiak herring stock with the allocation based on the forecasted biomass of Togiak herring. The Dutch Harbor fishery is summarized separately. All data in this summary are preliminary.

STOCK ASSESSMENT

Biomass Estimation

Togiak District aerial surveys began April 7, 2019. Department staff observed fish in the district for the first time on April 16 with fish previously reported on the grounds April 13. Survey ratings were above average for most of the season and significantly better than the previous three seasons. Fish behavior, however, was atypical with herring staying offshore and deep as opposed to moving into the shallows of Togiak and Kulukak bays. In general, department staff were able to get good biomass estimates from aerial surveys with the peak estimate on April 26.

COMMERCIAL FISHERY

Togiak District herring fisheries are managed in accordance with the *Bristol Bay Herring Management Plan* (5 AAC 27.865), which specifies a maximum allowable exploitation rate of 20% and allocates the harvestable surplus among all the fisheries harvesting the Togiak herring stock. The 2019 preseason biomass forecast was 217,548 tons with an exploitation rate of 14% (30,457 tons) due to three consecutive years of poor aerial surveys and the associated uncertainty. The projected harvest guideline for each fishery was as follows: 1,500 tons of herring equivalent or 350,000 lbs. of product for the spawn-on-kelp fishery; 2,027 tons for the Dutch Harbor food and bait fishery; and the remaining 26,930 tons for the sac roe fishery. The management plan further specifies that the department will manage the sac roe fishery so that 80% of the harvest is taken by purse seine (21,544 tons in 2019) and 20% of the harvest is taken by gillnet (5,386 tons in 2019). This 80%/20% split reflects a change made by the Board of Fisheries in 2018; the

previous allocation was 70%/30% purse seine/gillnet harvest, respectively. Additionally, there is a provision to allow 50% of the unharvested spawn-on-kelp and gillnet quotas to be reallocated. This allowed for a potential purse seine quota of 24,800 tons in 2019.

The *Bristol Bay Herring Management Plan* and other regulations direct the department to conduct an orderly, manageable fishery and strive for the highest level of product value while minimizing waste. For at least the past decade, the seine fleet has been comprised of processor-organized cooperatives. During the 2019 season, management staff allowed long duration seine openings across a large area of the district and let processors limit harvest for their individual fleets based on processing capacity.

Department staff took a poll of processing companies prior to the 2019 season to assess processing capacity and to inquire about additional concerns or issues. The poll indicated that four companies intended to participate in the 2019 Togiak herring fishery. One company indicated they planned to buy both gillnet and purse seine fish and three companies planned to buy only purse seine fish. The processing capacity for 2019 was estimated to be 2,375 tons per day.

Purse Seine

The Togiak purse seine fishery opened until further notice at 5:00 p.m. on April 16 with a harvest of 1,310 tons. Weather conditions were better than in previous years and fishing was able to proceed at a fast pace. Roe recovery started at 11.4% on April 16, peaked at 12.2% (on April 22), and ended with an overall average of 11.8% at the end of the season. Fish size decreased over the course of the season starting at 421 grams on April 16 and dropping to 301 grams on April 26, the last day of fishing. The average fish size for the season was 348 grams, higher than the preseason forecast of 318 grams. April 22 was the only day this season when inclement weather significantly reduced purse seine fishing effort. Harvest on that day was 350 tons. Harvest was generally steady all season long, though it fluctuated with capacity. Harvest peaked on April 23 with 4,430 tons harvested. On April 24, the department announced the reallocation of both spawn-on-kelp and gillnet quota, bringing the purse seine quota up to 24,800 tons. Fishing continued at a strong pace and by the morning of April 26, management staff felt there was sufficient capacity and opportunity to harvest the quota by 1:00 p.m. that day. The department announced at 9:00 a.m. on April 26 that the fishery would close at 1:00 p.m. that afternoon and that all sets needed to be completely pumped by 5:00 p.m. the same day. Reported harvest on April 26 was 750 tons, bringing the cumulative harvest to 23,060 tons. With 1,660 tons of documented deadloss, this brought the total purse seine harvest to 24,720 tons. This represented 99.7% of the quota and there was no need to reopen the fishery. Purse seine participation was documented at 19 vessels, down from 20 in 2018. The 23,060-ton harvest is a record for the purse seine fishery, exceeding the previous record of 22,853 tons set in 1994.

Gillnet

The Togiak herring gillnet fishery opened until further notice at 8:00 a.m. April 18. The gillnet opening was later than the purse seine opening due to the lack of gillnet fishermen present on April 16. The first gillnet harvest was reported on April 23; all harvest information is confidential due to there only being one processor and three fisherman that participated in the fishery. The last gillnet harvest was reported on May 3. Although fish were present in the open gillnet area, they remained offshore and in deeper water than usual making them difficult for the gillnet fleet to find and fish effectively. Weather also hampered fishing from April 28 until May 2.

Spawn-on-Kelp

No companies registered to buy herring spawn-on-kelp in 2019; therefore, there were no openings and no commercial harvest.

EXVESSEL VALUE

The projected exvessel value of the 2019 Togiak herring fishery is approximately \$1.73 million. This is based on an advance price estimate of \$75 per ton and does not include any postseason adjustments.

AGE COMPOSITION

Over the course of the fishery the department sampled 4,150 herring from the commercial harvest in order to: 1) determine the age composition of the harvest, 2) estimate the age composition of the biomass, 3) determine the size at age of herring in this year's spawning biomass, and 4) provide data for next year's forecast. Preliminary data suggests that 74% of the herring in this year's harvest were age-7 or younger, 16% were age-8 or age-9, and 10% were age-10 or older. The mean weight of herring in the gillnet harvest was 406 grams, and in the purse seine harvest it was 326 grams.

EXPLOITATION

The 2019 Togiak herring fisheries were managed for a maximum exploitation rate of 14% of the preseason biomass estimate. The purse seine harvest was 23,060 tons, the average roe content was 11.8%, and the average reported weight was 348 grams. Gillnet harvest remains confidential. The Dutch Harbor food and bait fishery has not occurred at this time. Based on the preseason biomass estimate of 217,548 tons, the 2019 exploitation rate would be below 14%.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The department would like to thank the Bristol Bay Fisheries Collaborative (BBFC) for committing to fund Togiak herring fishery monitoring activities in 2019. While BBFC funding was not used, their commitment allowed the department to continue a monitoring program essential to the understanding of Togiak herring.

The department would like to thank the processors for allowing us to collect herring samples from their 2019 commercial harvest. The biological data collected in our herring sampling program allows the department to produce biomass estimates, which are the basis of sustainable management.