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United States Department of the Interior

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

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Anchorage, Alaska 99503-6199



Agenda Item U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Report
September 23, 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 continued during 2013, including restrictions and closures of Federally managed subsistence fisheries. In conjunction with Alaska Department of Fish and Game managers, Federal managers took the following actions:

Yukon River: The preseason plan for management of the Federal subsistence fisheries for Chinook salmon was to enact restrictions parallel to the Alaska Board of Fisheries recently approved management plan. The early season restrictions included: 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. The subsistence fisheries for Chinook salmon on the Yukon River were restricted throughout the season to protect both the Alaskan and Canadian Chinook salmon stocks. Despite the continual restrictions, the transboundary Canadian escapement goal was not met.

Kuskokwim River: The 2013 Kuskokwim River Chinook salmon return was one of the lowest on record and was not sufficient to support both subsistence needs and meet escapement goals. Most if not all of the historic Kuskokwim River watershed tributary escapement goals were not met this season. At this time, preliminary information indicates that the Kuskokwim River escapement goal for the entire drainage was not met for 2013.

Kenai River: The subsistence fishery for early-run Chinook salmon was restricted preseason effective May 16, 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 unbaited hook. The Kenai River Chinook salmon early-run was weak requiring closure of the subsistence fishery for Chinook salmon. The lower end of the escapement goal range was not achieved. The Kenai River Chinook salmon late-run was also weak requiring closure of the subsistence fishery for Chinook salmon. The lower end of the escapement goal range was achieved for the late-run.

Chignik, Karluk, and Ayakulik Rivers: Chinook salmon returns to all of these rivers were among the lowest on record. In response, subsistence fisheries for Chinook salmon were closed in all of these rivers. The lower ends of the escapement goals for all three systems were not met.

Unalakleet River: The subsistence fishery for Chinook salmon was closed by regulation as the run strength did not warrant opening this fishery.

Situk River: The subsistence fishery for Chinook salmon was closed effective May 19. Inseason assessment indicated better-than-expected abundance and the subsistence fishery for Chinook salmon was reopened. The escapement goal was achieved.

Stikine River: The Federal Subsistence Board closed the subsistence fishery for Chinook salmon effective May 15. Inseason assessment indicated better-than-expected abundance and the subsistence fishery for Chinook salmon was reopened. The escapement goal was achieved.

For further information, contact Jerry Berg, Subsistence Coordinator at (907) 786-3519 or Jerry_Berg@fws.gov.

Endangered Species Act Issues:

Marine Mammals:

The sea otter recovery plan and 5-year review were both approved in August 2013. Both documents are available at:

<http://www.fws.gov/alaska/fisheries/mmm/seaotters/recovery.htm>.

In the recovery plan, population trends vary by geography and five management units (MUs) are identified. Threats to recovery were assessed and categorized as to likely importance. The threats judged to be most important are predation and oil spills. Objectives and criteria to further develop classification of sea otters under Endangered Species Act, including those needed to delist, are presented.

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

Aleutian and Bering Sea Islands Landscape Conservation Cooperative (ABSILCC):

The mission of this LCC is to promote coordination, dissemination, and development of applied science to inform conservation of natural and cultural resources in the face of climate change and other landscape-scale stressors. The Steering Committee of the ABSILCC finalized a draft Strategic Science Plan. This plan is structured around six landscape-scale stressors: climate variability and change; commercial fisheries; invasive species; marine shipping; ocean acidification and contaminants and pollutants. Potential effects from commercial fisheries were not addressed in this plan, as there are considerable resources already directed to this topic. The draft plan is available at: <https://absilcc.org/science/Shared%20Documents/ABSILCC%20Draft%20Strategic%20Science%20Plan.pdf>.

For further information on this or other LCCs in Alaska, visit: <http://alaska.fws.gov/lcc/index.htm>. For ABSI-specific information, contact Doug Burn, ABSI LCC Coordinator at: (907) 786-3807 or Douglas_Burn@fws.gov.