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Advisory Announcement
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2024 SOUTHEAST ALASKA HERRING SUMMARY

The department monitors herring stocks in Southeast Alaska that historically have been important to subsistence, personal use, and/or commercial fisheries. Basic stock assessment includes conducting aerial surveys to document herring spawn, but when warranted may include more extensive stock assessment including collecting herring samples for age, weight, and length (AWL) analysis, conducting spawn/egg deposition surveys to determine the spawning biomass, and developing biomass forecasts. The following is a summary of 2024 herring aerial surveys, spawn observations, spawn deposition surveys, and fisheries results. In 2024, large spawning events for the coastal stocks (Craig and Sitka) persisted and increases of documented spawn mileage for some inside stocks (Revilla Channel, Ernest Sound, and Tenakee Inlet) were observed.

Revilla Channel (Section 1-F) – Aerial surveys were conducted from March 18 through March 24, with herring spawn first observed by industry pilots on March 16 on Double Island. Spawning continued in Revilla Channel through March 23 with peak daily spawn occurring on March 19 with 5.8 nautical miles (nmi). Spawn was observed on Cat, Double, Dog, Duke, and Village Islands with the most intense spawn occurring on Dog and Double Islands. Total cumulative spawn in state waters was 9.1 nmi, above the recent 10-year (2014–2023) average of 6.8 nmi. Herring samples were obtained for AWL analysis and a spawn deposition survey was conducted. The last commercial fishery occurred in 1998.

West Behm (Sections 1-E/F) – Due to budgetary constraints, minimal aerial surveys were conducted in West Behm Canal in 2024. Communication with residents, air taxi pilots transiting the area, satellite imagery, and follow up skiff surveys documented 4.2 nmi of spawn in West Behm Canal. Spawn was documented as early as March 15 along the Cleveland Peninsula near Smugglers Cove with the most consistent spawn occurring from March 23–26 along the Cleveland Peninsula from Mike Point to Point Francis and Indian Point outside Naha Bay. The last commercial fishery occurred in 2011.

Craig (District 3) – Aerial surveys were conducted from March 17 through March 28 with another survey occurring on April 4. Herring spawn was first observed March 21 on southwest Fish Egg Island. The spawn event progressed rapidly with peak spawn occurring on March 24 with 12.1 nmi of spawn observed. While there have been several years that a spot spawn was documented earlier than March 21 in the Craig/Klawock area, this was the earliest observed date for the main spawn event for the Craig/Klawock herring stock. The main spawning event concluded on March 28 with a small spot spawn on the Alberto Islands observed. An additional 0.8 nmi of spawn occurred on April 4 for a cumulative spawn of 23.8 nmi, below the recent 10-year average of 26.3 nmi. Herring spawn occurred around the Albertos, Balandra, Ballena, Coronados, Fish Egg, and San Juan Bautista Islands, but the main spawn and herring biomass was concentrated south and west of the open pounding area. Herring samples were obtained for AWL analysis and a spawn deposition survey was completed. The biomass forecast and GHL for the 2024/25 season will be available in the fall.

The 2023/24 Craig herring guideline harvest level (GHL) was 6,716 tons of herring and was allocated between the winter food and bait fishery (60%) and the spawn-on-kelp fishery (40% plus any remaining winter food and bait GHL). The 2023/24 Craig winter food and bait fishery GHL was 4,030 tons, while the initial spawn-on-kelp GHL was 2,686 tons. The winter food and bait fishery opened by regulation on October 1 and closed February 28. The winter bait harvest is confidential and the unharvested portion of the winter bait GHL added to the spawn-on-kelp pound fishery resulted in a GHL greater than 6,000 tons. The spawn-on-kelp fishery opened by regulation on March 17 and herring were first introduced to pound structures on March 24. There were a total of 33-pound structures actively fished, with 60 permits landing 92.8

tons of spawn-on-kelp product. Given the herring distribution in the Craig/Klawock area many herring pound structures did not have herring introduced. Final exvessel value will be available in the fall.

Ernest Sound (District 7) – Aerial surveys were conducted from April 4 through April 20 and skiff surveys occurred on April 11 and April 16. Herring eggs were documented on approximately 4.0 nmi of shoreline in the vicinity of Vixen Inlet, between Union Point and Vixen Point. The total spawn mileage this year is just above the 10-year average of 3.5 nmi but below the long-term average (1969–2023) of 5.5 nmi. Two samples of spawning herring were obtained for AWL analysis, but a spawn deposition survey was not conducted. A commercial fishery last occurred in 2014.

Hobart Bay/Port Houghton (District 10) – Due to budgetary constraints, very few aerial surveys were conducted in Hobart Bay and Port Houghton in 2024. On April 20, approximately 0.5 nmi of active spawn was observed on the north shore of Port Houghton. No other herring activity was reported in 2024. A commercial fishery last occurred in 2010.

Seymour Canal (Section 11-D, District 10) – Aerial surveys were conducted from April 16 through May 2. On April 23, active spawn was observed on the south and east shorelines of Gambier and Romp Islands, and it extended north along the Big Bend shoreline over the next 2 days for a cumulative of 1.5 nmi of spawn. This total is well below the recent 10-year average observed spawn mileage of 3.4 nmi and occurred substantially earlier than the recent 10-year average date of first spawn of May 8. This season was the first time in nearly 50 years with no spawn observed along the Glass Peninsula shoreline and the second consecutive season with the main spawning event located along the shoreline from Gambier Island north into the Big Bend. A sample of spawning herring was obtained for AWL analysis, but a spawn deposition survey was not conducted. A commercial fishery last occurred in 2014.

Tenakee Inlet (Sections 12-A and 13-C) – Aerial surveys were conducted from April 16 through May 2. Active herring spawn was first observed on April 16 in the South Passage Point area and extended south down the Chichagof and Catherine Islands shoreline to Point Lull and west to the entrance of Crab Bay in Tenakee Inlet over the next 5 days for a cumulative of 10.6 nmi of spawn. This total is well above the recent 10-year average observed spawn mileage of 2.0 nmi and occurred substantially earlier than the recent 10-year average date of first spawn of May 1. This was the first season since 2019 with more than a spot spawn observed in the pounding area on the shoreline between Corner and Crab Bays inside Tenakee Inlet, and the fifth consecutive season with most of the spawn mileage observed outside Tenakee Inlet in Chatham and outer Peril Straits. A sample of spawning herring was obtained for AWL analysis and a spawn deposition survey was conducted. A commercial fishery last occurred in 2014.

Sitka Sound (Sections 13-A/B) – Aerial surveys were conducted from March 15 through April 16. Herring spawn was first observed in Sitka Sound on March 23. The primary herring spawning event for 2024 began on March 26 when 8.6 nmi of active herring spawn was observed on Kasiana, Apple, Crow, and Gagarin Islands, Halibut Point, and Fred's Creek. Spawning peaked on March 29 when 26.2 nmi of active herring spawn was documented. The last day of the primary spawn event was April 3; however, smaller areas of herring spawn were observed through April 11. Surveys from skiffs were conducted April 8 and 9 to identify additional areas of herring spawn not observed during the aerial surveys. In total, ADF&G mapped 85.1 nmi of shoreline with herring spawn in 2024 which is higher than both the 10-year (2014–2023) average of 68.9 nmi and the 40-year (1984–2023) average of 61.9 nmi. Herring samples were obtained for AWL analysis and a spawn deposition survey was completed.

Herring spawn was observed daily from March 23 to March 30 within the area closed to commercial fishing by regulation (commonly referred to as the "core subsistence area"). Of the total 85.1 nmi of mapped herring spawn in Sitka Sound, approximately 27.7 nmi of herring spawn was mapped within this area. Herring spawn also occurred in several other areas known to be commonly used for subsistence fishing, including Hayward Strait, Magoun Islands, Promisla Bay, Eastern Bay, and Siginaka Islands. Harvest estimates from the 2024 subsistence fishery should be available late this year.

The commercial herring sac roe fishery total harvest was approximately 12,700 tons of herring with an average mature roe percentage of 12.0%. This year's harvest accounted for 16% of the 2024 guideline harvest level of 81,246 tons. The fishery was open for 14 days between March 22 and April 5, with an average daily harvest of approximately 900 tons of herring. For more detailed information on the 2024 Sitka Sound herring stock and fishery, see the *Sitka Sound Sac Roe Herring Fishery Summary* announcement from April 25, 2024.

Hoonah Sound (Section 13-C) – One aerial survey was conducted on April 16 and no herring or herring spawn was observed. No herring spawn has been documented in Hoonah Sound since 2015 and the 2006–2015 average miles of spawn was 9.0 nmi. The commercial spawn-on-kelp fishery last took place in 2012.

Lynn Canal (Sections 11-A and 15-B/C) – Due to budgetary constraints, no aerial surveys were conducted in Central/South Lynn Canal in 2024. Commercial fisheries last occurred in 1982 and the commercial sac roe herring fishery was repealed by the Board of Fisheries in 2018.

Additional herring spawn events were documented in 2024 with the use of satellite imagery, air-taxi pilots transiting an area and relayed to ADF&G, or by the ADF&G in other areas throughout Southeast Alaska. Other herring spawn events observed around the region included: 0.8 nmi in East Behm Canal near Fitzgibbon Cove and Chickamin River; 1.4 nmi in Kasaan Bay; 0.6 nmi in northern Stephens Passage on April 17–18; and 1.8 nmi on the south end of the Chilkat Peninsula with an AWL sample obtained.

Advisory Announcement web site: *http://www.adfg.alaska.gov/index.cfm?adfg=cfnews.main*.

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