Tourism Industry Notices Weaker King Salmon Returns

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Casey Kelly/KMXT

The weak start to this year’s salmon season caused fishery mangers to put commercial, sport and subsistence fishing restrictions on another Kodiak river last week. This time it was the Ayakulik River, where only about 500 king salmon had passed the weir as of last Friday. KMXT’s Casey Kelly takes a look at how the late start to the season is affecting businesses around the island.

Alaska Department of Fish and Game Sport Fish Management Biologist Len Schwarz says so far the returns of king and sockeye salmon to rivers around the island have looked pretty bleak. But he says that’s a pattern the department has been seeing for the past three years.

(Schwarz 1 :29s “…real trend for late returns.”)

Right now sport fishing on the Karluk and Ayakulik Rivers is restricted to non-retention of king salmon, meaning anglers can’t remove fish from the water and must let any fish they catch go immediately. The use of bait is also prohibited to reduce hooking deaths. Some restrictions on sport fishing for sockeye are also in place. Schwarz says the department works with sport fishermen and businesses to notify them of changes to fishing regulations.

(Schwarz 2 :19s “…participate in is now closed.”)

Martha Sikes has run the Karluk Lodge in Karluk for 30 years, where sport fishermen flock to catch Chinook and red salmon. She says fish and game sent a letter in January warning her that the king run on the Karluk might be weak this year.

(Sikes 1 :11s “…wasn’t to hard for them to.”)

Sikes says she doesn’t usually start booking clients until after the new year, so she hasn’t had any customers call to cancel their reservations. But with the weak

king returns, she says that’s the way it’s been for the last couple of years. Most of her clients these days are coming for silvers later this summer.

(Sikes 2 :26s “…it’s happening everywhere.”)

Some businesses that help support the island’s sport fishing industry have also felt the effects of the late salmon runs. Stan Devine is the manager of Andrew Airways. He says anglers aren’t really chartering flights to the Karluk and Ayakulik to catch king salmon this time of year. However, the pilots are staying busy offering fishing trips for other species, as well as the always popular bear viewing adventures.

(Devine 1 :14s “…for about a three day float.”)

A little bit of good news might be on the way for anglers soon. Although the king salmon numbers are still low, the sockeye runs appear to be picking up. As of late last week about 50-thousand reds had passed through the Karluk weir and nearly 30-thousand had been counted on the Ayakulik.

I’m Casey Kelly.

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