

Flat Funding Threatens Fish and Game Operations

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Jacob Resneck/KMXT

Managers

at the Kodiak office of the Alaska Department of Fish and Game warn that current funding levels could cause cut backs in core operations for the commercial fisheries division. This comes as legislatures in Juneau puts together a budget for the agency.

Regional

Supervisor of Commercial Fisheries Steve Honnold says increased personnel costs coupled with stagnant funding levels has forced cost-cutting of key programs by reducing operations at fish counting stations on river weirs.

-- weir 1 :38 "Most of the things ... those kinds of decisions."

The

weirs are used to track escapement of salmon that allow area management biologists to manage Kodiak's salmon fisheries. Last year the period of operations for weirs had to be shortened and that could happen again this summer. With less hard escapement data from the weirs, Honnold says biologists are forced to be more conservative on how often they can open a fishery.

-- weir 2 :25 "Whenever we have some ... aggressive about management."

Meanwhile

in Juneau, the House Finance Committee is finalizing appropriations for the agency. House Majority Leader Alan Austerman of Kodiak says an amendment has been introduced that would fund fish counting weirs to the tune of about a quarter million dollars.

-- weir3 :20 "At the last public ... but the budget's not complete."

But

funding for the weirs is not a done deal. Legislators in the house have until the end of the week to bring the matter to a floor vote. Then it goes to the senate.

-- weir4 :23 "Because we got extra ... no later than Friday night."

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commercial fisheries division for the Kodiak region is about \$7 million in general funds with a total of about \$12 million including federal grant funding. But Honnold says commercial fisheries are largely reliant on general funds from the legislature and have less federal funding support.

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