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United States Department of the Interior

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

1011 E. Tudor Road
Anchorage, Alaska 99503-6199



Agenda Item B-6: U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Report
May 22, 2013

Federal Subsistence Management of Chinook Salmon:

Most returns of Alaskan Chinook salmon have been in low abundance in recent years and resulted in numerous fisheries restrictions and closures. This trend is expected to continue during 2013. Forecasted returns of some stocks are of sufficient concern to warrant pre-season restrictions and closures to subsistence fisheries throughout the State. In conjunction with Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ADFG) managers, Federal managers have taken the following actions:

Stikine River. The Federal Subsistence Board closed the May 15 to June 20, 2013, Chinook salmon subsistence fishery on the Stikine River. The 2013 pre-season return estimate for the Stikine is 22,400 Chinook salmon. The U.S./Canada Pacific Salmon Treaty stipulates that a directed Chinook salmon subsistence fishery is not authorized if the pre-season run estimate is less than 28,100 Chinook salmon.

Situk River. The subsistence fishery for Chinook salmon closed May 19 to July 18, 2013. While subsistence fishing for other salmon species is permitted during this time, the use of gillnets or bait when fishing with rod and reel is prohibited. Since 2010, escapements have ranged from 167 to 322 large Chinook salmon and consistently below the Biological Escapement Goal of 450 to 1,050 large Chinook salmon.

Kenai River. The subsistence fishery for early-run Chinook salmon was restricted May 16 to July 14, 2013, to a bag and possession limit of one Chinook salmon less than 46 inches or greater than 55 inches in length, an annual limit of two Chinook salmon, and use of only one single un-baited hook. The 2013 forecasted return is approximately 5,300 Chinook salmon, which is the lower bound of the Optimal Escapement Goal of 5,300 to 9,000 Chinook salmon.

Yukon River. The pre-season plan for management of the Federal subsistence fisheries for Chinook salmon is to enact restrictions parallel to the Alaska Board of Fisheries recently approved management plan. The early season restrictions include: full closure of one or more subsistence fishing periods targeting Chinook salmon during passage of the first pulse through districts 1, 2, and 3; restriction of mesh size to a maximum of 6 inch stretch; and begin the season with a weekly fishing period schedule instead of starting the season unrestricted. Additional management actions may be necessary later based on in-season run assessment. The 2013 forecasted return is 96,000 to 142,000 Chinook salmon, which is among the lowest since 1982.

Kuskokwim River. The preliminary estimated 2012 total run of Chinook salmon in the Kuskokwim River was the lowest on record, going back to 1976, despite severe restrictions on subsistence

fishermen during the entire Chinook salmon run. The preliminary 2012 subsistence Chinook salmon harvest estimate was the smallest harvest estimate on record, going back to 1990. The 2013 Kuskokwim River king salmon forecast is for 160,000–240,000 fish, up slightly from the 2012 forecast. Due to continuing conservation concerns, the 2013 fishing season will begin with subsistence Chinook salmon fishing with hook and line gear closed, and subsistence fishing restricted to the use of gillnets with 4-inch or less mesh size, not to exceed 60-feet in length and 45 meshes deep, in five lower tributaries, including confluence buffers with the Kuskokwim River, and two sloughs. Subsistence fishermen typically use 8-inch mesh size nets to harvest Chinook salmon. Subsistence salmon fishing will be open to unrestricted gillnet mesh size (large mesh gear) in the mainstem of the Kuskokwim River. However, in-season managers are prepared to impose further subsistence salmon fishing restrictions, similar to those imposed in 2012, as necessary, on the mainstem to ensure sustainable runs for future generations.

For further information, contact Kathy O'Reilly-Doyle, Acting Assistant Regional Director, Office of Subsistence Management at (907) 786-3519 or kathy_oreilly-doyle@fws.gov.

Endangered Species Act Issues:

Short-tailed Albatross:

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) and National Marine Fisheries Service staff discussed outreach and reporting procedures for observers deployed to vessels less than 60 feet in length. Topics of discussion included methods to disseminate information to vessel owners and operators about short-tailed albatrosses, and modifications to reporting procedures if any short-tailed albatross is incidentally taken. Historically, short-tailed albatross takings have only been reported from observed vessels.

Marine Mammals:

The Service is beginning a 5-year review of the status of the southwest Alaska Distinct Population Segment of the northern sea otter, which is currently listed as threatened under the Endangered Species Act. Comments are due by June 25, 2013. Information on how to comment is available at this site: <http://alaska.fws.gov/fisheries/mnm/seaotters/review.htm>.

The Service is soliciting comments on Stock Assessment Reports for the three stocks of northern sea otters. Comments are due by July 17, 2013. The reports and information on how to comment is available at this site: <http://alaska.fws.gov/fisheries/mnm/seaotters/reports.htm>.

The Service is soliciting comments on the Stock Assessment Report for Pacific Walrus, which is currently a candidate species for listing as threatened or endangered under the Endangered Species Act. Comments are due by July 17, 2013. The report and information on how to comment is available at this site: <http://alaska.fws.gov/fisheries/mnm/walrus/reports.htm>.

For further information on these issues, contact Sonja Jahrsdoerfer, Endangered Species Coordinator at (907) 786-3323 or Sonja_Jahrsdoerfer@fws.gov.