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

2027 Preliminary Salmon SAFE

(pre-SSC review)

Compiled by

The NMFS Cook Inlet Salmon SAFE Team

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Overview

This is a preliminary draft of the fourth Stock Assessment and Fishery Evaluation (SAFE) report for the Federal salmon fishery in Cook Inlet Area exclusive economic zone (CI EEZ). This preliminary CI EEZ SAFE report provides the necessary information for the North Pacific Fishery Management Council (Council) to recommend proposed harvest specifications for the 2027 fishing season at its December 2026 meeting. Following that meeting, the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) will update data and submit a revised SAFE report for review by the Science and Statistical Committee (SSC) at the Council's February 2027 meeting. At that meeting, the SSC will provide final recommendations for overfishing limits (OFLs) and acceptable biological catches (ABCs) and the Council will recommend final harvest specifications.

Under the terms of the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act (MSA), the National Standard 1 Guidelines (50 CFR 600.310), and the Fishery Management Plan for the Salmon Fisheries in the EEZ off Alaska (Salmon FMP), this preliminary SAFE report uses the tier system and harvest specifications process described in the Salmon FMP to calculate status determination criteria (SDC) and recommend ABC. This preliminary SAFE report relies on the assessment methodology recommended by the SSC in the 2026 Final SAFE report, incorporating updated data to the extent available to ensure the proposed harvest specifications are based on the best scientific information available. Because pink salmon are assessed on odd-year and even-year cycles, the most recent SSC recommendation regarding the appropriate assessment methodology and buffers for odd-year pink salmon come from the 2025 Final SAFE report.

For the 2026 CI EEZ salmon fishery, proposed harvest specifications were published on April 15, 2026 (91 FR 20085); NMFS received 15 public comment letters on the proposed harvest specifications before the end of the comment period on April 30, 2026. Public comments pertaining to the 2026 CI SAFE were responded to in the final 2026 harvest specifications published on June 18, 2026 (91 FR 36761). The 2026 salmon fishing season in the CI EEZ began on June 19, 2026, with the first fishing period on June 22, 2026. NMFS closed the fishery on August 5, 2026 in response to the coho TAC being reached; published in the Federal Register (91 FR 50728) and by NOAA Information Bulletin (IB 26-28).

Table 1 of this SAFE report contains a summary of NMFS SAFE Team recommendations for the 2027 CI EEZ salmon fishery.

Table 2 of this SAFE report contains preliminary stock status in relation to postseason status determination criteria following the 2026 CI EEZ salmon fishery.

Table 3 of this SAFE report contains harvest specification in relation to preliminary catch for the 2026 CI EEZ salmon fishery.

Relevant Reference Documents

This SAFE report relies on the following documents and supporting material:

1. 2026 Final Salmon SAFE - DeFilippo et al. (2026). Stock Assessment and Fishery Evaluation Report for the Salmon Fisheries of the Cook Inlet Exclusive Economic Zone Area[1]
2. 2025 Final Salmon SAFE - Brenner et al. (2025). Stock Assessment and Fishery Evaluation Report for the Salmon Fisheries of the Cook Inlet Exclusive Economic Zone Area [2]
3. 2025 and 2026 CI EEZ Final Harvest Specifications[3]
4. 2026 SSC Final Report to the NPFMC, February 2026[4]
5. 2026 Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ADF&G) Preliminary Inseason Harvest Estimates[5]

Summary of Changes for the 2027 SAFE

Table 1 of this preliminary SAFE report contains 2027 recommendations for SDC and ABC. These recommendations are based on the methodology recommended by the SSC during the 2026 assessment cycle and reflected in the 2026 Final SAFE report. For the Tier 1 stocks, the NMFS estimated preliminary 2026 total run sizes using available data and relied on the same model recommended by the SSC during the 2026 assessment cycle and published in the 2026 Final CI EEZ SAFE report to calculate the preseason values of OFL and ABC. For the SSC-recommended Tier 1 model, the buffer is derived via retrospective evaluation of the model's preseason forecast performance and accounts for uncertainty associated with the predicted total run size, harvests in State fisheries, and the achievement of the SSC-recommended spawning escapement target. For the total run size estimates, stock proportions harvested in the drift gillnet fishery were estimated using 5-year averages from ADF&G genetic stock composition reports and similar methods were also used to estimate other harvest components in this and previous SAFE reports. Fish passage information was obtained from the ADF&G website. For the Tier 3 pink salmon stock complex, given the separation of odd- and even-year broodlines, Table 1 contains SSC recommendations from the 2025 assessment cycle, the most recent year in which the SSC made recommendations for the odd-year pink salmon stock complex broodline. The recommendations for all other Tier 3 stocks are identical to those recommended by the SSC during 2026.

[1] https://files.npfmc.org/SAFE/2026/CookInletSalmon.pdf

[2] https://files.npfmc.org/SAFE/2025/CookInletSalmon.pdf

[3] https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/alaska/commercial-fishing/cook-inlet-salmon-harvest-specifications

[4] https://meetings.npfmc.org/CommentReview/DownloadFile?p=ce21717d-542a-48fc-8916-561c0d9eb152.pdf&fileName=SSC%20Report%20Feb%202026_FINAL.pdf

[5] https://www.adfg.alaska.gov/index.cfm?adfg=commercialbyareauci.salmon_harvest

Preliminary Recommendations for the 2027 Cook Inlet Salmon Fishery

Table 1. Preliminary recommendations for the 2027 CI EEZ salmon fishery based on the most recent SSC recommendations for these stocks. Values for Tier 1 stocks are based on the point estimate of S_{MSY} ($S_{MSY\text{-}POINT}$) as the escapement target for SDC, recommended buffers, and the resulting ABC/ACL and resulting harvest specifications and resulting harvest specifications. Buffers for the Tier 1 stocks are calculated based on the methods described in the 2026 SAFE report and account for uncertainty in the preseason forecast and estimated harvests in fisheries outside the CI EEZ. Note that the buffers are rounded here for presentation purposes, but not in the assessment, which influences the calculation of ABC. MFMT = maximum fishing mortality threshold, MSST = minimum stock size threshold, OFL =Tier 3 overfishing limit

Stock	Tier	MFMT	MSST	OFL	OFL_{PRE}	Buffer	ABC/ACL
Kenai River Late-Run Sockeye (KNSOCK)**	1	0.236	3,030,000	–	295,774	37.7%	184,408
Kasilof Sockeye (KASOCK)**	1	0.546	555,000	–	525,766	43.5.%	297,017
Aggregate "Other" Sockeye (AOSOCK)	3	NA	NA*	906,757	181,351	15%	154,149
Aggregate Chinook (ACHIN)	3	NA	45,500	2,237	373	30%	261
Aggregate Coho (COHO)	3	NA	NA*	268,053	67,013	60%	26,805
Aggregate Chum (CHUM)	3	NA	NA	390,030	97,508	20%	78,006
Aggregate Pink (PINK-ODD)	3	NA	NA	116,348	58,174	10%	52,357

*While MSST may be used to assess overfished status for these stocks, determining MSST for 2027 will depend on the availability/number of indicator stocks with escapement data and thus cannot be reliably determined as a preseason quantity
** MFMT, OFL_{PRE}, and ABC were calculated using preliminary harvest estimates. Final values will be presented in future CI SAFE reports pending finalized data from ADF&G.

Stock Summaries and 2027 Buffers to Account for Scientific Uncertainty in Reducing the Preseason Overfishing Limits (OFL_{PRE}) to the Acceptable Biological Catch (ABC)

The following 2027 stock summaries contain the preseason OFLs, buffers, and resulting ABCs based on SSC-recommendations from the 2026 assessment cycle (based on the 2025 assessment cycle for odd-year pink salmon). Full assessments of Federal salmon stocks harvested in the CI EEZ will be provided in the 2027 Final SAFE report.

Tier 1 Kenai River late run sockeye salmon: Based on the SSC-recommended Tier 1 method and model from 2026, for 2027 KNSOCK has an OFL-pre of 295,774 sockeye salmon, a model-derived buffer of approximately 37.7%, and a resulting ABC of 184,408 sockeye salmon. The buffer accounts for uncertainty associated with the predicted total run size, harvests in State fisheries, and the achievement of the SSC-recommended spawning escapement target. Overfishing is not occurring on this stock and the stock is not in an overfished condition (Table 2). Kenai late run sockeye salmon harvested in the CI EEZ during 2026 made up approximately 75% of the overall (State + Federal) drift gillnet harvest of this stock in Upper Cook Inlet (411,931 of 551,455).

Tier 1 Kasilof River sockeye salmon: Based on the SSC-recommended Tier 1 method and model from 2026, for 2027 KASOCK has an OFL-pre of 525,766 sockeye salmon, a model-derived buffer of 43.5%, and a resulting ABC of 297,017 sockeye salmon. The buffer accounts for uncertainty associated with the predicted total run size, harvests in State fisheries, and the achievement of the SSC-recommended spawning escapement target. Overfishing is not occurring on this stock and the stock is not in an overfished condition (Table 2). Kasilof sockeye salmon harvested in the CI EEZ during 2026 made up approximately 75% of the overall (State + Federal) drift gillnet harvest of this stock in Upper Cook Inlet (48,959 of 65,543).

Tier 3 Aggregate Other sockeye salmon: Based on the SSC recommendation from 2026, for 2027 AOSOCK has an OFL-pre of 181,351 sockeye salmon, a buffer of 15%, and a resulting ABC of 154,149 sockeye salmon. The NMFS SAFE Team recommends that the Aggregate sockeye salmon stock complex is healthy given the degree to which this stock has achieved the spawning escapement goals. While sockeye salmon are considered vulnerable to harvest with gillnets in the CI EEZ based on their size, State data suggests there are many sockeye salmon spawning locations throughout Upper Cook Inlet, with an estimated total run size for the AOSOCK stock complex as large or larger than KASOCK. The AOSOCK stock complex could be considered for a Tier 2 designation in the future if additional escapement data were available to estimate total run size, which would be necessary to calculate a harvest rate from the CI EEZ portion of the fishery. Overfishing is not occurring on this stock and the stock is not in an overfished condition (Table 2). AOSOCK harvested in the CI EEZ during 2026 made up approximately 75% of the overall (State + Federal) drift gillnet harvest of this stock in Upper Cook Inlet (147,618 of 197,618).

Tier 3 Aggregate Chinook salmon: Based on the SSC recommendation from 2026, for 2027 ACHIN has an OFL-pre of 373 Chinook salmon, a buffer of 30%, and a resulting ABC of 261 Chinook salmon. The recommended buffer reflects a heightened level of concern given that there are several Chinook salmon stocks listed as "Stocks of Concern" by the State of Alaska, including the Kenai Late Run large Chinook salmon indicator stocks for the ACHIN stock complex. In addition, Chinook salmon are currently at a low state of abundance throughout the eastern North Pacific. However, there were only 60 Chinook salmon harvested during the CI EEZ salmon fishery during 2026. Chinook salmon are considered vulnerable to harvest in gillnets based on their size, but historical harvest estimates suggest they may be infrequently encountered in the CI EEZ relative to all other salmon species. The NMFS SAFE Team is not aware of any available genetic data to support stock of origin for Chinook salmon harvested in the CI EEZ and historically such harvests have not been included in the State's stock assessments for Chinook salmon stocks in Northern Cook Inlet (e.g., Susitna River stocks). There are few available length data for CI EEZ harvests with which the harvested Chinook salmon harvests could be attributed to the Kenai Late Run Large Chinook salmon stock, but, available weight data from the Federal fishery since 2024 suggests that few if any of the Chinook salmon harvested in the CI EEZ were of sufficient size (greater than 75 cm mid-eye to tail fork length, MEFT) to attribute them to the Kenai Late Run

Large indicator stock. Overfishing is not occurring on this stock and the stock is not in an overfished condition (Table 2). Chinook salmon harvested in the CI EEZ during 2026 made up approximately 52% of the overall (State + Federal) drift gillnet harvest (60 of 116).

Tier 3 Aggregate coho salmon: Based on the SSC recommendation from 2026, for 2027 COHO has an OFL-pre of 67,013 coho salmon, a buffer of 60%, and a resulting ABC of 26,805 coho salmon. This recommendation reflects the highest level of concern for any salmon stock harvested in the CI EEZ. Commercial coho salmon are vulnerable to drift gillnet harvest based on their size. Coho salmon harvests throughout Upper Cook Inlet were at historically low levels during 2024-2026. In 2026, as has occurred during several recent years, initial information suggests that flooding of weirs prevented the assessment of the Federal spawning escapement target for the Deshka and Little Susitna rivers. Overfishing is not occurring on this stock (Table 2). Coho salmon harvested in the CI EEZ during 2026 made up approximately 65% of the overall (State + Federal) drift gillnet harvest (38,591 of 59,229).

Tier 3 Aggregate chum salmon: Based on the SSC recommendation from 2026, for 2027 CHUM has an OFL-pre of 97,508 chum salmon, a buffer of 20%, and a resulting ABC of 78,006 chum salmon. This recommendation reflects chum salmon being vulnerable to harvest in gillnets based on their size combined with State data suggesting there are few chum salmon spawning locations throughout Upper Cook Inlet relative to spawning locations for all other salmon species. Currently, no chum salmon stocks are listed as "Stocks of Concern" by the State of Alaska. Overfishing is not occurring on this stock and the stock is not in an overfished condition (Table 2). Chum salmon harvested in the CI EEZ during 2026 made up 65% of the overall (State + Federal) drift gillnet harvest (54,970 of 84,432).

Tier 3 Aggregate pink salmon (odd-year): Based on the SSC recommendation from 2025, for 2027 odd-year PINK has an OFL-pre of 58,174 pink salmon, a buffer of 10%, and a resulting ABC of 52,357 pink salmon.This recommendation reflects the lowest level of concern for any salmon stock harvested in the CI EEZ. The NMFS SAFE Team recommends that the small size of pink salmon makes them less vulnerable to harvest using gillnets than other salmon species. State data indicates that there are many pink salmon streams throughout Upper Cook Inlet and pink salmon are thought to be in a relatively high state of abundance throughout the North Pacific. Overfishing is not occurring on this stock and the stock is not in an overfished condition (Table 2). Pink salmon harvested in the CI EEZ during 2025 made up approximately 16% of the overall (State + Federal) drift gillnet fishery (6,080 of 37,107)

Preliminary 2026 Postseason Summary of Stock Status in Relation to SDC and Catch relative to Harvest Specifications

Table 2 and Table 3 include the 2026 tiers, maximum fishing mortality threshold (MFMT), minimum stock size threshold (MSST), OFL_{PRE}, buffers, ABC, annual catch limits (ACLs), TACs, and the actual catch that occurred during the 2026 Federal salmon fishery in the CI EEZ.

Based on preliminary 2026 data, overfishing is not occurring for any federally managed salmon stock and no stocks are in or approaching an overfished condition (Table 2). For Tier 1 stocks, since the preliminary postseason estimates of fishing mortality rates in the CI EEZ for the most recent generation (F_{EEZ}) were lower than the MFMT, overfishing did not occur for those stocks during 2026. For stocks with escapement goals and reliable estimates of escapements, the preliminary postseason estimates of cumulative escapement for the most recent generation ('Cum. Esc.' in Table 2) were greater than the MSSTs; thus, these stocks are not in an overfished condition (Table 2). For Tier 3 stocks, since postseason estimates of cumulative harvests across the most recent generation ('Cum. Harv.' in Table 2) are less than the postseason OFLs, overfishing did not occur during 2026.

For the 2026 salmon fishing season in the CI EEZ, except for the COHO stock complex, preliminary catch data indicate that harvests for all stocks were less than the preseason values for TAC, ABC/ACL, and OFL_{PRE} set in the final 2026 harvest specifications (91 FR 36761). However, 2026 CI EEZ harvests of the COHO stock complex were greater than the TAC and ABC/ACL, but less than the preseason OFL (Table 3).

Table 2. Preliminary stock status in relation to status determination criteria following the 2026 CI EEZ salmon fishery and based on SSC-recommendations from the 2026 Final CI EEZ SAFE report. MFMT and cumulative escapements (Cum. Esc.) were calculated using preliminary 2026 run size and escapement values and estimated harvests in other fisheries, and will be updated in future CI SAFE reports pending final harvest counts from ADF&G. Odd-year Pink Salmon OFL and Cum. Harv is based on the 2025 fishery and status determination criteria described in the 2025 Final CI EEZ SAFE report.

Stock	Tier	MFMT	F_{EEZ}	MSST (000's)	Cum. Esc. (000's)	OFL (000's)	Cum. Harv (000's)
KNSOCK	1	0.237	0.078	3,030	9,185	NA	NA
KASOCK	1	0.565	0.028	555	5,202	NA	NA
AOSOCK	3	NA	NA	100	559	907	631
ACHIN	3	NA	NA	45	75*	2.237	0.356
COHO	3	NA	NA	NA	NA	268	83
CHUM	3	NA	NA	NA	NA	390	162
PINK-EVEN	3	NA	NA	NA	NA	283	36
PINK-ODD	3	NA	NA	NA	NA	116	30

*Cumulative escapement for ACHIN stock not updated for 2026. An update will be provided in the Final SAFE report.

Table 3. 2026 harvest specification in relation to preliminary catch for the 2026 CI EEZ salmon fishery. Stock level sockeye salmon catch was estimated from the total CI EEZ sockeye salmon catch using ADF&G genetic mixed stock analysis. Odd-year Pink Salmon values are based on the 2025 fishery.

Stock	Tier	OFL_{PRE}	ABC/ ACL	TAC	Catch	Sockeye Catch
KNSOCK	1	1,284,478	937,993			411,931
KASOCK	1	617,006	489,936	1,487,153*	608,508*	48,959
AOSOCK	3	181,351	154,148			147,618
ACHIN	3	373	261	240	60	NA
COHO	3	67,013	26,805	16,619	38,591	NA
CHUM	3	97,058	78,006	68,645	54,970	NA
PINK-EVEN	3	141,407	127,266	124	6,250	NA
PINK-ODD	3	58,174	52,357	52,357	16,308	NA

* Combined TAC and catch for Kenai Late-Run, Kasilof, and Aggregate "Other" sockeye salmon stocks.

2026 Social and Economic Overview of the CI EEZ Drift Gillnet Salmon Fishery

The following is a preliminary postseason summary of social and economic information for the 2026 CI EEZ salmon fishery. During 2026, there were 347 Federal permit holders for the CI EEZ drift gillnet salmon fishery, which is the largest number since the implementation of the Federal fishery in 2024. Of the Federal fishery permit holders, 275 reported landings. A total of 7 processors were registered to receive CI EEZ salmon. CI EEZ salmon fishery landings (by weight) were distributed among five Alaska home ports: Homer (31%), Kasilof (25%), Kenai (39%), Ninilchik (2%), and Valdez (3%). Sockeye contributed 84% or approximately 3.3 M lbs to the total landings, all other species combined contributed the remaining 16% of total landed weight. The total estimated exvessel value of the CI EEZ drift gillnet fishery in 2026 was $10.2 M and sockeye salmon was the dominant species harvested, accounting for 96% ($9.8 M) of that value.

2027 Stock Assessment and Fishery Evaluation for the Cook Inlet EEZ Salmon Fishery: Overall Assessment Summary

The NMFS SAFE Team assesses that, based on SDC that are compliant with the MSA, National Standard Guidelines, the Salmon FMP, and recommendations from the SSC, there is available yield of Tier 1 sockeye salmon stocks that could reasonably be harvested in the Cook Inlet EEZ salmon fishery while still allowing harvests in all other (i.e., State) fisheries and achieving spawning escapement goals that have the highest probability of producing maximum sustainable yield (MSY) over the long term. The estimated amount of available yield is dependent upon estimates of the total run size and State harvests and applies conservative buffers with methodology recommended by the SSC.

To prevent overfishing the Federal COHO stock, this preliminary SAFE carries over the 60% precautionary buffer recommended by the SSC in the 2026 final SAFE report.