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Advisory Announcement

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2020 BRISTOL BAY SALMON SEASON SUMMARY

The following is an overview of the 2020 Bristol Bay commercial salmon season. All data are preliminary. The 2020 inshore Bristol Bay sockeye salmon run of 58.2 million fish (Table 1) is the fifth largest total run and was 46% above the 40.0 million average run for the latest 20-year time period (2000–2019). It was the sixth consecutive year that the Bristol Bay inshore sockeye salmon run exceeded 50.0 million fish.

The 2020 Bristol Bay sockeye salmon run was 25% above the preseason inshore forecast of 46.6 million fish (Table 2). Runs to the Egegik, Naknek-Kvichak, and Nushagak districts were larger than the preseason forecast. The commercial harvest of 39.5 million sockeye salmon (Table 1) was 14% above the 34.6 million preseason forecast and is the fifth largest harvest on record. All sockeye salmon escapement goals were met or exceeded, with a total bay-wide escapement of 18.7 million fish (Table 3). The preliminary harvest estimates for other species are 10,000 Chinook, 425,000 chum, 107,000 coho, and 73,000 pink salmon (Table 1).

EXVESSEL VALUE

Exvessel value of salmon caught in Bristol Bay in 2020 was estimated using the weight, harvest, and price paid for each species. The 2020 Bristol Bay preliminary exvessel value of \$140.7 million of all salmon species (Table 4) ranks ninth in the last 20 years and was 5% below the 20-year average of \$147.8 million. The 40.1 million harvest of all salmon species was the fourth largest since 2000 (Table 1). Prices are an average of postseason processor final operations reports and do not include future price adjustments for icing, bleeding, or production bonuses.

SPECIES PERFORMANCE

Sockeye Salmon

The 2020 harvest of 39.5 million fish (Table 5) was 46% higher than the recent 20-year average for all districts (Table 5). Sockeye salmon escapement goals were met on Kvichak, Alagnak, Togiak, and Igushik rivers. All other systems exceeded their respective escapement goal ranges (Table 3). All districts observed relatively late run timing this season. Unlike the most recent three years, the timing was such that large harvests were seen in the Nushagak, Naknek-Kvichak, and Egegik districts simultaneously. This resulted in several days of harvest over 2.5 million sockeye salmon and subsequently, some processors placed temporary restrictions on their fleet's harvest.

The 2020 Bristol Bay sockeye salmon run was dominated by the 1.2 and 1.3 age classes, or fish with one year of freshwater residence. Fish with two years of freshwater residence (2.2s and 2.3s) were below the

preseason forecast, particularly in the Egegik and Kvichak rivers. Average weight at age for sockeye salmon were nearly one pound less than their respective historical averages.

Chinook Salmon

Except in the Ugashik District, the 2020 Chinook salmon harvests in Bristol Bay were below average (Table 6). All Chinook salmon were caught during directed sockeye salmon periods in all commercial districts and a preliminary total of 10,000 fish were harvested, which is below the most recent 20-year average of 44,000 fish (Table 6). Chinook salmon passage into the Nushagak River as enumerated at the sonar site was 43,000 fish, below the escapement goal range of 55,000–120,000.

Chum Salmon

The 2020 preliminary Bristol Bay chum salmon harvest was 425,000 fish (Table 1), which was below the latest 20-year average of 1,106,000 fish. The Nushagak District was the largest producer of chum salmon, where 260,000 fish were harvested. The Nushagak River chum salmon escapement of 112,000 was below the minimum escapement goal of 200,000.

Pink Salmon

Though pink salmon return to Bristol Bay in greater numbers in even years, it is difficult to say what the overall magnitude of the pink salmon return was in 2020. There was little directed commercial effort for pink salmon and no escapement enumeration of pink salmon in Bristol Bay. The commercial harvest of 73,000 fish (Table 1) was far short of the 510,000 even-year average harvest but was not the lowest harvest in the last 20 years.

Coho Salmon

The preliminary coho salmon harvest in 2020 was 107,000 fish (Table 1), which was above the latest 20-year average of 96,000 fish. The Nushagak District is typically the largest producer of coho salmon, as was the case in 2020. Coho salmon harvest in the Nushagak District was 76,388 fish (Table 1).

ALLOCATION

Bristol Bay fisheries are managed to achieve allocation between drift and set gillnet gear groups in four of five districts. Togiak District is excluded from the allocation plan. Strategies used to achieve allocation between gear groups included varying the amount of fishing time and providing separate gear group openings. The Egegik, Naknek-Kvichak, and Nushagak District harvest percentages either met or were relatively close to their established allocation goals. The Ugashik District deviated from the allocation plan by 16%, with the set gillnet fleet harvesting more than their allocation (Table 7).

Acknowledgements

The department would like to thank the Bristol Bay Fisheries Collaborative (BBFC) for funding assistance in 2020. Created in 2016, this was the fourth season that BBFC provided financial support to assist management of the salmon fishery. BBFC is an agreement between ADF&G and the Bristol Bay Science and Research Institute (BBSRI) to work together and with stakeholders to restore a world class fisheries management system and raise funds for its support and maintenance. This agreement is supported by ADF&G, drift and set gillnet fishermen, processors, municipalities, villages, support industries, and other stakeholders. BBFC provided \$600,000 to support management projects in 2020. A list of organizations that have provided financial support to the BBFC, as well as additional information about this agreement can be found at <https://www.bbsri.org/bbfc>.

Port Moller Test Fishery – Separately from BBFC and for the third consecutive season, BBSRI and the Bristol Bay Regional Seafood Development Association (BBRSDA) funded the deployment of a second vessel in the Port Moller Test Fishery in 2020. The second test fishing vessel documented a substantial portion of the Bristol Bay sockeye salmon run moving by the test fishery well beyond the historically fished locations. The 2020 program provided a better index of the arrival timing, abundance, and stock composition of this year’s return than was possible with a single vessel. Mechanical problems that precluded the arrival of the core test fishing vessel this season made the second vessel essential to all the 2020 Port Moller results.

Table 1.–Preliminary 2020 Bristol Bay salmon harvest and escapement by district and species.

District	Sockeye	Chinook	Chum	Pink	Coho	TOTAL
Naknek-Kvichak catch	14,083,915	530	41,733	999	598	14,127,775
Escapement-Kvichak	4,030,968	ND	ND	ND	ND	4,030,968
Naknek	4,112,160	ND	ND	ND	ND	4,112,160
Alagnak	2,386,518	ND	ND	ND	ND	2,386,518
NK Subtotal	24,613,561	530	41,733	999	598	24,657,421
Egegik catch	13,361,640	476	47,300	732	20,373	13,430,521
Escapement-Egegik	2,389,728	ND	ND	ND	ND	2,389,728
Egegik subtotal	15,751,368	476	47,300	732	20,373	15,820,249
Ugashik catch	2,613,661	1,216	21,661	0	242	2,636,780
Escapement-Ugashik	1,745,940	ND	ND	ND	ND	1,745,940
Ugashik subtotal	4,359,601	1,216	21,661	0	242	4,382,720
Nushagak catch	8,940,438	6,826	260,154	28,691	76,388	9,312,497
Escapement- Wood	2,243,886	ND	ND	ND	ND	2,243,886
Igushik	323,814	ND	ND	ND	ND	323,814
Nushagak	1,228,059	43,032	112,731	ND	ND	1,383,822
Nushagak subtotal	12,736,197	49,858	372,885	28,691	76,388	13,264,019
Togiak catch	458,844	753	54,186	42,623	9,857	566,263
Escapement - Togiak	261,126	ND	ND	ND	ND	261,126
Togiak R. & trib.	ND	ND	ND	ND	ND	0
Kulukak	ND	ND	ND	ND	ND	0
Togiak subtotal	719,970	753	54,186	42,623	9,857	827,389
Bristol Bay catch	39,458,498	9,801	425,034	73,045	107,458	40,073,836
Bristol Bay escapement	18,722,199	43,032	112,731	0	0	18,877,962
Bristol Bay total run	58,180,697	52,833	537,765	73,045	107,458	58,951,798

^a Nushagak sonar enumerated Chinook, sockeye, and chum salmon in 2020.

Table 2.—Difference between Bristol Bay sockeye salmon actual inshore run and preseason forecast, 2020.

District	Inshore forecast	Inshore run	% Above/below forecast
Naknek-Kvichak	19,010,000	24,613,561	30% Above
Egegik	10,230,000	15,751,368	54% Above
Ugashik	4,450,000	4,359,601	2% Below
Nushagak	12,030,000	12,736,197	6% Above
Togiak	880,000	719,970	18% Below
Totals	46,600,000	58,180,697	25% Above

Table 3.—Bristol Bay sockeye salmon escapement goals and actual escapements, 2020.

River system	Escapement goal range	Escapement
Kvichak River	2,000,000–10,000,000	4,030,968
Naknek River	800,000–2,000,000	4,112,160
Alagnak River	320,000 minimum	2,386,518
Egegik River	800,000–2,000,000	2,389,728
Ugashik River	500,000–1,400,000	1,745,940
Nushagak River	370,000–900,000	1,228,059
Wood River	700,000–1,800,000	2,243,886
Igushik River	150,000–400,000	323,814
Togiak River	120,000–270,000	261,126
Total		18,722,199

Table 4.—Average price, weight, harvest, and value of salmon harvest in Bristol Bay, 2020.

Species	Price/lb.	Avg. weight (lb.)	Number of fish	Total weight	Value
Sockeye	\$0.70	5.1	39,458,498	199,275,503	\$139,492,852
Chinook	\$0.50	8.6	9,801	83,897	\$41,948
Chum	\$0.25	6.1	425,034	2,569,544	\$642,386
Pink	\$0.05	3.3	73,045	240,310	\$12,016
Coho	\$0.70	6.2	107,458	668,151	\$467,706
Totals			40,073,836	202,837,405	\$140,656,908

Table 5.–2020 Preliminary commercial sockeye salmon harvests and 20-year averages by district.

District	2000–2019 Average sockeye harvest	2020 Sockeye salmon harvest
Naknek-Kvichak	8,433,034	14,083,915
Egegik	7,190,984	13,361,640
Ugashik	2,871,760	2,613,661
Nushagak	7,915,926	8,940,438
Togiak	623,378	458,844
Totals	27,035,082	39,458,498

Table 6.–Chinook salmon preliminary harvest data and 20-year averages by district.

District	2000–2019 Average Chinook salmon harvest	2020 Chinook salmon harvest
Naknek-Kvichak	1,727	530
Egegik	802	476
Ugashik	974	1,216
Nushagak	34,883	6,826
Togiak	5,325	753
Totals	43,711	9,801

Table 7.–Allocation of Bristol Bay drift and set gillnet harvest, 2020.

District	Drift gillnet percent of harvest allocated /caught	District set gillnet percent of harvest allocated /caught	Section set gillnet percent of harvest allocated /caught
Naknek-Kvichak	84% / 80%	16% / 20%	Naknek: 8% / 12% Kvichak: 8% / 8%
Egegik	86% / 86%	14% / 14%	–
Ugashik	90% / 74%	10% / 26%	–
Nushagak ^a	74% / 71%	26% / 23%	Nushagak: 20% / 26% Igushik: 6% / 3%

^a Wood River Special Harvest Area harvest was entirely drift gillnet and is included in the 71% listed above.