The salmon season of 2008 is just beginning to get under way in some parts of western Alaska. Based on forecasts and predictions by the Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ADFG, also referred to as “department” throughout this article), some areas can expect to see good returns and harvests while others may see weaker returns and limited market opportunity. Here, we will summarize ADFG’s pre-season reports for all salmon fisheries from Kotzebue Sound to Bristol Bay. Please note that the information provided here, much is excerpted from ADFG reports, are pre-season estimates and – as always – are subject to change once the actual salmon returns begin to occur and fishery managers can better estimate fish abundance.

**INSIDE: SEASON OUTLOOK**

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**Kotzebue Sound fishery outlook**

*Chum demand likely similar to 2007*


Most returning chum salmon to the Kotzebue Sound region return as either 4 or 5-year old fish, with a much smaller amount of 3 or 6-year old fish also returning. For 2008, ADFG expects the 4-year-old component of the run to be above average and the 5-year-old fish to return in average strength. Similar to recent years, the commercial fishery will likely be limited due to reduced markets for the fishermen.

“One demand for chum salmon during the 2008 season is expected to be the same as 2007 as the same buyer is returning. However, the buyer may decide to purchase fish from a limited number of... continued on page 3

Bering Sea Fishermen’s Association has launched a new addition to the FAIR website (http://fair.bsfaak.org) that allows stakeholders to post their observations about what’s going on in their own backyard. In the last issue of the FAIR Advocate, Dave Cannon wrote about making observations of the natural environment and how important it can be to document observations or events. These can be significant or just plain fun – like when the river breaks up, man-made disturbances, or just pictures from fish camp.

The easy interface on the website is map-based, meaning that you can zoom in on a map and click on the exact place where you are making your observation. After “pinpointing” your observation site, you then can enter what kind of observation you made, along with the date and time, and any other important information...and you can upload photos, as well. Aside from making your own observations, you can also look at the observations that other people have entered into the database.

By collecting these observations throughout the region, we may all help explain some of the natural complexity that unfolds before our eyes every day.

The website is not the only access point for submitting observations. You can call, email, or drop us a postcard. If you choose to email or write, please include the location of your observation, a description of the observation you are making and the date(s) it was observed. Your contact information is also important, in case we need to get more information from you. If you want to remain anonymous, we will not post that information to the database.

We hope that the observations network will be a useful and interesting tool where western Alaska residents can share information about things happening in their region.
Kuskokwim area salmon fishery outlook

Fishery dependent on market, processor capacity

All text in quotes in this section are excerpts from a May 1, 2008 news release (#1) from ADFG and USFWS “Kuskokwim Area salmon outlook and management strategy”. The news release can be found at http://www.cf.adfg.state.ak.us/region3/finfish/salmon/forecast/08kskmp.pdf

For the Kuskokwim River, “The 2008 Chinook, chum and sockeye salmon runs are expected to be similar in abundance to 2007 when there were harvestable surpluses beyond what was needed for escapement and subsistence uses. Anticipated harvestable surpluses for commercial harvest will range from 20,000 to 50,000 Chinook, 20,000 to 40,000 sockeye, 400,000 to 700,000 chum, and 100,000 to 250,000 coho salmon. Markets and processor capacity may limit actual harvest.”

“It is anticipated that a commercial salmon fishery directed at the harvest of Chinook, sockeye, and chum salmon will be initiated in late June dependent on run timing and availability of harvestable surpluses. A coho salmon directed commercial fishery is anticipated to occur from late July through August.”

“Subsistence fishing is anticipated to be open 7 days per week with the exception of closures before, during, and after commercial fishing periods. The BOF approved liberalized subsistence fishing regulations in 2004 to provide greater opportunity for subsistence fishing during the commercial fishing season. As in the last 4 years, when one subdistrict is open to commercial fishing, subsistence fishing will be allowed in the majority of the other subdistrict. During closures, all subsistence harvest gear within the closed area with a mesh size greater than 4-inches must be removed. Subsistence fishing for fish other than salmon will be allowed during closed periods with gillnets not exceeding 60 feet in length with a mesh size of 4-inches or less.”

“The first 2008 king caught in Quinhagak by Frank Matthew.

Subsistence fishing with hook and line for any species of salmon will be allowed 7 days per week. In 2007, the BOF liberalized subsistence hook and line bag and possession limits in the Aniak River upstream from Doestock Creek from 6 fish per day to 10 fish per day. Of those 10 fish, the salmon daily bag and possession limit is 3 salmon, only 2 of which can be Chinook salmon.”

“As directed by the Kuskokwim River Salmon Management Plan the commercial fishery will be conducted in June and July if it is determined there is a surplus above that necessary to meet escapement goals and subsistence uses. As it is expected that this criteria will be met, a Chinook, sockeye, and chum salmon fishery is anticipated in mid- to late June, but may be limited dependent on market conditions and processor capacity.”

Although the BOF adopted regulations allowing for up to 8-inch mesh gillnet gear in 2007, it is anticipated that all commercial fishing periods will be limited to 6-inch or less gillnet gear. This will allow for harvest of Chinook and sockeye salmon because of their overlapping run timing during the second half of June.”

In Kuskokwim Bay, “[i]t is anticipated that the harvestable surplus of salmon available for Kuskokwim Bay commercial fisheries will range from 17,000 to 31,000 Chinook, 110,000 to 300,000 sockeye, 80,000 to 130,000 chum, and 33,000 to 52,000 coho salmon. Total harvest capacity may be affected by low participation, weak market conditions, and limited processor capacity in the fisheries.”

“Subsistence fishing will be allowed 7 days per week prior to the commercial salmon season. Once the commercial fishing season begins, there will be subsistence fishery closures 16 hours before, during, and 6 hours after commercial fishing periods. However, subsistence fishing closures may be reduced in time if additional commercial fishing periods are allowed. Fishers will be informed of subsistence fishing closures through news releases and radio announcements.”

In District 4, “[i]t is anticipated that the commercial fishing will begin prior to June 15 by regulation and follow a schedule of two 12-hour periods per week. As the abundance of Chinook salmon tapers off and sockeye salmon become more... continued on page 3
**Kuskokwim**

**Continued from page 2**

abundant, a commercial fishing schedule of at least three 12-hour periods per week is anticipated given adequate run abundance, market interest, and processor capacity. A directed coho salmon fishery is anticipated for the month of August with two to three 12-hour commercial fishing periods per week given adequate abundance and processor capacity. A directed coho salmon fishery is anticipated to be implemented for the month of August with two to three 12-hour commercial fishing periods per week given adequate run abundance and processor capacity."

In Districts 4 and 5, “[t]he duration of fishing periods may be reduced if limits imposed by processors result in high grading and the potential for wanton waste. Other contingencies to address waste are being considered including a reduction in the weekly fishing schedule.”

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- John Linderman (907) 543-2709 (Bethel), or (907) 267-2303 (Anchorage)
- Kevin Clark (907) 543-1678 (Bethel), or (907) 267-2739 (Anchorage)
- Doug Bue (907) 543-2931 (Bethel)

"If commercial catches indicate a weak run, and are in agreement with test fish catches in the Kobuk River, the department will consider reducing fishing time in late July to two short duration fishing periods per week or less. If commercial catches indicate sufficient run strength the department will allow commercial fishing to continue based on market conditions and escapement indicators. Likewise in August as the Noatak chum salmon run passes through the district the department will consider restrictions if commercial catches indicate a weak run, and are in agreement with department test fish catches. No time restrictions on subsistence fishing are expected in 2008.”

**Kotzebue**

**Continued from page 1**

permit holders who are willing to provide a higher quality salmon by taking care of the fish after harvest.” The report goes on to say, “If the commercial fishery is similar to last year, there will be 6 to 8 hour fishing periods on the weekdays and weekends will be closed to fishing. If the buyer opts for longer fishing periods similar to the 12-hour periods in the late 1990’s and early 2000’s then there will likely be a 1 day closure mid week and the weekends would be closed to fishing.”

“The department intends to open the commercial fishery anytime after July 9 when the buyer is ready or permit holders indicate they are ready to fish and a market is available. [...] By regulation, the commercial season closes after August 31, but the buyer usually ceases operations the fourth week of August as catches dwindle and more water marked fish show up in the catches. However, in 2007 the buyer did purchase salmon until August 31.

“If commercial catches indicate a weak run, and are in agreement with test fish catches in the Kobuk River, the department will consider reducing fishing time in late July to two short duration fishing periods per week or less. If commercial catches indicate sufficient run strength the department will allow commercial fishing to continue based on market conditions and escapement indicators. Likewise in August as the Noatak chum salmon run passes through the district the department will consider restrictions if commercial catches indicate a weak run, and are in agreement with department test fish catches. No time restrictions on subsistence fishing are expected in 2008.”

**Kotzebue ADFG staff contacts**

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Bering Sea Fishermen’s Association

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Weak Chinook runs predicted, pink fishery likely


To a large degree, the salmon returns to Norton Sound have been fairly good in recent years, with Chinook salmon runs in the Unalakleet and Shaktoolik subdistricts as significant exceptions.

“Except for Chinook salmon, there have been near record to record runs for all species in most river drainages in Norton Sound since 2004. Parent-year escapements for Chinook salmon have been mostly poor in the 2000’s.”

“The excellent salmon runs in recent years indicates good ocean survival conditions and will likely help to counter poor parent-year escapements for this year’s returning salmon. The department is cautiously optimistic that most salmon runs in Norton Sound will be average and that the coho salmon run will be above average. However, because of poor parent-year escapements for many salmon species, the department will take action to restrict fisheries if salmon runs show early signs of being weak.”

“The Chinook salmon run is expected to be below average and no commercial fishing targeting Chinook salmon is expected. Subsistence restrictions are expected again in southern Norton Sound. The Chinook salmon harvest will likely be low as an incidental catch in other salmon directed fisheries. Chum salmon returns are expected to be average, but limited commercial fishing targeting chum salmon is expected. There is some buyer interest in chum salmon this year and the harvest could be 40,000 to 50,000 fish.”

“The only expected subsistence restrictions for chum salmon will be in the Nome Subdistrict where catch limits will be in effect. In the last several years, there have been record breaking pink salmon returns in many locations when compared to respective even- and odd-numbered year run cycles. However, in 2007 the pink run was average for an odd-numbered year and well below the run in 2005. There was limited buyer interest in 2007 and nearly 4,000 pink salmon were sold in the commercial fishery. If there was a sufficient market the harvest could be 500,000 pink salmon in 2008. [...] The coho salmon run in 2008 is expected to be above average based on good ocean survival conditions and the near record and record runs in southern Norton Sound. The commercial harvest is expected to 80,000 to 100,000 fish and no subsistence fishing restrictions are expected, except for catch limits in the Nome subdistrict.”

“The guideline harvest level (GHL) set by the Alaska Board of Fisheries (BOF) for the Port Clarence sockeye fisheries allows for a harvest of up to 10,000 sockeye salmon. Based on excellent runs of sockeye salmon in recent years, the department expects the GHL to be reached if there is a sufficient fishing fleet.”

A more recent development since the publication of the ADFG management plan is that Norton Sound Seafood Products has indicated they intend to purchase significant volumes of pink salmon this summer, with the harvest effort taking place largely in the Unalakleet, Shaktoolik, Norton Bay and Moses Point subdistricts.

In the Nome subdistrict, ADFG expects salmon management will be similar to what occurred in 2007. Subsistence fishers will need to obtain a permit and observe established catch limits, which can vary by species and location of harvest. In the fresh waters of the Nome subdistrict, subsistence fishing schedules will be in place from June 15 through August 31 and in the marine waters from June 15 through August 15. While commercial fishing for chum salmon is closed in the Nome subdistrict, there is the possibility for a very limited commercial fishery for pink salmon if a market develops and chum salmon interception is minimal. ADFG does not anticipate a commercial fishery for coho salmon in the Nome subdistrict however if the run is strong and there is market interest, fishing time may be allowed.

In the Golovin Bay subdistrict, the department does not expect significant restrictions to subsistence fishing but a permit/harvest record is required when subsistence fishing. There may be opportunities for commercial fishing for pink and chum salmon if run strengths are adequate and if there is an interested buyer.

... CONTINUED ON PAGE 5
Norton Sound
Continued from page 4

In the Moses Point subdistrict, “No subsistence salmon fishing restrictions have occurred in this subdistrict in nearly 20 years and no restrictions are expected in 2008. Subsistence permits are required when subsistence salmon fishing in the marine or fresh waters of the Moses Point subdistrict. No commercial fishing is expected for Chinook salmon because of an expected poor run. There is the possibility of commercial fishing for chum and pink salmon if a market is available. Also, there is the possibility of commercial coho salmon openings depending on buyer availability and sufficient escapement as indicated by historical comparisons of the Kwinik River aerial survey and tower counts and subsistence fishing catch reports.”

In the Norton Bay subdistrict, commercial fishing is expected for pink salmon. No subsistence fishery restrictions are expected.

The Shaktoolik and Unalakleet subdistricts “will be managed as one fishery because past studies have shown salmon bound for these subdistricts intermingle and that harvests in one subdistrict most likely will affect the other. If there is a sufficient salmon surplus for commercial fishing a fishery will occur. However, no commercial fishing is expected for Chinook salmon because of recent poor runs and recent BOF regulations which have raised the passage goal at the North River tower over 50% before a commercial fishery can occur. If there is market interest pink and chum salmon will be targeted in July. A chum salmon fishery would likely occur after July 4 to allow more time for Chinook salmon to pass through the subdistricts. The department will switch to coho management in late July and a commercial fishery is expected.” Subsistence fishing schedules will be in effect from June 16 through July 15 in the marine waters of the two subdistricts, as well as within the Unalakleet River, to protect Chinook salmon. Also, “concerns have been expressed by fishers about the lack of larger Chinook salmon on the spawning grounds of the Unalakleet River drainage. To address those concerns subsistence gillnet mesh size will likely be restricted to no more than six inches in the Unalakleet River in late June through mid-July to conserve older, larger Chinook salmon. The subsistence fishing schedule will remain in effect through July 15 unless further restrictions are necessary to protect Chinook salmon.”

In the Port Clarence District, ADFG anticipates a commercial fishery for sockeye salmon during the month of July if “subsistence fishing reports indicate normal catches of sockeye salmon [...] Continued commercial fishing will be dependent on sufficient subsistence fishing catches and an in-river goal of 30,000 sockeye salmon projected to be met at Pilgrim River.”

“No subsistence fishing time restrictions are expected in 2008, but if the weir project and aerial surveys indicate poor runs of a particular species the department may need to implement fishing restrictions.”

A permit (with catch limits for fresh water harvests) is required for subsistence fishing in the Port Clarence district, Pilgrim River and Salmon Lake.

MMS accepting public comments on proposed North Aleutian Basin EIS

The Minerals Management Service (MMS) held a scoping meeting in Kodiak on June 3 regarding the preparation of an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for the proposed oil and gas lease sales in the North Aleutian Basin.

A June 4th story in the Kodiak Daily Mirror reported that the MMS is already accepting public comments to help them with the preparation of the EIS, a draft of which is expected to be completed in 2010, and a final EIS expected to be released in 2011.

Public comments are taken at a number of steps throughout the process. Interested parties can submit comments about what kinds of research should be conducted as well as what kind of potential impacts should be considered. Comments on this phase of the process will be accepted through July 7, 2008 and can be emailed to sale214NOI@mms.gov

For more information, go to “current activities” at the MMS Alaska home page at http://www.mms.gov/alaska/.

Norton Sound/Port Clarence ADFG staff contacts

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Yukon River salmon fishery outlook

All text in quotes in this section are taken from ADFG Regional Information Report No. 3A08-03, “2008 Yukon area subsistence, personal use, and commercial salmon fisheries outlook and management strategies”, May 2008. The report can be found online at: http://www.sf.adfg.state.ak.us/FedAidpdfs/RIR.3A.2008.03.pdf

The disappointing 2007 Chinook salmon return to the Yukon River was “well below average despite good escapements in parent years of 2001 and 2002, and yielded approximately 31,000 less Canadian-origin fish than expected. Whether this is attributable to dramatically increasing bycatch in the Bering Sea pollock trawl fishery or to ocean conditions or some other suite of environmental factors remains unknown.”

“The 2008 [Chinook] run is expected to be below average and similar to the 2007 run. It is anticipated that the 2008 run will provide for escapements, support a normal subsistence harvest, and a below average commercial harvest. Fishery management will be based on inseason assessments of the run. However, there is a possibility that the run may not be large enough to support even a small directed commercial fishery. If inseason indicators of run strength suggest sufficient abundance exists to have a commercial Chinook salmon fishery, the commercial harvest could range from 5,000 to 30,000 Chinook salmon including the incidental harvest taken during anticipated summer chum directed periods.”

For summer chum salmon on the Yukon River, “[t]he 2008 run is anticipated to be near average and provide for escapements and support a normal subsistence and commercial harvest. Summer chum salmon runs have exhibited steady improvements since 2001 with a harvestable surplus in each of the last 5 years (2003-2007). If inseason indicators of run strength suggest sufficient abundance exists to allow for a commercial fishery, the commercial harvest surplus in Alaska could range from 500,000 to 900,000 summer chum salmon. The actual commercial harvest of summer chum salmon in 2008 will likely be dependent on market conditions and may be affected by a potentially poor Chinook salmon run, as Chinook salmon are incidentally harvested in fisheries directed at chum salmon.”

For fall chum salmon, “[a] considerable amount of uncertainty has been associated with fall chum salmon run projections, particularly recently because of unexpected run failures (1997 to 2002) followed by a strong improvement in productivity from 2003 through 2006. Weakness in salmon runs prior to 2003 has generally been attributed to reduced productivity in the marine environment and not as a result of low parental escapement.”

“If the 2008 [fall chum salmon] run size is near the projected range of 890,000 to 1,200,000, it will be well above the upper end of the BEG range of 600,000 fall chum salmon. A run of this projected size should support normal subsistence fishing activities and provide opportunity for commercial ventures where markets exist. The strength of the run will be monitored inseason to determine appropriate management actions and levels of harvest based on stipulations in the Alaska Yukon River Drainage Fall Chum Salmon Management Plan.”

“A[though there is little comprehensive escapement information on Yukon River drainage coho salmon, it is known that coho salmon primarily return as age-4 fish and overlap in run timing with fall chum salmon. […] Assuming average survival, the 2008 coho salmon run is anticipated to be average to above average based on good escapements in 2004.”

“The Alaska Yukon River Coho Salmon Management Plan allows a directed commercial salmon fishery, but only under unique conditions. Directed coho salmon fishing is dependent on the assessed levels in the return of both coho and fall chum salmon since they migrate together.”

For a recording of the current subsistence, personal use, and commercial fishing schedules, call toll free 1-866-479-7387.

Yukon ADFG staff contacts

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Recorded information, (907) 949-1731
Fairbanks ADFG office, (907) 459-7274
Anchorage ADFG office, (907) 267-2105
Bristol Bay salmon fishery outlook

Strong run could mean lots of fishing time in early season

All text in quotes in this section are excerpts from the April 18, 2008 news release “Bristol Bay 2008 outlook for commercial salmon fishing”. The news release can be found at http://www.cf.adfg.state.ak.us/region2/finfish/salmon/bbay/bbabout08.pdf

“The forecasted Bristol Bay sockeye salmon run for 2008 is approximately 40.3 million fish. From this total, a commercial harvest of approximately 31.4 million fish is projected. Because of this projected surplus, the department plans to fish aggressively early in the run. Fishers should expect significant amounts of fishing time, however, run timing will be the key factor as to when fishing will occur.”

“An inshore run of nearly 14.7 million sockeye salmon is expected for the Naknek/Kvichak District in 2008. The forecasted harvest in the Naknek/Kvichak District is approximately 9.7 million sockeye salmon, consisting of roughly 1.5 million from the Kvichak River, 1.5 million from the Alagnak River and 6.7 million from the Naknek River. The 2008 Kvichak River minimum biological escapement goal will be 2.0 million. The preseason point goal for the Kvichak River is the minimum 2.0 million. If the return is greater than the forecast, the inseason point goal will be changed to reflect the actual inseason total run. The Naknek River escapement goal range is 800,000 to 1.4 million sockeye with a midpoint of 1.1 million. The expected surplus potentially available for harvest is approximately 6.9 million fish.”

“The proportion of harvest between set gillnets and drift gillnets (during the allocation period) in 2007 was approximately 16% and 84%, respectively; the sockeye salmon allocation plan specifies 14% and 86%. In 2008, separate gear openings and extensions are tools that will be used to adjust harvest in an attempt to achieve allocation percentages. At the January 2001 BOF meeting, the Board adopted a regulation that directs the department to avoid “to the extent practicable”, continuous fishing with set gillnet gear in the Egegik District. Therefore, set gillnet fishers in Egegik should expect breaks in fishing.”

Table 1. Spawning escapement goals, and expected harvests of sockeye salmon returning to Bristol Bay River systems in 2008. (Source: ADFG)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>District</th>
<th>Total Harvest</th>
<th>Spawning Escapement Goal</th>
<th>Total Expected Harvest</th>
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<tr>
<td>NAKNEK-KVICHAK</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Kvichak</td>
<td>1.56</td>
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<td>9.68</td>
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<td>Alagnak</td>
<td>1.45</td>
<td>1.86</td>
<td>1.10</td>
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<tr>
<td>Naknek</td>
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<td>Total</td>
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<td>7.10</td>
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<td>Igushik</td>
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<td>0.23</td>
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<tr>
<td>Nushagak</td>
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<td>Total</td>
<td>8.53</td>
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<tr>
<td>TOGIAK</td>
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<td>BRISTOL BAY TOTAL</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Egegik River in 2008. The escapement goal range is 800,000 to 1.4 million sockeye with a midpoint of 1.1 million. The expected surplus potentially available for harvest is approximately 6.9 million fish.”

“The proportion of harvest between set gillnets and drift gillnets (during the allocation period) in 2007 was approximately 16% and 84%, respectively; the sockeye salmon allocation plan specifies 14% and 86%. In 2008, separate gear openings and extensions are tools that will be used to adjust harvest in an attempt to achieve allocation percentages. At the January 2001 BOF meeting, the Board adopted a regulation that directs the department to avoid “to the extent practicable”, continuous fishing with set gillnet gear in the Egegik District. Therefore, set gillnet fishers in Egegik should expect breaks in fishing.”

“The forecasted Ugashik River sockeye salmon run is 6.5 million fish. With an escapement goal range of 500,000 to 1.2 million (mid range goal of 800,000) approximately 5.6 million fish are potentially available for harvest.”

In the Ugashik district, “separate gear openings and extensions” will be used in an attempt to achieve the allocations between set gillnet and drift gillnet of 10% and 90%, respectively, as prescribed by the Ugashik District allocation plan.

“The 2008 forecasted run of sockeye salmon for the Nushagak District is 10.4 million fish with the distribution by river as follows: Wood River at 7.1 million with a 1.1 million midpoint goal, leaving approximately 6 million available for harvest; Igushik river at 1.4 million with a 225,000 midpoint goal, leaving approximately 1.2 million available for harvest; and the Nushagak River at 1.9 million with the midpoint goal of 550,000, leaving approximately 1.4 million available for harvest.”

The 2008 inshore run of sockeye salmon to the Togiak River is forecasted at 740,000 fish. With a mid range escapement goal of 150,000 sockeye salmon past the towers into Togiak Lake, approximately 590,000 sockeye salmon will be potentially available for commercial harvest.”

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Our mailing list needs you!

With this being the third issue of the FAIR Advocate, we’ve realized that we need a more comprehensive mailing list of fishery stakeholders in western and interior Alaska. The first and third issues of the newsletter were sent out as “boxholder” mailings to almost 30,000 post office boxes in rural communities. The second (April) issue was mailed to a smaller list that was largely composed of Alaska residents who hold commercial fishing permits in the various western Alaska fisheries.

Most commercial permit holders are also subsistence fishers, but many subsistence users do not own commercial permits, so a large portion of fishery stakeholders may be left out of future mailings. If you’d like to continue receiving future issues of the FAIR Advocate, please contact us to be added to the mailing list.

If you did not receive the April issue of the FAIR Advocate due to our smaller mailing list, it is posted on our website (http://fair.bsfaak.org) or if you would like a copy mailed to you, you can go to the website and click on the “submit comments to BSFA staff” button and enter your mailing address. You can also call us at 1-888-927-2732, or you can drop us a note or postcard: BSFA, 110 W. 15th Avenue, Unit A, Anchorage, AK 99501.

We promise never to share your information with anyone. Thanks for reading! ♡