



United States Department of the Interior



U.S. FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE
Anchorage Fish and Wildlife Conservation Office
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In Reply Refer to:
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Report # B-9: U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Report to the North Pacific Fisheries Management Council, September 2020.

The following information is a summary of the major updates from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) that the Service is involved in related to the affairs of the North Pacific Fisheries Management Council (Council).

I. Migratory Bird Management

Update on Spectacled Eider

The following is a list of updates on the spectacled eider:

- Spectacled eiders are sea ducks that spend the majority of their life cycle in waters of the Bering, Chukchi, and Beaufort Seas
- The Service has initiated a 5-year status review of the spectacled eider under the Endangered Species Act.
- The Service is requesting information about species' biology, updates to laws, regulations, policies, or plans that may apply to the species, information on potential threats to the species, and any other information pertinent to an assessment of their status, by October 30, 2020, for inclusion in the review.

Update on Seabird Mortality Events and Monitoring

From May to September 2020, the Service received reports of dead and dying seabirds from the northern Bering and Chukchi Seas. The following is a summary of findings:

- The majority of species were puffins and murres, but also included shearwaters, kittiwakes, and auklets.
- There was also a mortality event in July in the Aleutian Islands, comprised of puffins and murres (primarily fish eaters).
- Birds examined from St. Lawrence Island in June were emaciated, however, these carcasses were also associated with a non-petroleum oil compound (vegetable, fish, or cooking oil), which was in the bird's esophagus and lungs, and on their feathers. The possible source of the oily waste is under investigation.
- The Service is coordinating with Federal, State, Tribal governments, and community members to report observations and collect carcasses for examination by the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) National Wildlife Health Center.

- All of the 12 birds examined to date were emaciated and tested negative for Avian Influenza. Tissues collected during examinations will be analyzed for harmful algal bloom toxins by the USGS Alaska Science Center. Results of those analyses will be shared when available; there may be delays due to restricted access to labs this year.

The following is a summary of historical mortality events:

- Seabird mortality events are not uncommon in Alaska, but were not typically reported from the Bering Strait Region.
- Since 2017, these events have occurred every year in the northern Bering and southern Chukchi Seas, although the 2020 numbers were lower (approximately 320 recorded) than during the previous 3 years.
- The Service has posted an information sheet on the 2020 mortality event, accessed at: <https://www.fws.gov/alaska/stories/2020-alaska-seabird-dieoff-update>.

The following is a summary of vessel collision activity:

- There was increased fishing activity in the western North Bering Sea, which could pose a risk to eiders and seabirds susceptible to vessel collisions.
- Birds are attracted to or disoriented by vessel lights during darkness, storms, or fog. A collision event occurred in fall 2019, killing endangered spectacled eiders (on which the Council was briefed).
- Vessel collisions can involve a few to dozens or hundreds of birds in a single event.

For further information, contact Dr. Kathy Kuletz, Seabird Coordinator at 907-786-3453 or via email at kathy_kuletz@fws.gov, within the Division of Migratory Bird Management.

II. Office of Subsistence Management

Regulatory Actions and Fisheries Special Action Requests

The following is an update on the Chignik River Sockeye salmon concerning Emergency Special Action 08-SS-01-20:

- The Federal in-season manager, Service, Anchorage Fisheries Field Office Manager Mr. Jon Gerken, pursuant to delegated authority from the Federal Subsistence Board (Board) under section 815 of Title VIII of the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act (ANILCA), issued Emergency Special Action 08-SS-01-20 to close Federal public waters of the Chignik River drainage to the harvest of Sockeye salmon except by federally qualified subsistence users, beginning 12:01 AM on June 18, 2020, through July 31, 2020.
- This action was necessary to ensure the conservation of healthy populations of Chignik River Sockeye salmon and the continuation of subsistence uses.

- Sockeye salmon could only be harvested by federally qualified subsistence users who are residents of Chignik Bay, Chignik Lagoon, Chignik Lake, Ivanof Bay, or Perryville and were in possession of a Federal Subsistence Harvest Permit during this time.

The following is an update on the Chignik River Chinook salmon concerning Emergency Special Action 08-KS-01-20:

- Effective July 18, 2020, the Federal in-season manager, Mr. Jon Gerken, implemented Emergency Special Action 8-KS-01-20 closing all Federal public waters in the Chignik River drainage to subsistence fishing for Chinook salmon upstream of Mensis Point at the head of the Chignik Lagoon.
- The closure prohibited all subsistence fishing for Chinook salmon, as well as possession through August 9, 2020.
- Chinook salmon accidentally caught while fishing for other species could not be removed from the water and had to be released immediately.
- This Emergency Special Action closed Chignik River Federal public waters to the harvest of Chinook salmon for all users concurrently with the closures of Chignik River State subsistence and sport fisheries for Chinook salmon.

The following is a summary of Copper River salmon Fisheries Special Action Request:

- Mr. Lucas Borer of Cordova submitted a Fisheries Special Action Request to take salmon by dip net and rod and reel in the Copper River Delta and mainstream Copper River from the Million Dollar Bridge to a boundary extending 0.5 mile downstream from road crossings of the mainstream Copper River, east of mile 27 on the Copper River Highway.
- This request was submitted due to the COVID-19 pandemic that prevented rural residents from resupplying basic needs as a result of restrictions by Federal, State and local governments to practice social distancing to avoid the spread of the highly contagious virus.
- The Board voted not to support this Emergency Special Action

The following is a summary of the Karluk River Chinook salmon concerning Emergency Special Action 09-KS-01-20:

- The Federal in-season manager, Service, Kodiak National Wildlife Refuge (NWR) Manager, Mr. Mike Brady, issued Emergency Special Action 09-KS-01-20 to close Federal public waters of the Karluk River and the submerged land and water of the Pacific Ocean (Sheliokof Strait) near the river mouth under Federal subsistence fisheries jurisdiction to the retention of Chinook salmon beginning Wednesday, June 24, 2020, at 12:01 AM until 11:59 PM
- Thursday July 23, 2020, in an effort to conserve Karluk River Chinook salmon, under the authority of the Board and in consultation with the Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ADFG), the ADFG closed sport fishing for Chinook salmon in the Karluk River drainage.

The following is a summary of the Kuskokwim River drainage Chinook salmon concerning Emergency Special Action 03-KS-01-20:

- On June 1, 2020, the Federal in-season manager, Service, Yukon Delta NWR Manager, Mr. Ray Born, issued Emergency Special Action 03-KS-01-20 to close certain waters of the Kuskokwim River drainage under Federal subsistence fisheries jurisdiction to the harvest of Chinook salmon by non-federally qualified subsistence users, including in the Eek River; Kwethluk River drainage starting at its confluence with Kuskokuak Slough. This included:
 - Kasigluk and Kisaralik River drainages, including Old Kuskokuak Slough to ADFG regulatory markers at the confluence of Old Kuskokuak Slough with Kuskokuak Slough
 - Tuluksak River drainage, including its confluence with the Kuskokwim River and downstream approximately 1 mile to ADFG regulatory markers
 - The Aniak River drainage to ADFG regulatory markers at its confluence with the Kuskokwim River.
- Harvest opportunities for Kuskokwim River Chinook salmon by federally qualified subsistence users were limited for the 2020 season to residents of the Kuskokwim River drainage and the villages of Chefornak, Kipnuk, Kwigillingok, and Kongiganak through Federal Subsistence Board action and an ANILCA section 804 subsistence user prioritization analysis. The following gear types were legal:
 - dip nets
 - beach seine
 - fish wheels (required to be checked at least every 6 hours, equipped with a chute, and be closely attended while in operation)
 - rod and reel.
- Gill nets were not allowed and all Chinook salmon caught were required to be returned alive to the water.
- On June 1, 2020, the waters of the Kuskokwim River mainstream within and adjacent to the exterior boundaries of Yukon Delta National Wildlife Refuge (Refuge) under Federal subsistence fisheries jurisdiction were closed to the harvest of Chinook salmon by non-federally qualified subsistence users.

The following is a summary of the Kuskokwim River drainage Chinook salmon concerning Emergency Special Action 03-KS-02-20:

- On June 3, 2020, the Federal in-season manager Mr. Ray Born issued Emergency Special Action 03-KS-02-20 announcing three 24-hour set gillnet opportunities with 6-inch or less mesh net size for federally qualified subsistence users identified in the section 804 subsistence user prioritization analysis (see 03-KS-01-20), which included residents of the Kuskokwim River drainage and the villages of Chefornak, Kipnuk, Kwigillingok, and Kongiganak, to harvest Chinook salmon from Federal public waters of the Kuskokwim River mainstream, except for the section referred to as the Aniak Box, on June 3-4, June 6-7, and June 9-10, 2020, from 11:00 AM to 11:00 AM

- The waters in the Kuskokwim River drainage identified in 03-KS-01-20 remained closed to the harvest of Chinook salmon by all users within the boundaries of the Refuge under Federal subsistence fisheries jurisdiction.

The following is a summary of the Kuskokwim River drainage Chinook salmon concerning Emergency Special Action 03-KS-03-20:

- On June 5, 2020, the Federal in-season manager Mr. Ray Born issued Emergency Special Action 03-KS-03-20 announcing three 12-hour gillnet opportunities with 6-inch or less mesh net size for federally qualified subsistence users identified in the section 804 subsistence user prioritization analysis (see 03-KS-01-20), which included residents of the Kuskokwim River drainage and the villages of Chefornak, Kipnuk, Kwigillingok, and Kongiganak, to harvest Chinook salmon from Federal public waters of the Kuskokwim River mainstream, except for the section referred to as the Aniak Box, on June 12, June 15, and June 18, 2020, from 6:00 AM to 6:00 PM.
- The waters in the Kuskokwim River drainage identified in 03-KS-01-20 remained closed to the harvest of Chinook salmon by all users within the boundaries of the Refuge under Federal subsistence fisheries jurisdiction.

The following is a summary of the Kuskokwim River drainage Chinook salmon concerning Emergency Special Action 03-KS-04-20:

- On June 18, 2020, beginning at 6:00 PM, the Federal in-season manager Mr. Ray Born issued Emergency Special Action 03-KS-04-20 extending the opportunity to harvest Chinook salmon by all legal means on Federal public waters of the Kuskokwim River mainstream from a line downstream of Kalskag at the south edge of Uknavig Slough (Latitude 61° 20' 20" N, Longitude 160° 34' 52") and then due east to the edge of the bluff line (Latitude 61° 20' 20" N, Longitude 160° 41' 13") to the Refuge boundary at Aniak beginning June 18, 2020 at 6:00 PM.
- Only federally qualified subsistence users identified in the section 804 subsistence user prioritization analysis (see 03-KS-01-20), which included residents of the Kuskokwim River drainage and the villages of Chefornak, Kipnuk, Kwigillingok, and Kongiganak, could participate in this Emergency Special Action.
- The waters in the Kuskokwim River drainage identified in 03-KS-01-20 remained closed to the harvest of Chinook salmon by all users within the boundaries of the Refuge under Federal subsistence fisheries jurisdiction.

The following is a summary of the Kuskokwim River drainage Chinook salmon concerning Emergency Special Action 03-KS-05-20:

- On June 23, 2020, the Federal in-season manager Mr. Ray Born issued Emergency Special Action 03-KS-05-20 announcing one 12-hour gillnet opportunity, from 6:00 AM to 6:00 PM, with 6 -inch or less mesh net size for federally qualified subsistence users identified in the section 804 subsistence user prioritization analysis (see 03-KS-01-20)
- This included residents of the Kuskokwim River drainage and the villages of Chefornak, Kipnuk, Kwigillingok, and Kongiganak, to harvest Chinook salmon from Federal public

waters of the Kuskokwim River mainstream, except for the section referred to as the Aniak Box.

- The waters in the Kuskokwim River drainage identified in 03-KS-01-20 remained closed to the harvest of Chinook salmon by all users within the boundaries of the Refuge under Federal subsistence fisheries jurisdiction.

Effective 11:59 PM on July 1, 2020, all Federal restrictions on the Federal public waters of the Kuskokwim River expired and the ADFG resumed management of fishing openings, closings, and fishing methods.

The following is a summary of the Kuskokwim River Chinook, Sockeye and Coho salmon Fisheries Special Action Request:

- On June 30, 2020, Ms. Charlene Erik, Chair of the Kuskokwim River Inter-Tribal Fish Commission (KRITFC), submitted a Fisheries Special Action Request to the Kuskokwim River Federal in-season manager Mr. Ray Born, per the authority provided to him under his 2020 letter of delegation from the Board, requesting to immediately close the Federal public lands and waters of the Kuskokwim area to subsistence fishing for Chinook, Chum, and Sockeye salmon fishing to all but federally qualified rural residents, as identified in the section 804 Subsistence User Prioritization Analysis.
- This Special Action Request served to protect the Chinook salmon run throughout its entirety, as well as the Chum and Sockeye salmon runs, which were also demonstrating conservation concerns at the time.
- Specifically, the KRITFC requested that Federal management of Chinook salmon extend beyond July 1, 2020, to include the entire Chinook salmon run, as well as expand Federal management to Chum and Sockeye salmon, for continued conservation of Kuskokwim River Chinook salmon.
- The Federal in-season manager did not implement an Emergency Special Action for this Special Action Request.

The following is a summary of the Kenai River Chinook salmon concerning Emergency Special Action 10-KS-01-20:

- On June 12, 2020, the Federal in-season manager Service, Kenai Fisheries Field Office Manager, Mr. Jeff Anderson, issued Emergency Special Action 10-KS-01-20 closing the Federal subsistence rod and reel fishery for early-run Chinook salmon in all Federal public waters in the Kenai River downstream from the outlet of Skilak Lake beginning 12:01 AM, Monday, June 15, through 11:59 PM, Wednesday, July 15, 2020.
- This closure prohibited all rod and reel subsistence fishing for Chinook salmon.
- Chinook salmon incidentally caught while fishing for other species could not be removed from the water and had to be released immediately.
- Restrictions were necessary to conserve early-run Kenai River Chinook salmon.

The following is a summary of the Southeast Alaska Eulachon concerning Emergency Special Action 13-EU-01-20:

- On February 25, 2020, the Federal in-season manager (U.S. Forest Service [USFS], Ketchikan District Ranger, Ms. Susan Howle) issued Emergency Special Action 13-EU-01-20 closing the Federal public waters draining into District 1 to the harvest of Eulachon.
- All Eulachon incidentally caught had to be immediately released into the water unharmed.
- The ADFG also implemented a similar closure in District 1 for the State subsistence, personal use and commercial fisheries to provide for conservation of Eulachon.

The following is a summary of the Stikine River Chinook salmon concerning Emergency Special Action 13-KS-02-20:

- On April 2, 2020, the Federal in-season manager, USFS, Wrangell District Ranger Mr. Clint Kolarich, issued Emergency Special Action closing the May 15 through June 20, 2020, for Federal subsistence Chinook salmon fishery in the Stikine River.
- The ADFG also took actions in the State managed fisheries to reduce the harvest of Stikine River Chinook salmon.
- The May 15 through June 20 closure of the Federal subsistence Chinook salmon fishery did not affect other Stikine River Federal subsistence fisheries beginning June 21, 2020.
- This action was necessary for Chinook salmon conservation in the Stikine River and to meet obligations of the Pacific Salmon Treaty.

The following is a summary of the Situk River Chinook salmon concerning Emergency Special Action 12-KS-01-20:

- On May 22, 2020, the Federal in-season manager, USFS, Yakutat District Ranger Mr. Lee Benson, issued Emergency Special Action 12-KS-01-20 closing the Federal subsistence Chinook salmon fishery in the Situk River from Monday, June 1, 2020 at 12:01 AM, through Thursday, July 30, 2020, at 11:29 PM due to forecasted low returns.
- During this closure, the use of bait and gillnets were not allowed in the Situk River when fishing for other species to minimize the incidental mortality of Chinook salmon.
- Incidentally caught Chinook salmon could not be removed from the water and had to be released immediately.
- The ADFG also took actions in the State managed fisheries to reduce the harvest of Situk River Chinook salmon.

The following is a summary of the Situk River Chinook salmon concerning Emergency Special Action 12-KS-02-20:

- The Federal in-season manager, Mr. Lee Benson, reopened the Federal subsistence Chinook salmon fishery in the Situk River effective Wednesday, July 22, 2020, at 12:01 AM.
- The use of gillnets was not allowed in the Situk River through Thursday July 30, 2020, to minimize the incidental mortality of Chinook salmon.
- The ADFG also took actions in the State managed fisheries to open the Situk-Ahrnklin Inlet to the subsistence take of Chinook salmon.

- This action superseded 12-KS-01-20, which closed the Situk River to Chinook salmon harvest and the use of bait and gillnets.

The Board addressed the following Fisheries Special Action Requests:

- FSA 20-01 - Akiak-passes
- FSA 20-02 - Kwethluk-amended- and combines with Akiak-Passes
- FSA 20-03 - LaMont Albertson-Close to all but federally Qualifies Users-passes
- FSA 20-04 - (Lower Copper River)-fails
- FSA 20-05 - (LaMont Albertson) Close Chum and Sockeye to All Fed Qualified Users-deferred to in season manager

Outcome FSA 01, 02, and 03:

- The Board met by teleconference on May 1, 2020, and approved Temporary Special Action Requests FSA 20-01, FSA 20-02, and FSA 20-03.

For further information, contact Mr. Greg Risdahl, Fisheries Division Leader, at 907-786-3824 or via email at greg_risdahl@fws.gov, within the Office of Subsistence Management.

III. COVID-19

Impact of COVID-19 on Field Activities

The Service field season was significantly impacted in 2020 due to efforts to mitigate employee and community exposure to Covid-19. A list of mitigations are below:

- The Service initiated travel restrictions beyond those required by State and Tribal entities.
- The Alaska Maritime National Wildlife Refuge cancelled all seabird colony monitoring, and the Prince William Sound marine bird surveys were rescheduled for 2021.
- Only one offshore seabird survey was conducted in the Bearing and Chukchi Seas.
- The Service did participate in surveys in the Gulf of Alaska as part of the Northern Gulf of Alaska Long-term Ecological Research project, in cooperation with the University of Alaska Fairbanks.

For further information, contact Dr. Kathy Kuletz, Seabird Coordinator at 907-786-3453 or via email at kathy_kuletz@fws.gov, within the Division of Migratory Bird Management

The following projects funded by the Federal Subsistence Management Program were not operated this season due to Covid-19 related issues:

- Norton Sound Area
 - The Unalakleet River ADFG weir
- Yukon River
 - The Andreafsky River (Service) weir, Gisasa River (Service) weir, Henshaw Creek (Tanana Chiefs Conference) weir, and the Yukon River Coho Telemetry project (ADFG)

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- Kuskokwim River
 - The Kwethluk River (Service) weir and Native Village of Kwethluk.

For further information, contact Mr. Greg Risdahl, Fisheries Division Leader, at 907-786-3824 or via email at greg_risdahl@fws.gov, within the Office of Subsistence Management.