

Division of Commercial Fisheries
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Advisory Announcement

For Immediate Release: May 30, 2024

Time: 10:00 a.m.

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Kuskokwim Bay Salmon Fishery Announcement #1

2024 Kuskokwim Bay Commercial Fishery Outlook

This is an announcement from the Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ADF&G) for commercial fishermen in Districts 4 and 5, Kuskokwim Bay.

ADF&G does not anticipate any commercial gillnet openings in Kuskokwim Bay Fishing Districts 4 and 5 in 2024.

Commercial fishing in Districts 4 and 5 is managed in accordance with the *Districts 4 and 5 Salmon Management Plan* (5AAC 07.367) and targets salmon bound for the Kanektok and Goodnews rivers. Due to lack of a commercial buyer, there have been no commercial fisheries in Districts 4 and 5 in six of the previous eight fishing seasons. In 2020 and 2021, a single salmon processor operated within Kuskokwim Bay. The commercial fishing season was delayed until late June in 2020 and early July in 2021 because of low Chinook salmon returns and to achieve escapement goals for the species. Apart from sockeye salmon, commercial harvests for all species in Districts 4 and 5 were well below average in 2020 and 2021. Chum salmon harvest and catch per unit effort was among the lowest recorded.

Kuskokwim Bay has no formal forecast for salmon returns. Broad expectations are developed based on parent-year escapements and recent year trends. The 2024 preseason outlook for Chinook and chum salmon in Kuskokwim Bay Fishing Districts 4 and 5 is for below average runs. The sockeye salmon outlook is for an average to above average run. Kanektok River Chinook salmon escapement is evaluated through a peak aerial survey that has a sustainable escapement goal (SEG) with a range of 3,900–12,000 fish. The 2023 aerial survey estimate was 6,688 fish, which met the SEG. Aerial survey data for Chinook salmon are available in nine of the last 11 years with the escapement goal being met every year except 2013 and 2014. While the SEG has been met recently, aerial survey counts have been near the lower bound of the goal range in several years since 2015. Goodnews River Chinook salmon escapement is also evaluated through a peak aerial survey with a SEG range of 640–3,300 fish. The 2023 aerial survey counted 4,336 fish, exceeding the SEG. Goodnews River aerial surveys were completed in seven of the previous 10 years. In surveys in all years except 2014, aerial counts met or exceeded the SEG. The department relies on subsistence reports from local residents and commercial catch statistics to approximate run strength for Kuskokwim Bay chum salmon stocks. Weir operations ceased in the Kanektok River in 2015 and in the Middle Fork Goodnews River in 2019. Chum salmon escapement has not been formally assessed in those rivers since the end of weir operations. Commercial catch statistics and local observations in the bay have indicated that chum salmon run strength between 2020 and 2022 was poor. These observations are corroborated by the unprecedented extremely poor chum salmon returns to the Yukon and Kuskokwim rivers in those years.

For additional information concerning this advisory announcement:

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