



The Susitna River drainage is divided into six

UNIT 1 The Sutlej River from its mouth to and including the Deshka River

UNIT 2 The Susitna River upstream of the Deshka River

UNIT 3

**The Susitna River upstream from the
Talkeetna River to the Oshelna River**

The Yenisei River drainage

UNIT 5 The Talkeetna River drainage

UNIT 6 The Chulitna River drainage

ALASKA RAILROAD

Table X. History of achieving Chinook salmon escapement goals in NCI, 2006 - 2017.

System	Goal Range		Escapement											
	Lower	Upper	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
Beginning of downturn														
Beginning conservative management														
Knik Arm														
Little Susitna River (weir)	2,100	4,300												
Little Susitna River	900	1,800	1,835	1,731	1,297	1,028	589	887	1,154	1,651	1,759	1,507	1,622	1,192
2,531														
Eastside Susitna														
Willow Creek	1,600	2,800	2,193	1,373	1,255	1,133	1,173	1,061	756	1,752	1,335	2,046	1,814	1,329
Little Willow Creek	450	1,800	816	1,103	NC	776	468	713	494	858	684	788	675	840
Sheep Creek	600	1,200	580	400	NC	500	NC	350	363	NC	262	NC	NC	NC
Goose Creek	250	650	306	105	117	65	76	80	57	62	232	NC	NC	148
Montana Creek	1,100	3,100	1,830	1,936	1,357	1,460	755	494	416	1,304	953	1,416	692	603
Clear (Chunina) Creek	950	3,400	1,570	3,310	1,795	1,205	903	512	1,177	1,471	1,390	1,205	NC	780
Prairie Creek	3,100	9,200	3,570	5,036	3,039	3,500	3,022	2,038	1,185	3,304	2,812	3,209	1,853	1,930
Chulitna River	1,800	5,100	2,862	5,166	2,514	2,093	1,052	1,875	667	1,262	1,011	3,137	1,151	NC
Westside Susitna														
Alexander Creek	2,100	6,000	885	480	150	275	177	343	181	588	911	1,117	754	170
Deshka River (weir)	13,000	28,000	31,150	18,714	7,533	11,967	18,594	19,026	14,010	18,531	16,335	24,316	22,774	11,383
Peters Creek	1,000	2,600	1,114	1,225	NC	1,283	NC	1,103	459	1,643	1,443	1,514	1,122	307
Lake Creek	2,500	7,100	5,300	4,081	2,004	1,394	1,617	2,563	2,366	3,655	3,506	4,686	3,588	1,601
Talachulitna River	2,200	5,000	6,152	3,871	2,964	2,608	1,499	1,368	847	2,285	2,256	2,582	4,295	1,087
West Cook Inlet														
Lewis River	250	800	341	0*	120	111	56	92	107	61	61	5*	0*	0*
Theodore River	500	1,700	958	486	345	352	202	327	179	476	312	426	68	21
Chuitna River	1,200	2,900	1,911	1,180	586	1,040	735	719	502	1,690	1,398	1,965	1,372	235
Chinook EGs Missed			2 of 17	7 of 17	9 of 15	9 of 17	13 of 15	12 of 17	13 of 17	5 of 16	9 of 17	3 of 15	6 of 14	

 means missed goal.

* Lewis River diverged into muskeg 1/2 mi. below bridge, intermittent connection with Cook Inlet.

Table A.- Salmon abundance and distribution studies in the Susitna River since 2006, conducted by the Alaska Department of Fish & Game. "Mainstem Susitna River" is the Sustina River drainage upstream of the Yentna River confluence. All estimates obtained by mark-recapture.

Abundance Estimate								
Species	Return Year	Mainstem Susitna		Yentna River	95% CI	Total	95% CI	Source
		R.	95% CI					
Sockeye Salmon	2006	107,000	(49,180 - 164,820)	311,197	(252,000 - 391,000)	418,197	(335,448 - 500,946)	FDS 07-83
	2007	87,883	(79,712 - 96,054)	239,849	(205,955 - 273,743)	327,732	(292,867 - 362,597)	FDS 11-19
	2008	70,552	(60,882 - 80,221)	288,988	(251,436 - 326,540)	359,540	(320,763 - 398,317)	FDS 11-12
Coho Salmon	2010	73,640	(42,590 - 139,753)	122,777	(89,067 - 178,817)	196,417	(153,498 - 281,020)	FDS 13-05
	2011	131,878	(100,712 - 193,164)	84,677	(67,473 - 106,704)	216,555	(182,995 - 281,825)	FDS 16-35
	2012	90,397	(46,672 - 173,872)	93,919	(75,101 - 116,974)	184,316	(139,469 - 267,485)	FDS 16-52
	2013	130,026	(100,411 - 193,403)	Not Done				AEA 2014
	2014	84,879	(68,799 - 106,083)	73,819	(61,120 - 87,004)	158,698	(137,817 - 183,294)	AEA 2015
	2015	152,500	(120,552 - 184,448)	110,321	(97,157 - 123,869)	262,821	(228,128 - 297,514)	FDS In
Chum Salmon	2010	151,127	(103,911 - 251,314)	205,869	(150,499 - 268,455)	356,996	(284,573 - 476,270)	FDS 13-05
	2011	1,468,231	(1,271,724 - 1,758,917)	283,801	(216,660 - 386,754)	1,752,032	(1,556,974 - 2,073,042)	FDS 16-35
	2012	229,903	(143,362 - 528,890)	99,442	(62,712 - 228,990)	329,345	(237,012 - 735,368)	FDS 16-52
Chinook Salmon	2013	89,463	(77,720 - 114,954)	Not Done				AEA 2014
	2014	68,225	(53,473 - 94,240)	22,267	(17,466 - 28,701)	90,492	(74,498 - 116,748)	AEA 2015
	2015	88,600	(77,500 - 101,100)	48,400	(39,500 - 60,400)	137,000	(122,207 - 153,764)	prep.
	2016	66,116	(58,694 - 74,734)	31,310	(23,336 - 42,682)	97,426	(86,142 - 111,334)	prep.
	2017	45,471	(38,808 - 54,285)	17,804	(12,764 - 25,407)	63,275	(54,399 - 74,572)	prep.

Cleary, P. M., R. A. Merizon, R. J. Yanusz, and D. J. Reed. 2013. Abundance and Spawning Distribution of Susitna River chum Oncorhynchus keta and coho O. kisutch salmon, 2010.

Alaska Department of Fish and Game, Fishery Data Series No. 13-05, Anchorage.

Cleary, P. M., R. J. Yanusz, J. W. Erickson, D. J. Reed R. A. Neustel, and N. J. Szarzi. 2016. Abundance and spawning distribution of Susitna River chum Oncorhynchus keta and coho O. kisutch salmon, 2011. Alaska Department of Fish and Game, Fishery Data Series No. 16-35, Anchorage.

Cleary, P. M., R. J. Yanusz, J. W. Erickson, D. J. Reed R. A. Neustel, J. P. Bullock and N. J. Szarzi. 2016. Abundance and spawning distribution of Susitna River chum Oncorhynchus keta and coho O. kisutch salmon, 2012. Alaska Department of Fish and Game, Fishery Data Series No. 16-52, Anchorage.

Cleary, P. M., R. J. Yanusz, J. W. Erickson, D. J. Reed R. A. Neustel, J. P. Bullock and N. J. Szarzi. 2016. Distribution of Spawning Susitna River Chinook Oncorhynchus tshawytscha and Pink Salmon O. gorbuscha, 2012. Alaska Energy Authority. Susitna-Watana Hydroelectric Project. Anchorage.

AEA 2014- LGL Research Associates, Inc., and Alaska Department of Fish and Game, Divison of Sport Fish. 2014. Initial Study Report Part A: Sections 1-6, 8-10. Susitna-Watana Hydroelectric Project, Anchorage.

AEA 2015- LGL Research Associates, Inc., and Alaska Department of Fish and Game, Divison of Sport Fish. 2015. Salmon Escapement Study, Study Plan Section 9.7. Study Completion Report. Susitna-Watana Hydroelectric Project, Anchorage.



MEMORANDUM

TO: Distribution

DATE: March 13, 2018

FROM: Nick DeCovich, Northern Cook Inlet Area
Research Biologist
Division of Sport Fish, Region II

SUBJECT: Outlook for the 2018
Deshka River Chinook
salmon run, and
accuracy of the 2017
forecast

The point estimate of the preseason forecast for the 2018 Deshka River Chinook salmon total run is 12,782 fish of all ages, below the low end of the sustainable escapement goal (SEG) of 13,000-28,000. The run is forecast to consist of 2,187 (17%) age-1.1, 6,905 (54%) age-1.2, 1,264 (10%) age-1.3, and 2,426 (19%) age-1.4 fish (Table 1). The 80% prediction interval for the total run forecast is 6,398 to 19,166 fish. This forecast estimate is 32% less than the ten-year (2008 – 2017) average run of 18,696 fish and 62% less than the long-term (1979 – 2017) average of 33,417 fish.

The recent 5-year (2012 – 2016) mean harvest of Deshka River Chinook salmon in marine and sport fisheries is 2,376 fish. This level of harvest was achieved with some restrictions in the sport and commercial fisheries. The Deshka Chinook sport fishery harvest (1,777) is estimated as the recent 5-year average, obtained from the statewide harvest survey. The marine harvest (599) is estimated from the 5-year average of the Deshka River proportion of Northern Cook Inlet aerial survey counts multiplied by the total Northern Cook Inlet marine harvest of Chinook salmon. If the recent 5-year mean combined sport and commercial harvest is realized, the 2018 escapement would approximate 10,406 fish of all ages, well below the sustainable escapement goal (SEG) of 13,000 – 28,000 fish.

The total run forecast for 2018 is the sum of individual forecasts. We examined three classes of models: sibling relationships, Ricker spawner-recruit relationships, and recent year moving averages. The models chosen were those with statistically significant parameters that have the greatest past reliability (accuracy and precision). Specifically, the model estimates selected for each age class for inclusion in the 2018 forecast were those with the minimum recent year's mean absolute deviation (MAD). Using these criteria, the 5-year moving average was used for the age 1.1 fish, and no other models were considered for this age class. The Ricker model (Ricker model using all brood years) was selected for age-1.2 fish; a sibling model incorporating the relationship between age-1.2 and 1.3 fish was selected for age-1.3 fish; and the 5-year moving average was selected for age-1.4 fish. Examination of the MAD for the individual models of age 1.3 fish reveals that the second lowest MAD, 1,985 for the 5-year moving average model, is extremely close to the lowest MAD, 1,674 for the sibling model. The difference in the forecast estimate for the two models is substantial, 8,772 fish. This highlights the uncertainty in

construction of this forecast (Table 1). In addition to these analyses, forecast estimates for age 1.3 and 1.4 fish were produced using methods outlined in Bernard and Jones (2014), which allows for examination of sibling relationships in a Bayesian framework. We include these model estimates here for consideration in the overall forecast (Table 1).

Counts of age-1.1' jack' Chinook salmon at the Deshka weir are considered a minimum, because an unknown number likely pass through the weir panels and go uncounted. In many years, zero to only a few hundred fish of this age class are counted thru the weir. However, those enumerated do count toward the escapement goal. For this reason, past years forecasts have focused on age 1.2 – 1.4 fish. In recent years, there has been an increase in the number of jack's passing the weir, and efforts to increase the accuracy of counts for this age class are underway. The data available gives an index of abundance, and forecasting this age class is restricted to recent averages (Table 2).

The preliminary estimate of for last years (2017) Deshka River Chinook salmon total run is 12,409 fish age-1.2, 1.3, and 1.4 (Table 2). The forecast estimate of total run for 2017 was 17,813, a difference of 30%. The long term (1999 – 2017) relative average difference between the forecast total run and actual total run is 13% (Table 3). The 2017 actual total run was 34% less than the ten-year (2007 – 2016) average run of 18,677. Note that table 3 does not include comparisons for age 1.1 fish because forecasts are unavailable for past years for this age class.

The 2017 run completed the return of the 2010 brood year, a total return of 22,382 Chinook salmon (return per spawner = 1.23). This was similar to the 2009 brood year (return-per-spawner = 1.32).

There is uncertainty in the total 2018 Deshka River Chinook salmon forecast estimate. One pattern to this uncertainty is that the models tend to over-forecast when runs are declining and under-forecast when they are rebounding. The Deshka Chinook salmon forecast has ranged from 5% to 30% from the actual run in the past seven years. The best way to consider this salmon forecast is in terms of 3 broad categories: approximately average run, below average run, or above average run. The 2018 forecast gives the expectation of a run in the below average category.

Distribution:

Anchorage: Tom Brookover, Tom Taube, Jim Hasbrouck, Steve Fleischman, Scott Kelley, Forrest Bowers, Bill Templin, Andrew Munro, Tom Vania, Tim McKinley, Matt Miller, Dan Bosch, Bert Lewis, Jack Erickson, David Evans

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Table 1. – Forecast Chinook salmon abundance for the Deshka River in 2018 using various models, and the relative performance of each model to the previous 5 years of actual runs as measured by MAD (mean absolute deviation) and MD (mean deviation).

Model	Forecast 2018	Model chosen	5-year MAD	5-year MD
Age 1.1				
5-year moving average	2,187	*	NA	NA
Age 1.2				
5-year moving average	6,810		2,821	504
Sibling		^a		
Ricker	6,905	*	2,515	640
Age 1.3				
5-year moving average	10,036		1,985	51
Sibling	1,264	*	1,674	1,638
Ricker	14,226		4,395	862
Bernard and Jones ^b	2,420		3,203	2,798
Age 1.4				
5-year moving average	2,426	*	652	-177
Sibling	1,621		663	-419
Ricker	4,119		4,569	4,569
Bernard and Jones ^b	1,189		1,523	429
Total forecast	12,782	(6,398 - 19,166, 80% CI)		

^aThere was no significant sibling relationship with 1.2 age fish.

^bBernard, D. R., and E. L. Jones III. 2014. Forecasting annual run size of Chinook salmon to the Taku River of Alaska and Canada. Alaska Department of Fish and Game, Fishery Manuscript No. 14-08, Anchorage.

Table 2. – Estimated number of Deshka River Chinook salmon by age class in the run for years 1979 – 2017.

Run Year	Number per Age Class				1.5	Total Run age 1.2 - 1.4	Total Run all ages
	1.1	1.2	1.3	1.4			
1979	0	4,504	38,602	21,231	0	64,336	64,336
1980	0	3,962	20,206	15,451	0	39,619	39,619
1981	0	2,679	15,272	8,842	0	26,792	26,792
1982	0	5,601	19,388	18,526	0	43,515	43,515
1983	0	10,469	22,862	16,471	0	49,803	49,803
1984	0	7,747	21,417	16,405	0	45,569	45,569
1985	0	7,232	21,271	20,498	24	49,001	49,025
1986	40	19,192	23,705	15,979	106	58,876	59,022
1987	15	7,183	24,362	12,990	19	44,535	44,569
1988	495	6,415	13,260	31,447	1,017	51,122	52,633
1989	513	8,405	8,772	15,609	423	32,786	33,722
1990	474	8,768	22,338	19,974	189	51,079	51,743
1991	0	4,906	11,060	15,905	1	31,872	31,873
1992	3,041	5,848	8,952	10,566	15	25,367	28,423
1993	3	4,711	10,369	7,367	9	22,448	22,461
1994	4	1,730	4,584	4,305	101	10,620	10,724
1995	109	4,060	3,099	3,286	167	10,445	10,721
1996	11	7,109	5,572	2,014	0	14,694	14,706
1997	80	6,135	23,730	6,113	0	35,979	36,059
1998	0	10,866	15,777	10,444	117	37,087	37,205
1999	0	10,310	14,606	8,453	70	33,369	33,439
2000	4	4,654	33,202	4,416	0	42,272	42,276
2001	481	8,167	15,580	9,463	3	33,210	33,693
2002	534	8,842	18,849	5,263	0	32,955	33,488
2003	478	16,832	22,762	6,599	0	46,194	46,672
2004	670	12,068	44,249	10,057	0	66,373	67,044
2005	545	13,037	25,807	5,290	0	44,134	44,679
2006	0	8,746	21,195	8,509	0	38,450	38,450
2007	0	2,175	17,092	4,765	0	24,033	24,033
2008	0	1,513	3,668	4,479	0	9,660	9,660
2009	0	8,503	3,065	1,154	0	12,722	12,722
2010	200	4,668	15,605	1,934	0	22,208	22,408
2011	519	6,031	14,461	1,556	0	22,049	22,567
2012	669	8,809	4,182	2,453	0	15,444	16,113
2013	785	4,278	11,682	3,282	0	19,242	20,027
2014	1,550	7,046	7,108	2,197	0	16,351	17,901
2015	2,897	7,211	12,763	3,332	0	23,307	26,204
2016	4,029	11,021	8,948	1,787	0	21,756	25,785
2017	1,162	1,706	9,391	1,313	0	12,409	13,571

Table 3. – Accuracy of the Deshka River Chinook salmon outlook for the three major age classes, 1999–2017. Forecasts were not done in the past for age 1.1 fish.

Forecast difference by major age class (forecast-actual)							
Return year	Forecast Run	Actual Run	Age 1.2	Age 1.3	Age 1.4	overall effect	Relative Difference
1999	26,810	33,371	-4,374	-363	-1,824	underforecast	-24%
2000	33,337	42,273	3,508	-17,945	5,502	underforecast	-27%
2001	40,753	33,210	385	-5,768	12,926	overforecast	19%
2002	43,805	32,955	994	5,641	4,216	overforecast	25%
2003	41,041	46,193	-8,524	-969	4,341	underforecast	-13%
2004	60,833	66,383	-2,535	-927	-2,079	underforecast	-9%
2005	48,687	44,134	-4,692	2,924	6,321	overforecast	9%
2006	49,071	38,451	-628	12,056	-807	overforecast	22%
2007	37,007	24,033	6,592	4,117	2,266	overforecast	35%
2008	20,268	9,660	6,427	2,058	2,123	overforecast	52%
2009	20,593	12,722	1,024	4,148	2,699	overforecast	38%
2010	30,775	22,208	4,864	2,742	962	overforecast	28%
2011	21,080	22,049	270	-4,306	3,068	underforecast	-5%
2012	21,665	15,444	-4,181	9,419	983	overforecast	29%
2013	26,791	19,242	3,134	6,526	-2,111	overforecast	28%
2014	19,063	16,351	-549	1,454	1,806	overforecast	14%
2015	20,418	23,307	-984	-2,102	198	underforecast	-14%
2016	24,638	21,756	-4,195	3,885	3,192	overforecast	12%
2017	17,813	12,409	5,106	-992	1,289	overforecast	30%
Average relative difference, 1999-2017							13%

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2018 King Salmon Sport Fishing Catch-and-Release Only for Deshka and Yentna rivers and Remaining Susitna River Drainage Closed

(Palmer) – In favor of protecting returning king salmon and increased fishing opportunities in the future, Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ADF&G) is implementing the following sport fishing regulation restrictions which will be effective 6:00 a.m., Tuesday, May 1, through Friday, July 13, 2018, for the Susitna River drainages (Unit 1-6). For a complete description of these waters, anglers should refer to the [2018 Southcentral Alaska Sport Fishing Regulations](#) booklet.

Units 1-6 of the Susitna River drainage:

- Sport fishing for king salmon (of any size) is open to catch-and-release in the Deshka and Yentna rivers.
- Sport fishing for king salmon is closed in the remainder of the Susitna River drainage.
- Only one unbaited, single-hook, artificial lure is allowed in the Susitna River drainages. Single-hook means a fish hook with only one point. Treble hooks and more than one single-hook are prohibited.
- Fishing for other species, including trout, will be allowed seven days per week, this includes the waters within Unit 2 that are normally closed during the king salmon season.
- 2018 Deshka River king salmon outlook memo can be found at: <http://www.adfg.alaska.gov/index.cfm?adfg=ByAreaSouthcentralNorthCookInlet.fishingInfo#outlook>.

This management strategy is designed to provide sport fishing opportunities where possible and achieve the Susitna River king salmon escapement goals. In addition to these management actions to the sport fishery, the Northern District commercial king salmon fishery will also be closed. Anglers should also be aware of [changes to the Little Susitna king salmon fishery](#). ADF&G staff will monitor these fisheries closely as the season progresses. Data gathered from weirs, guide logbooks, fishwheels, boat surveys, and aerial surveys will be used to gauge run strength during the 2018 season.

"Since 2007, the king salmon returns to the Susitna River have been below average and the trend is expected to continue in 2018," stated Area Management Biologist Sam Ivey. "Restricting or closing specific areas to sport fisheries is never an easy decision. ADF&G understands the decisions made have tremendous impacts on local businesses, guides, and anglers; however, with king salmon populations continuing a downward trend of productivity, ADF&G has a duty to protect, maintain, and improve sport fisheries. These restrictions will hopefully ensure enough salmon will successfully spawn, so that their

offspring will guarantee future runs. These fish and their offspring are the future of the king salmon fisheries and we need to sustain them for a healthy return."

For additional information, please contact Assistant Area Management Biologist Sam Oslund at (907) 746-6300, or Regional Management Coordinator Matt Miller at (907) 267-2415.

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2018 King Salmon Sport Fishing Restrictions for Little Susitna River

(Palmer) – In favor of protecting returning king salmon and increased fishing opportunities in the future, Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ADF&G) is implementing the following sport fishing regulation restrictions which will be effective 6:00 a.m. Tuesday, May 1, through Friday, July 13, 2018, for the Little Susitna River drainage. For a complete description of these waters, anglers should refer to the [2018 Southcentral Alaska Sport Fishing Regulations](#) booklet.

Little Susitna drainage:

- Only one unbaited, single-hook, artificial lure is allowed in the Little Susitna River drainage. Single-hook means a fish hook with only one point. Treble hooks and more than one single-hook are prohibited.
- Fishing for king salmon is allowed; however, king salmon may only be retained on Friday, Saturday, Sunday, and Monday in the Little Susitna River drainage. King salmon may not be retained on Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday and any king salmon caught on these days may not be removed from the water and must be released immediately.
- The annual limit of two king salmon 20 inches or longer is areawide. The total annual limit of king salmon 20 inches or longer taken from fresh waters of Cook Inlet remains at five, which only two may be from the Little Susitna River drainage.
- The Eklutna Tailrace in Knik Arm is excluded from all restrictions.
- 2018 Deshka River king salmon outlook memo can be found at: <http://www.adfg.alaska.gov/index.cfm?adfg=ByAreaSouthcentralNorthCookInlet.fishingInfo#outlook>.

This management strategy is designed to provide sport fishing opportunities where possible and achieve the Little Susitna River king salmon escapement goal. In addition to these management actions to the sport fishery, the Northern District commercial king salmon fishery will also be closed. Anglers should also be aware of [changes to the Susitna River drainages](#) (Unit 1-6). ADF&G staff will monitor these fisheries closely as the season progresses. Data gathered from weirs, guide logbooks, fishwheels, boat surveys, and aerial surveys will be used to gauge run strength during the 2018 season.

"Since 2007, the king salmon returns to the Little Susitna River has been below average and the trend is expected to continue in 2018," stated Area Management Biologist Sam Ivey. "Restricting or closing specific areas to sport fisheries is never an easy decision. ADF&G understands the decisions made have tremendous impacts on local businesses, guides, and anglers; however, with king salmon populations

continuing a downward trend of productivity, ADF&G has a duty to protect, maintain, and improve sport fisheries. These restrictions will hopefully ensure enough salmon will successfully spawn, so that their offspring will guarantee future runs. These fish and their offspring are the future of the king salmon fisheries and we need to sustain them for a healthy return."

For additional information, please contact Assistant Area Management Biologist Sam Oslund at (907) 746-6300, or Regional Management Coordinator Matt Miller at (907) 267-2415.