

# **Draft SSC Report February 2025**



**C1 Cook Inlet EEZ Salmon 2025 SAFE**

# C1 Cook Inlet Salmon Harvest Specifications

## 2025 SAFE and Harvest Specifications

- The SSC **reviewed** the 2025 SAFE for Upper Cook Inlet aggregate salmon stock complexes
- The SSC **reviewed** status determination criteria for 2024 (Table 1) and **recommended** 2025 harvest specifications (Table 2; included below)
- Aggregate salmon stock complexes were not apparently subject to overfishing, pending final harvest data.
- Aggregate salmon stock complexes, with the exception of aggregate chum and pink stocks, were not apparently overfished, pending final harvest and escapement data.
  - For aggregate chum and pink stocks, an overfished status determination is not possible.

# C1 Cook Inlet Salmon Harvest Specifications

## General Comments

- The SSC **highlights** the challenge in adapting State of Alaska salmon management practices based on escapement and active inseason management to meet requirements under the MSA
- The SSC **highlights** that continued development of the Cook Inlet SAFE is an iterative process
- The SSC **recommends** a work-group, workshop(s) or Plan Team to facilitate iterative development of the SAFE, including expertise from the SAFE team, SSC, ADF&G, and the Pacific Council, who have extensively considered Federal management of salmon fisheries on the West Coast
- The SSC **highlights** scheduling review of methodological developments outside of the specification meeting may improve the process

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## General Comments

- The SSC **highlights** the need for research to fill data gaps and collection of genetics and ASL data, particularly for sockeye and Chinook
- The SSC **acknowledges** the value of inseason information (e.g. a test fishery) to characterize timing, magnitude, and distribution of returning salmon
- The SSC **looks forward to** future incorporation of a summary of scientific information on the most recent social and economic conditions of the relevant fishing interests, processing industry and fishing communities into the SAFE

*Table 2 - Draft February 2025 SSC Report*

Stock	Tier	MSST	Escapement goal (LB)	$S_{MSY}^*$	OFL	OFL <sub>PRE</sub>	ABC	ABC Buffer (%)
Kenai River Late Run Sockeye salmon	1	<b>3,030,000</b>	750,000	1,212,000	NA	<b>514,761</b>	<b>360,332</b>	<b>30 %</b>
Kasilof River Sockeye salmon	1	<b>555,000</b>	140,000	222,000	NA	<b>664,294</b>	<b>285,646</b>	<b>57%</b>
Aggregate Other Sockeye salmon	3	163,000	65,000	NA	906,757	181,351	154,148	15%
Aggregate Chinook salmon	3	40,500**	13,500**	NA	2,237	373	261	30%
Aggregate Coho salmon	3	38,800**	19,400**	NA	268,053	67,013	<b>16,753</b>	<b>75%</b>
Aggregate Chum salmon	3	NA	3,500	NA	390,030	97,508	78,006	20%
Aggregate Pink salmon	3	NA	NA	NA	116,348	58,174	52,357	10%

\*Hasbrouk et al 2022 \*\* corrected values to be updated in final 2025 SAFE

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## Tier 1 Stocks - Kenai River Late Run and Kasilof River

- The SSC **recommends** that OFL, MFMT and MSST calculations for Tier 1 stocks be based on the  $S_{MSY}$ , as opposed to the lower bound of the escapement goal range as proposed by the authors,
  - **appreciates** the additional information provided by authors
  - **notes** this is an area that requires further development and may best be addressed by a work group or workshop
- The SSC **supports** the ARIMA model approach for preseason projections for run size and the harvest rate in State waters.
  - The SSC **recommends** the authors further develop the Bayesian approach

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## Tier 1 Stocks Kenai River Late Run and Kasilof River

- The SSC **recommends** a 30% buffer for the Kenai River Late Run and a 57% buffer for the Kasilof River
  - This is a reduction from the buffers calculated in the SAFE for  $S_{MSY}$  (67.3% Kenai Late Run and 80.3% for Kasilof River)
- The SSC had concerns about the methodology used to calculate the buffers, primarily the handling of OFL values at zero.
- The reduced buffers are close to those based on the lower bound of the escapement goal, recognizing that
  - $S_{MSY}$  is more conservative
  - There are no conservation concerns (particularly Kenai late run)

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## Tier 3 Stocks

- The SSC **supports** classification of ‘aggregate’ other stocks as Tier 3.
- The SSC **supports** the new assessment method for Tier 3 stocks.
  - Single year preseason OFL = maximum average catch over a generation during the period 1999-2024
  - Buffers are interpreted as the % reduction from the OFL.
  - The approach may be considered less precautionary than the Council’s groundfish Tier 6 (average-catch) approach, but was considered appropriate for salmon due to their multi-year return to spawn.



# C1 Cook Inlet Salmon Harvest Specifications

## Tier 3 Stocks

- SAFE team developed ABC buffers for each Tier 3 stock, starting with a 15% ABC buffer as a default buffer.
- The SSC **agrees** with the proposed buffers of 15% for “other” sockeye, 30% for Chinook, 20% for chum, and 10% for pink salmon.
- The SSC **recommends** a lower buffer for the aggregate coho salmon complex than proposed by the SAFE team (next slide).
- The SSC **recommends** that the default buffer for Tier 3 stocks be 25%, possibly adjusted on a stock-specific basis with clear justification
  - Better reflects uncertainty in historical catch assessments.
  - Consistent with the Groundfish Tier 6 average-catch approach.

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## Tier 3 Stocks

- The SSC **agrees** with the SAFE team's concern with low coho abundance.
  - Both catch in the EEZ and escapement counts from coho index stocks are at all-time lows.
  - Complete weir counts are not available for either coho indicator stocks in the last three years.
- Nevertheless a 90% buffer is very large, and the resulting ABC would have led to an early fishery closure in 24 of the last 26 years.
- The SSC **recommends** a large, but less extreme buffer of 75%.
  - Comparable to the largest buffer used for BSAI crab stocks of 75% for West Aleutian red king crab, which has been at very low abundance for many years.

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## Tier 3 Stocks

- The SSC **appreciates** the draft risk table for aggregate coho salmon complex.
- The SSC is concerned that monitoring of salmon escapement in Cook Inlet has decreased over time. Increased support for the existing coho indicator stocks is the highest priority.