

Slow Start To Salmon Season Triggers Closures

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Casey Kelly/KMXT

Weak salmon runs are forcing state and federal fishery managers to close down some subsistence and commercial fishing activity around Kodiak Island.

As of Monday, only 134 Chinook and 220 sockeye salmon had passed through the Karluk River weir on the island's west side. Jeff Wadle (Wad-LEE), area management biologist with the Alaska Department of Fish and Game, says that's well below the desired escapement range for this time of year of between 1,635 and 3,316 Chinook. Based on the numbers Wadle (Wad-LEE) says department doesn't believe that its escapement goals for Chinook will be met this year, meaning no subsistence harvest of kings will be allowed above the weir. And unless sockeye escapement improves there won't be a commercial fishery in the area either.

(Fish Closures 1 :13s "of me since 1965, so.")

Closer to Kodiak city, the Buskin Lake sockeye run also appears to be weak. So far, just a little over 1,000 reds have passed through the Buskin River weir. The desired escapement for this time of year is between 4,203 and 6,830. Wadle (Wad-LEE) says it's not expected that the Buskin Lake lower escapement goal of 8,000 sockeye will be reached this season. That means all inside waters from Near Island, south to the northern edge of Middle Bay will be closed to both commercial and subsistence fishing through the beginning of August. Wadle (Wad-LEE) says that's pretty unusual.

(Fish Closures 2 :13s "to subsistence before.")

The department is also putting restrictions on sport fishing around the island. Retention of king and sockeye salmon on the Karluk, Ayakulik, and Buskin Rivers is not allowed. Subsistence restrictions will be the first to be lifted if the runs improve. That's because the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act assures a subsistence priority for rural residents. Wadle (Wad-LEE) says that would happen fairly quickly once the department is comfortable enough to allow subsistence fishing to re-open.

(Fish Closures

3 :06s "within
basically 18 hours.")

Wadle (Wad-LEE)

says there's a possibility that the fish could just be late to arrive, which happened last year, although not nearly to this extent. However, late runs seem to be trend so far this season.

(Fish Closures

4 :20s "it
could be weak also.")

All of the closures will take effect Thursday (tomorrow). Fish and game is working with the Federal Subsistence Board and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to monitor the salmon runs.

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