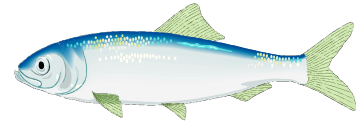


ALASKA DEPARTMENT OF FISH AND GAME
DIVISION OF COMMERCIAL FISHERIES
NEWS RELEASE



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REVISED

2016 Togiak Herring Season Summary

The following is a summary of the 2016 herring sac roe and spawn-on-kelp fisheries 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 17, 2016 after fish and spawn were reported in the district by a local pilot on April 14. Department staff observed some fish on April 17, but weather conditions were poor because of turbid water, surface chop, and intermittent clouds. Staff were able to document 37 miles of spawn however. This spawn was documented in several places throughout the district including at Summit Island and the northern tip of Hagemeister Island. Spawn is not usually seen in these areas until later in the fishery. A second survey on April 24 also was conducted with poor conditions. On this survey 73,000 tons of herring were documented. Herring were concentrated just outside of Kulukak Bay and in Togiak Bay. Relatively few fish were observed anywhere else because of the poor conditions. This was the peak biomass survey. The third and final survey of the season was flown on May 2; again conditions were poor. Herring were observed in Kulukak and Togiak Bays in large schools. There were strings of herring apparently exiting the district along Cape Constantine, but very few fish were seen anywhere else. A total of 57,000 tons of herring were documented during this survey.

AGE COMPOSITION

Due to budget cuts there was no sampling program in 2016. No age, length, weight, or sex data was collected in 2016.

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 2016 preseason biomass forecast was 162,244 tons. The projected harvest guideline for each fishery was as follows: 1,500 tons herring equivalent or 350,000 lbs. of product for the spawn-on-kelp fishery, 2,166 tons for the Dutch Harbor food and bait fishery, and the remaining 28,782 tons for the sac roe fishery. The management plan further specifies that the department will manage the sac roe fishery so that 70% of the harvest is taken by purse seine (20,148 tons in 2016) and 30% of the harvest is taken by gillnet (8,635 tons in 2016).

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 quality with a minimum of waste. In recent years, the seine fleet has been comprised of processor-organized cooperatives. For the 2016 season, management staff allowed long duration seine openings over a large area of the district and let processors limit harvest for their individual fleets based on processing capacity.

Department staff polled processing companies prior to the 2016 season to assess processing capacity and to inquire about additional concerns or issues. The poll indicated that four companies intended to participate in the 2016 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 2016 was estimated to be 2,530 tons per day.

Purse Seine

The Togiak purse seine fishery opened at 6:00 p.m. on April 17 until further notice. This is the earliest the purse seine fishery has ever opened in Togiak and 10 days earlier than in 2015. The unprecedentedly early arrival of herring resulted in a scramble by industry to get assets in position. The first harvest occurred on April 19. By April 20 all the companies were able to harvest fish and the harvest through April 20 was 2,350 tons. Weather, specifically wind, was a significant factor throughout the fishery. Several days, April 24, 25, and 27, saw a minimal harvest due to strong winds and other days harvest was certainly reduced because of turbid water conditions limiting the ability of spotter pilots to find fish. The peak harvest of 3,093 tons occurred on the 9th day of harvest. In addition to the record early start, the fishery was unusual because of the large amount of spawn that occurred prior to vessels being on the grounds and due to where fish were harvested. A significant portion of the harvest came from the Hagemeister Spit and Hagemeister Island area. The purse seine fleet also harvested a significant portion of fish from the Kulukak Bay area. It has been over 15 years since this area was open to the purse seine fleet. The department decided to shut the fishery down before the quota was harvested because of concerns of decreasing fish size. Based on processor production data, the department decided on April 29 that the proportion of age 6 and younger fish was exceeding 30% of the harvest and that fishing should stop. The fishery closed at noon on April 30. The final harvest of 15,171 tons is just slightly below the 2004–2013 average purse seine harvest of 15,505 tons. The

harvest was 75% of the 20,148 ton GHL. Purse seine participation was documented at 17 vessels, up from 16 in 2015.

Gillnet

The Togiak gillnet fishery opened at 6:00 p.m. April 17 until further notice. With only 3 permit holders indicating that they would participate in the 2016 gillnet fishery, it was expected that most of the gillnet quota would be unharvested. The early arrival of the herring exacerbated the situation with the gillnet fleet showing up later than the purse seine fleet. The fishery was hampered by wind and forced from the traditional fishing area because of rough weather. Despite adjusting boundaries several times to accommodate the gillnet fleet, they struggled to find productive areas to fish consistently. The gillnet harvest is confidential because there was only 1 processor buying fish and only 3 vessels participated in the fishery.

Spawn on Kelp

No companies registered to buy herring spawn-on-kelp in 2016, therefore there were no openings and no commercial harvest.

EXPLOITATION

The 2016 Togiak herring fisheries were managed for a maximum exploitation rate of 20% of the preseason biomass estimate. The purse seine harvest was 15,171 tons. The department is not reporting roe percent or average fish weight from the fishery because the harvest included spawned out herring harvested for uses other than sac roe. The Dutch Harbor food and bait fishery has not occurred at this time. If the Dutch Harbor fishery harvest is equal to the quota of 2,166 tons, then the total harvest for 2016 would be estimated at 17,337 tons. Based on the preseason biomass estimate of 162,244 tons, the 2016 exploitation rate would be approximately 10.7%. These projections do not include the gillnet harvest.

EXVESSEL VALUE

The projected exvessel value of the 2016 Togiak herring fishery is approximately \$1.52 million. This is based on a grounds price estimate of \$100 per ton for seine caught fish and does not include any postseason adjustments.