

Karluk King Season to Open with Restrictions

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Jay Barrett/KMXT

There's another poor return forecast for king salmon on Kodiak's Karluk River, and that's prompting the Alaska Department of Fish and Game to open the sportfishing season with restrictions from the beginning.

Len Schwarz is the sportsfish area biologist for fish and game in Kodiak.

-- (Karluk 1 41 sec "The trend for the ... take them out of the water.")

Last year fish and game wound up closing the river to king fishing, and if this year's run turns out to be just as bad, Schwarz says he'll be forced to close it again.

King salmon runs, Schwarz says, have been declining everywhere, but the Karluk run is down to a tenth of what it once was.

-- (Karluk 2 55 sec "In
the 90s, we'd get ... starting to dip down, too.")

He says
fish and game only counts the salmon returning that go through the Karluk weir
and not the smolt heading out to sea, so it's impossible to tell whether the declining
stocks are being affected in fresh water or salt.

The king
salmon that return to the Karluk system are generally five and six year-olds,
and Schwarz says the poor runs are into their second generation now:

-- (Karluk 3 35 sec "You
know the brood ... back from those escapements.")

It's not
just king salmon that are causing fish and game fits. The red salmon run on the
Karluk fuels a big commercial and sport fishery, and until last year, Schwarz
said the runs were strong:

-- (Karluk 4 47 sec "They've
been going off ... for years and years and years.")

Schwarz says the sockeye sport fishery will start with a normal bag limit this year, though fish and game will monitor the return past the Karluk weir. The emergency order for Karluk drainage kings is in effect from June 1st through July 25th, unless the run improves. In addition to the catch and release restriction, only unbaited hooks are allowed below Karluk Lake. In the nearby Ayakulik (eye'ah-KOO-lick) River, the king sports fishery will be restricted to a bag limit of one fish a day.

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