

**ALASKA DEPARTMENT OF FISH AND GAME
DIVISION OF COMMERCIAL FISHERIES
NEWS RELEASE**



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2008 UPPER COOK INLET COMMERCIAL SALMON FISHERY SUMMARY

The 2008 Upper Cook Inlet (UCI) commercial harvest of 2.8 million salmon is approximately 1.5 million fish below the average long-term harvest in UCI (Table 1). While all five species of Pacific salmon are present in Upper Cook Inlet, the primary focus of the commercial fishery is sockeye salmon. Sockeye salmon escapement goals are monitored in six systems in UCI. In 2008 two were within, two were below, and two were over the goal ranges (see table below and Table 2).

System	2008 Inriver Estimate	Lower Goal	Upper Goal
Crescent River	62,030	30,000	70,000
Fish Creek	19,339	20,000	70,000
Kasilof River ^a	301,469	150,000	250,000
Kenai River	614,946	650,000	850,000
Packers Creek	25,248	15,000	25,000
Yentna River	90,146	90,000	160,000

^a The Kasilof River BEG is 150,000 to 250,000; an OEG was established in 2002 of 150,000 to 300,000 to aid in achieving the lower end of the Kenai River goal.

SOCKEYE SALMON

The preseason forecast for the 2008 season projected a run of 5.6 million sockeye salmon, with a harvest estimate (sport, personal use & commercial) of 3.9 million fish. The total run to the Kenai River, generally the largest producer in UCI, was forecasted to be 3.1 million sockeye salmon. This resulted in managing for an inriver sonar goal range in the Kenai River of 750,000 to 950,000 sockeye salmon. Two regularly scheduled fishing periods plus up to 51 hours of additional fishing time in the Upper Subdistrict set gillnet fishery were allowed under this size or run under the abundance based escapement goal for the Kenai River. In addition, this run strength mandated two closed periods (windows) per week, a 24 and a 36-hour period in the Upper Subdistrict set gillnet fishery.

While the fishing season opens in most of Upper Cook Inlet in mid to late June, participation and harvests remain fairly low until about July 4. In 2008, harvests in the Central District were relatively low through July 12 for a return forecast at the level of 5.6 million; however winds and tides will sometimes have this effect. After July 12, the harvest from each fishing period was approximately one-half of that expected. Beginning July 20, indications from the Offshore Test Fish Program (OTF), coupled with harvests and escapements to date began to indicate the return was not going to be as strong as forecast. On July 24, the run estimate from the OTF was indicating that the run was going to be not only well below forecast but below 2 million triggering a different escapement goal of 650,000–850,000 sockeye salmon and different management parameters. The commercial fishery targeting Kenai Stocks in the Upper Subdistrict and Central District drift gillnet fishery was closed at the end of the July 24 fishing period and remained closed for the remainder of the year due to lagging sockeye passage to the Kenai River. Even with these actions to conserve Kenai Sockeye the inriver goal was not achieved. On August 1, the department assessed the total Kenai River sockeye salmon to be between 1.85 and 1.91 million fish. With this inseason assessment, the inriver goal for the Kenai River became 650,000 to 850,000 sockeye salmon. The final inriver sonar count in the Kenai River was 614,946 sockeye salmon, slightly below the lower end of the inriver goal range for a run of fewer than 2 million. The run in 2008 was approximately 4 days early and much weaker than forecast. Because of the run size estimate being so close to the 2 million demarcation point to the Kenai River and the changes dictated by management plans, it will be several weeks before information from fish tickets and escapements can be tallied for individual river systems to see if the estimates for run strengths listed above are indeed correct.

The UCI commercial harvest of 2.3 million sockeye salmon was significantly below the preseason forecast harvest estimate of 3.9 million and the 9th lowest harvest since 1980. The total run of sockeye salmon to UCI of 4.0 million was 29% less than the preseason forecast (see table below). Returns to all systems were significantly less than the forecast with the largest disparity in numbers of fish being with the run forecast to the Kenai River where the forecast was approximately 1 million fish off.

System	Forecast	Actual	Difference
Crescent River	100,000	82,000	-18%
Fish Creek	53,000	28,000	-50%
Kasilof River	1,286,000	1,100,000	-14%
Kenai River	3,064,000	2,086,000	-32%
Susitna River	344,000	307,000	-11%
Minor Systems	727,000	336,000	-54%
Overall Total	5,574,000	3,943,000	-29%

Sockeye salmon prices at the beginning of the season were in the range of \$1.20 per pound. The total exvessel value in UCI for sockeye salmon was approximately \$18.0 million, which was 92.5% of the total UCI exvessel value.

COHO SALMON

The 2008 coho salmon harvest of 166,475 was slightly below the recent 10-year average harvest of 188,000 and approximately half of the 1966–2007 long term average coho salmon harvest of 316,000. Commercial coho salmon harvests in 2008 were likely reduced due to restrictions in area to the drift fleet endeavoring to achieve the Yentna Sockeye escapement goal, as well as several periods closed in the Northern District set gillnet fishery for the same reason, and also due to an early closure in the drift fishery and Upper Subdistrict set gillnet on July 24 for most of the rest of the season. The coho salmon run in 2008 was judged to be above average. Commercial coho salmon harvests in UCI during the 1980's and early 1990's were much higher than the long term average due to good coho salmon production, and also due to strong sockeye salmon returns to Upper Cook Inlet, which resulted in more fishing time in the Central District. Since 1996, BOF regulations have reduced the fishing time of the drift fleet in the Central District and eliminated additional fishing time directed at coho salmon surpluses in the Northern District, Kalgin Island and Upper Subdistricts of the Central District, which has resulted in marked reductions in the commercial exploitation of this species. The only significant coho salmon return to UCI that is monitored with an escapement goal is the Little Susitna River. In 2008, the final escapement count of 18,485 was slightly below the upper end of the escapement goal range of 19,200. The exvessel value of coho salmon to the commercial fishery was approximately \$700,000 or 3.6% of the total exvessel value in Upper Cook Inlet.

PINK SALMON

Approximately 168,000 pink salmon were harvested in 2008. This figure is approximately 75% of the recent 10-year average pink salmon harvest of 187,000 and about one third of the average harvest of 490,000 since 1966. Pink salmon harvests were impacted by the restrictions implemented for Yentna River sockeye salmon and the early termination of the Upper Subdistrict set gillnet fishery. Pink salmon escapements are not monitored in Upper Cook Inlet to an appreciable degree; however it appears that escapements to most river systems were very good. Prices paid for pink salmon ranged from approximately \$.10 to \$.35 per pound, resulting in an exvessel value for this species of \$150,000, less than 1% of the total exvessel.

CHUM SALMON

The 2008 harvest of 51,301 chum salmon was well below the long-term average harvest of approximately 500,000 chum salmon. The 2008 chum salmon harvest was approximately 50% less than the recent 10-year average harvest of 120,000. Much of this reduction in harvest is the result of reduced fishing time in traditional fishing areas, primarily by the drift fleet, due to sockeye salmon concerns to Northern Cook Inlet. Following the flood of 1986 through the mid 1990s, chum salmon production in much of Southcentral Alaska was poor. Since the mid-1990s however, chum salmon production has increased. Chum salmon runs to most of Cook Inlet in 2008 were good by recent standards. The exvessel value of chum salmon to the commercial fishery was approximately \$150,000, or less than 1% of the total value.

CHINOOK SALMON

The 2008 harvest of 12,917 Chinook salmon is 25% below both the long and short-term average harvests of 16,200. The two fisheries where Chinook salmon are harvested in appreciable numbers in UCI are in the set gillnet fisheries in the Northern District King Salmon Fishery and in the Upper Subdistrict of the Central District. After experiencing a significant downturn in the early to mid 1990s, Northern District Chinook salmon stocks rebounded and were relatively strong for the preceding 10 years. However, in 2008, the Deshka River Chinook salmon run, which is the generally the largest run in the region was below average failing to meet its escapement goal. Closures were implemented with 1 of the 5 allowable king salmon periods being closed and the first regular sockeye period on June 26 was also closed in the Northern District to conserve Chinook salmon. Harvests in the Northern District fishery remain well below the harvest cap of 12,500 Chinook salmon due to reduced participation and regulatory closures of the highest producing fishing sites located north of the Theodore River. The 2008 harvest in the Northern District of 4,000 Chinook salmon is about 1,600 fish higher than the recent 10-year average harvest of 2,400 Chinook salmon. This is most likely due to changes made by the BOF in 2005 lengthening the fishing periods from 6 hours to 12 hours on each Monday. In 2008, the commercial harvest in the Upper Subdistrict set gillnet fishery of 7,000 Chinook salmon was about 75% of the average harvest since 1966 when harvest records were available. Late-run Kenai River Chinook salmon runs have been relatively stable and escapement objectives have been consistently achieved or exceeded. Beginning in 1999, a 24-hour closed period per week was mandated for the set gillnet fishery in the Upper Subdistrict. Since that time, longer closed periods of 36-hours or two shorter closed periods each week, a 24 and a 36-hour closed period, have also been adopted into regulation. The stated purpose of these closed periods is to pass fish into the inriver recreational fishery for the weekends. However, when large numbers of sockeye salmon pass into the Kenai and Kasilof Rivers during closed windows, allowable fishing time is maximized when fewer sockeye salmon are moving into UCI in an attempt to keep sockeye salmon goals within their ranges. This may result in increased Chinook salmon harvest in the set gillnet fishery. In 2008, the exvessel value for Chinook salmon was \$461,000 which is approximately 2.4% of the total exvessel value.

Table 1. Upper Cook Inlet commercial salmon harvest by species, 1966–2008.

Year	Chinook	Sockeye	Coho	Pink	Chum	Total
1966	8,544	1,852,114	289,837	2,005,745	532,756	4,688,996
1967	7,859	1,380,062	177,729	32,229	296,837	1,894,716
1968	4,536	1,104,896	468,160	2,276,993	1,107,903	4,962,488
1969	12,386	691,815	100,684	32,499	267,686	1,105,070
1970	8,336	732,572	275,205	814,760	750,774	2,581,647
1971	19,765	636,289	100,362	35,590	323,945	1,115,951
1972	16,086	879,811	80,896	628,566	626,414	2,231,773
1973	5,194	670,098	104,420	326,184	667,573	1,773,469
1974	6,596	497,185	200,125	483,730	396,840	1,584,476
1975	4,787	684,751	227,376	336,330	951,588	2,204,832
1976	10,865	1,664,149	208,663	1,256,728	469,180	3,609,585
1977	14,790	2,052,291	192,593	553,855	1,233,436	4,046,965
1978	17,299	2,621,421	219,193	1,688,442	571,779	5,118,134
1979	13,738	924,406	265,164	72,980	649,758	1,926,046
1980	13,798	1,573,588	271,416	1,786,421	387,815	4,033,038
1981	12,240	1,439,262	484,405	127,143	831,977	2,895,027
1982	20,870	3,259,864	792,224	790,644	1,432,940	6,296,542
1983	20,634	5,049,733	516,322	70,327	1,114,858	6,771,874
1984	10,062	2,106,714	449,993	617,452	680,726	3,864,947
1985	24,088	4,060,429	667,213	87,828	772,849	5,612,407
1986	39,254	4,791,562	757,319	1,300,939	1,134,817	8,023,891
1987	39,431	9,465,994	449,421	109,381	348,809	10,413,036
1988	29,069	6,843,833	560,948	471,076	710,615	8,615,541
1989	26,737	5,011,124	339,818	67,441	122,051	5,567,171
1990	16,105	3,604,259	501,643	603,434	351,123	5,076,564
1991	13,542	2,178,331	426,487	14,663	280,223	2,913,246
1992	17,171	9,108,353	468,930	695,861	274,303	10,564,618
1993	18,871	4,755,329	306,882	100,934	122,770	5,304,786
1994	19,954	3,565,586	583,793	523,434	303,177	4,995,944
1995	17,893	2,951,827	446,954	133,575	529,422	4,079,671
1996	14,306	3,888,922	321,668	242,911	156,501	4,624,308
1997	13,292	4,176,738	152,404	70,933	103,036	4,516,403
1998	8,124	1,219,242	160,660	551,260	95,654	2,034,940
1999	14,383	2,680,510	125,908	16,174	174,541	3,011,516
2000	7,350	1,322,482	236,871	146,482	127,069	1,840,254
2001	9,295	1,826,833	113,311	72,559	84,494	2,106,492
2002	12,714	2,773,118	246,281	446,960	237,949	3,717,022
2003	18,490	3,476,159	101,756	48,789	120,767	3,765,961

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Year	Chinook	Sockeye	Coho	Pink	Chum	Total
2004	27,476	4,926,220	311,056	357,939	146,164	5,768,855
2005	28,171	5,238,168	224,657	48,419	69,740	5,609,155
2006	18,029	2,192,730	177,853	404,111	64,033	2,856,756
2007	17,625	3,316,779	177,339	147,020	77,240	3,736,003
2008	12,917	2,362,880	166,475	168,759	51,301	2,762,332
1966–2007 Avg.	16,185	2,933,227	316,284	490,446	469,098	4,225,241
16,166	16,166	2,897,224	187,569	223,971	119,765	3,444,695

Note: Catch statistics prior to 2007 reflect minor adjustments to the harvest database.

Table 2. Sockeye salmon enumeration by river and date, 2008.

Date	Kenai River		Kasilof River		Crescent River		Yentna River		Fish Creek		Packers Creek	
	Daily	Cum	Daily	Cum	Daily	Cum	Daily	Cum	Daily	Cum	Daily	Cum
15-Jun			446	446								
16-Jun			271	717								
17-Jun			477	1,194								
18-Jun			427	1,621								
19-Jun			658	2,279								
20-Jun			3,229	5,508								
21-Jun			3,905	9,413								
22-Jun			5,504	14,917								
23-Jun			7,355	22,272								
24-Jun			4,728	27,000	35	35						
25-Jun			6,437	33,437	53	88						
26-Jun			15,121	48,558	55	143						
27-Jun			7,825	56,383	30	173						
28-Jun			7,849	64,232	20	193						
29-Jun			2,296	66,528	155	348						
30-Jun			4,618	71,146	166	514						
1-Jul	2,474	2,474	2,145	73,291	333	847						
2-Jul	2,791	5,265	2,944	76,235	2,541	3,388						
3-Jul	2,638	7,903	3,150	79,385	1,438	4,826						
4-Jul	1,384	9,287	1,216	80,601	2,859	7,685						
5-Jul	969	10,256	2,082	82,683	1,324	9,009					0	
6-Jul	890	11,146	1,574	84,257	873	9,882					81	81
7-Jul	829	11,975	5,914	90,171	3,148	13,030	102	102	0	0	289	370
8-Jul	1,069	13,044	3,039	93,210	3,111	16,141	113	215	0	0	948	1,318
9-Jul	2,123	15,167	2,479	95,689	3,734	19,875	136	351	1	1	9	1,327
10-Jul	3,019	18,186	4,371	100,060	3,915	23,790	159	510	1	2	2	1,329
11-Jul	1,527	19,713	2,095	102,155	1,751	25,541	131	641	0	2	24	1,353
12-Jul	2,056	21,769	4,697	106,852	3,765	29,306	299	940	114	116	391	1,744
13-Jul	4,465	26,234	2,147	108,999	3,352	32,658	221	1,161	7	123	475	2,219
14-Jul	2,718	28,952	9,213	118,212	3,629	36,287	370	1,531	0	123	39	2,258
15-Jul	25,514	54,466	19,047	137,259	2,946	39,233	4,635	6,166	0	123	159	2,417
16-Jul	68,124	122,590	18,828	156,087	1,282	40,515	7,164	13,330	0	123	172	2,589
17-Jul	51,062	173,652	12,343	168,430	1,883	42,398	7,249	20,579	12	135	149	2,738
18-Jul	18,535	192,187	7,821	176,251	2,905	45,303	6,389	26,968	304	439	101	2,839
19-Jul	17,110	209,297	19,026	195,277	2,493	47,796	7,923	34,891	386	825	318	3,157
20-Jul	29,398	238,695	5,591	200,868	1,526	49,322	13,571	48,462	315	1,140	225	3,382
21-Jul	32,015	270,710	6,918	207,786	2,067	51,389	8,854	57,316	562	1,702	259	3,641
22-Jul	31,450	302,160	8,292	216,078	1,940	53,329	5,781	63,097	1,004	2,706	742	4,383
23-Jul	10,529	312,689	5,600	221,678	984	54,313	7,147	70,244	3,312	6,018	674	5,057
24-Jul	11,401	324,090	5,470	227,148	437	54,750	3,760	74,004	2,624	8,642	383	5,440

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Table 2. Page 2 of 2.

Date	Kenai River		Kasilof River		Crescent River		Yentna River		Fish Creek		Packers Creek	
	Daily	Cum	Daily	Cum	Daily	Cum	Daily	Cum	Daily	Cum	Daily	Cum
25-Jul	10,920	335,010	8,779	235,927	849	55,599	2,677	76,681	2,124	10,766	622	6,062
26-Jul	7,387	342,397	14,539	250,466	760	56,359	1,053	77,734	441	11,207	20	6,082
27-Jul	16,437	358,834	12,167	262,633	962	57,321	547	78,281	1,243	12,450	1,467	7,549
28-Jul	19,164	377,998	6,844	269,477	1,119	58,440	868	79,149	1,128	13,578	360	7,909
29-Jul	22,136	400,134	3,516	272,993	1,009	59,449	1,103	80,252	665	14,243	726	8,635
30-Jul	26,216	426,350	2,930	275,923	1,062	60,511	582	80,834	207	14,450	1,674	10,309
31-Jul	19,548	445,898	3,525	279,448	412	60,923	932	81,766	1,432	15,882	407	10,716
1-Aug	22,615	468,513	3,256	282,704	592	61,515	669	82,435	168	16,050	116	10,832
2-Aug	17,284	485,797	2,886	285,590	515	62,030	883	83,318	91	16,141	405	11,237
3-Aug	13,332	499,129	3,018	288,608			1,317	84,635	668	16,809	432	11,669
4-Aug	14,327	513,456	2,819	291,427			1,770	86,405	41	16,850	484	12,153
5-Aug	11,409	524,865	2,263	293,690			1,351	87,756	513	17,363	427	12,580
6-Aug	10,903	535,768	1,753	295,443			700	88,456	226	17,589	1,216	13,796
7-Aug	8,477	544,245	1,154	296,597			385	88,841	144	17,733	823	14,619
8-Aug	6,603	550,848	1,161	297,758			307	89,148	83	17,816	310	14,929
9-Aug	7,729	558,577	1,763	299,521			489	89,637	424	18,240	464	15,393
10-Aug	10,802	569,379	1,948	301,469			509	90,146	40	18,280	366	15,759
11-Aug	10,951	580,330							68	18,348	573	16,332
12-Aug	10,392	590,722							401	18,749	436	16,768
13-Aug	7,351	598,073							481	19,230	459	17,227
14-Aug	8,415	606,488							109	19,339	273	17,500
15-Aug	5,448	611,936							0	19,339	700	18,200
16-Aug	1,530	613,466									178	18,378
17-Aug	1,480	614,946									630	19,008
18-Aug											284	19,292
19-Aug											345	19,637
20-Aug											815	20,452
21-Aug											543	20,995
22-Aug											1,849	22,844
23-Aug											566	23,410
24-Aug											298	23,708
25-Aug											455	24,163
26-Aug											112	24,275
27-Aug											153	24,428
28-Aug											231	24,659
29-Aug											93	24,752
30-Aug											496	25,248

Note: Days without data indicate days when the project was not operational.