

Sportsfishing Around Kodiak Better Than Most Places

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Brianna Gibbs/KMXT

Across the state anglers and biologists alike are scratching their heads and asking the same question, "where have all the king salmon gone?" For much of the state, sport fishing for the prized species, even catch and release, has been closed. Donn Tracy is the Kodiak area management biologist for the Department of Fish and Game Sportfish Division. He said Kodiak runs have been stable, but no exception to the decline.

"As far as king salmon, we've been a little more fortunate than the rest of Alaska in the fact that our two native king salmon runs in the Kodiak archipelago in the Karluk and Ayakulik rivers, the numbers of returning fish have been abundant enough in that we have achieved our minimum escapement numbers this year, unlike a lot of other streams in Alaska, particular in Cook Inlet."

Tracy is quick to note that while the runs have met escapement goals, the numbers are still relatively weak by historical standards. He said it isn't clear why the runs are so low, but attributes the fact that they are statewide shortages to mean there have been higher mortality rates during the ocean stage of the salmon's life.

A saving grace for Kodiak anglers, he said, has been the Kodiak road system enhancement project, which has helped improve salmon runs in rivers along the road system.

"We, as you may know, have been releasing king salmon smolt from the local hatchery, pillar creek hatchery, since about 2007 in the American and Olds rivers. And since about 2004 in Monashka Creek. And the 2012 returns have been below, actually quite a bit below what we expected, but there still have been enough adult fish coming back that we've had some good sportfishing opportunity, particularly at the American and Olds rivers."

As for sportfishing in general, Tracy said the season has started off slow, but anglers and charter captains are starting to report more rewards reaped from the sea.

"I understand from reports that I have gotten and looking at log sheets submitted by the local Kodiak charter operators that the halibut fishing started off sort of slow this year, king salmon, salt water king salmon was very slow in May and early June. But the information I have looked at more recently indicates that halibut fishing has picked up, king salmon fishing has gotten a little better, people are actually starting to catch a few silver salmon trolling out in Chiniak Bay, pinks are starting to show up. So the saltwater fishing has seemed to have gotten off to a small start this year but has seemed to improve recently and by all accounts pretty good at the moment."

Tracy said the freshwater runs for sockeye were especially good, and early numbers for pink salmon predict a great season ahead.