

Chinook Disaster Funds Released

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Jay Barrett/KMXT

NOAA Fisheries announced Monday that it is ready to start distributing \$7.8-million in disaster relief funds stemming from the 2012 king salmon collapse. A second round valued at about \$13-million will also be forthcoming.

NOAA Fisheries Deputy Regional Administrator for Alaska Doug Mecum in Juneau says that application forms for affected commercial fishermen in the Yukon-Kuskokwim Delta and Cook Inlet will be made available this week.

“We really wanted to get as much of the money out to people as we could, as soon as we could, and it appeared that we needed to break this aspect of it out. So we’re still working on that.”

Mecum said there are about 1,120 commercial fishermen between the Yukon and Kuskokwim rivers who are in line to receive about \$3.2-million in this first round of grants, while there are about 540 Cook Inlet fishermen getting \$4.6-million. He says that imbalance will be addressed in the second round of grants:

“In the Kuskokwim there’s not a real big fishery, commercial fishery for chinook salmon. There’s a very large subsistence fishery, of course. And the second grant will address some of those things. So when all the dust settles one might want to look at it at that point when the full allotment gets sent out, because there’ll actually be more money going to the Yukon-Kuskokwim in that second piece than there would be to the Cook Inlet area.”

He also said that the sportsfishing industry in Cook Inlet will also be receiving some of the disaster funds:

“In the Cook Inlet area there are going to be direct payments made to recreational fishing businesses — guides and lodge operators and things of that nature that were impacted by the disaster. And then the Yukon-Kuskokwim there’s some assistance for people to purchase alternative gear types. There’s also some assistance in terms of design management strategies to avoid these commercial fisheries failures in the future to the extent we can control that in the management of the fisheries.”

Mecum said the fishermen in the affected areas will now work with the Pacific States Marine Fisheries Commission to make arrangements to get the disaster relief payments. He says NOAA would like to see the money in the hands of the fishermen “before the snow flies,” and that the second, larger round of payments should be ready for awarding in the coming months.