Stock Assessment and Fishery Evaluation Report for the Salmon Fisheries of the Cook Inlet Exclusive Economic Zone Area

Addendum to 2027 Preliminary Salmon SAFE

(pre-SSC review)

Compiled by

The NMFS Cook Inlet Salmon SAFE Team

Contributions by

L. DeFilippo, R. Brenner, J. Russell, B. Ferriss, A. Zaleski, and M. Yeager

November 2026

Addendum for the 2027 Preliminary Cook Inlet Salmon SAFE report

This addendum provides an explanation for the substantial decrease, relative to the 2026 assessment, in the Kenai River late-run sockeye salmon preseason overfishing limit (OFLpre) and acceptable biological catch (ABC) contained in the 2027 Preliminary Cook Inlet salmon exclusive economic zone (CI EEZ) stock assessment and fishery evaluation report (2027 SAFE report).

As explained in prior CI EEZ salmon SAFE reports and the Salmon FMP, for Tier-1 stocks the OFLpre represents available yield that could be harvested in the CI EEZ after the achievement of spawning escapement target and harvests in State fisheries (OFLpre = total run size - spawning escapement target - estimated State harvests). Proposed harvest specifications must account for the interannual variability in salmon runs; OFLpre and ABC values are highly affected by observed run sizes from the prior seasons. The ABC is the OFLpre reduced by a model-derived buffer that accounts for uncertainty in estimated State harvests and the estimated total run size.

For the Tier 1 Kenai late-run sockeye salmon stock, the proposed OFLpre, the buffer to account for scientific uncertainty, and the proposed ABC in NMFS's 2027 SAFE report was calculated using the methods and model recommended by the Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC) during the 2026 assessment cycle, incorporating data from the 2026 fishing season in which there was a substantial decrease in the run size for this stock (2025 total run size was ~8 million sockeye salmon; 2026 total run size is estimated to be ~2 million sockeye salmon). In light of smaller run sizes observed in the fishery in 2026, NMFS relied on the most recent methodology recommended by the SSC, incorporating the best scientific information available, to estimate the 2027 preseason run size and the resulting OFLpre and ABC. For the 2026 assessment, the NMFS preseason run size estimate for this stock was ~4.7 million sockeye salmon. In contrast, the NMFS 2027 preseason run size forecast for this stock is <3 million sockeye salmon.

In 2026, the SSC recommended reducing the buffer from its recommended methodology (from 41.2% to 20.6%) and recognized this reduction was less precautionary than the SAFE Team's initial recommendation. The buffer in NMFS's 2027 SAFE report is consistent with the methodology approved by the SSC without making any additional adjustments (no reduction from the model output). When the SSC reviews the draft final 2027 SAFE report in February, it could determine whether adjusting the buffers is warranted for setting the final ABC.

In summary, the 2027 SAFE report, which follows the SSC-recommended approach, contains OFLpre and ABC values for the Kenai late run sockeye salmon stock that are smaller than the 2026 assessment due to a smaller preseason run size estimate and a larger model-derived buffer. Ahead of the February 2027 Council meeting, NMFS will prepare the draft final 2027 SAFE report that incorporates updated data for SSC and Council review. Updated data would include any updated fish ticket data, data in the ADF&G Upper Cook Inlet Salmon Season Summary, and data that ADF&G sent to NMFS as part of the NMFS annual request.