



THE STATE  
of **ALASKA**  
GOVERNOR MIKE DUNLEAVY

## Department of Fish and Game

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April 14, 2025

The Honorable Lyman Hoffman  
Chair, Senate Finance Fish and Game Subcommittee  
Alaska State Capitol, Room 518  
Juneau, AK 99801

*Submitted electronically via email*

Dear Chair Hoffman:

Please find below the Alaska Department of Fish and Game's (ADF&G) response to the request for information on unrestricted general fund (UGF) budget proposals related to Western Alaska / Arctic-Yukon-Kuskokwim (AYK) Chinook salmon projects over the last six years.

The State's fiscal reality has resulted in UGF reduction across agencies over the years. Despite this, the Division of Commercial Fisheries operating budget for AYK salmon projects and assessments (includes Chinook, summer chum, fall chum, and coho salmon stocks in coastal Western Alaska systems) across all fund sources has increased by over a million dollars from FY2020 to FY2025. This includes a FY2023 UGF request to restore AYK assessment and management projects that were eliminated in prior year reductions.

Additionally, the UGF funding provided by the Legislature in ADF&G's capital budget for the Alaska Marine Salmon Program helps fund the department's ongoing marine research and participation in critical national and international marine research efforts in the Bering Sea and Gulf of Alaska, such as the International Year of the Salmon initiative and research through the North Pacific Anadromous Fish Commission (NPAFC).

### Unrestricted General Funds (UGF) in Whole Dollars

- FY2023 Operating Budget – Restore Assessment and Management Projects that were Eliminated in Prior Year Budget Reductions – \$285,000
- FY2023 Capital Budget – Alaska Marine Salmon Program – \$1,150,000
- FY2024 Capital Budget – Alaska Marine Salmon Program – \$1,150,000
- FY2025 Capital Budget – Alaska Marine Salmon Program – \$1,300,000
- FY2025 Capital Budget – Replacement Research Vessel for Gulf and Bering Sea – \$3,000,000
- FY2026 Capital Budget – Alaska Marine Salmon Program – \$800,000
- FY2026 Capital Budget – Gulf of Alaska Chinook Salmon – \$5,625,000

In FY2023, ADF&G put forward its first capital request for the Alaska Marine Salmon Program, which is also referred to as the Salmon Ocean Ecology Program or “SOEP.” The purpose of this program is to conduct marine research for systems in Alaska experiencing poor returns of salmon, including Western Alaska Chinook salmon. The initial request was for \$1,150,000 UGF annually for five years:

- \$250,000 was proposed for core program support such as staff salaries and purchasing supplies and equipment for laboratory analyses;
- \$100,000 to support two existing research programs – the Northern Bering Sea Juvenile Salmon Survey (Yukon River Chinook and Western Alaska Chum) and Southeast Alaska Coastal Monitoring Program (Southeast Alaska Chinook); and
- \$800,000 to charter a vessel for a comprehensive assessment of juvenile salmon in the South Bering Sea and Western Gulf of Alaska, including monitoring of Yukon, Kuskokwim, Bristol Bay, North Alaskan Peninsula, Kodiak, Cook Inlet, Copper River, and Chignik salmon stocks.

In FY2024, ADF&G submitted another capital request to continue funding for this program with the same allocations. In FY2025, ADF&G submitted a capital request of \$1,300,000 UGF for this program with adjusted allocations:

- \$200,000 was proposed for core program support;
- \$100,000 to support the two existing research programs mentioned previously; and
- \$1,000,000 for the ongoing comprehensive assessment of major Alaska salmon stocks at sea.

ADF&G also received a donated fishing vessel, renamed the Research Vessel (R/V) Equinox, and \$3,000,000 UGF was provided in the FY2025 capital budget to retrofit the vessel. Once the retrofit is complete, the vessel will be utilized for Western Gulf of Alaska surveys, which will result in reduced charter costs.

The FY2023-FY2025 budget requests total \$3,600,000 UGF for the Alaska Marine Salmon Program with more than 70 percent of expenditures to date going to support Bering Sea juvenile survey work and research related to Western Alaska salmon, which also includes charter costs, staff salaries, and genetics, physiology, and pathology laboratory analyses. Additionally, ADF&G has been successful in securing federal awards for needed work; while not a new UGF request, receiving these federal funds has freed up approximately \$99,356 in State UGF for Chinook salmon marine research.

Available information frequently points to poor marine survival attributed to changing ocean conditions and inriver mortality attributed to impacts of warm water, reduced fat stores, and *Ichthyophonus* disease on adult Yukon River Chinook salmon during their upriver migration. Examples of ongoing projects related to the Alaska Marine Salmon program and genetics and pathology laboratory work were provided in the letter response dated March 20, 2025. Recent reporting results from that work are linked below:

- Genetics: the most recent chum salmon genetic baseline – published as a NPAFC report:
  - A coastwide chum salmon genetic baseline for Western Alaska and high-seas genetic stock identification: Barclay, A.W., T.H. Dann, K. Gruenthal, and S.E. Gilk-Baumer,

2024. *NPAFC Doc.* 2153. 58 pp. <https://www.npafc.org/wp-content/uploads/Public-Documents/2024/2153USA.pdf>
- Pathology: ADF&G staff recently presented on *Ichthyophonus* research at Yukon River Drainage Fisheries Association (YRDFA) meetings in the communities of Emmonak and Alakanuk:
    - An article providing an overview and update on ADF&G's Statewide Fish Pathology Program and *Ichthyophonus* work can be found in this YRDFA newsletter: <https://yukonsalmon.org/wp-content/uploads/YukonFisheriesNews-Spring2025.pdf>
  - SOEP: recent products from this program that are directly related to Western Alaska salmon:
    - Critical periods in the marine life history of juvenile western Alaska chum salmon in a changing climate: Farley Jr, E.V., Yasumiishi, E.M., Murphy, J.M., Strasburger, W., Sewall, F., Howard, K., Garcia, S. and Moss, J.H., 2024. *Marine Ecology Progress Series*, 726, pp.149-160. <https://repository.library.noaa.gov/view/noaa/56673>
    - Divergent Responses of Western Alaska Salmon to a Changing Climate: Schoen, E.R., Howard, K.G., Murphy, J.M., Schindler, D.E., Westley, P.A. and von Biela, V.R., 2023. Divergent responses of western Alaska salmon to a changing climate. *NOAA Technical Report OAR ARC*, pp.23-13. <https://repository.library.noaa.gov/view/noaa/56618>
    - Body size and early marine conditions drive changes in Chinook salmon productivity across northern latitude ecosystems: Feddern, M.L., Shaftel, R., Schoen, E.R., Cunningham, C.J., Connors, B.M., Staton, B.A., von Finster, A., Liller, Z., von Biela, V.R. and Howard, K.G., 2024. *Global Change Biology*, 30(10), p.e17508. <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/gcb.17508>
    - Adult spawners: a critical period for subarctic Chinook salmon in a changing climate: Howard, K.G. and von Biela, V., 2023. *Global Change Biology*, 29(7), pp.1759-1773. <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/gcb.16610>
    - Additionally, the SOEP team provides updates on marine research to stakeholder groups in Western Alaska. In FY2025, audiences included the Yukon River Panel (January 2025), the Kuskokwim River Salmon Management Working Group (November 2024), and the Norton Sound Economic Development Corporation (January 2025). SOEP team members also provide updates on marine research to the general public through their Facebook page: <https://www.facebook.com/ADFGUnderseaWorldOfSalmonAndSharks>

In the Governor's proposed FY2026 capital budget, \$800,000 UGF is requested to continue the work of the Alaska Marine Salmon Program. As mentioned earlier, chartering costs will be reduced with the arrival of the donated R/V Equinox, and this is reflected in the reduced amount of funding requested for FY2026. Additionally, \$5,625,000 is being requested for a comprehensive Gulf of Alaska Chinook Salmon Research program. An overview of the proposed program was provided in the letter response dated March 20, 2025. This capital request incorporates the Stock Identification of the Chinook Salmon Harvested in South Alaska Peninsula Fisheries project that was originally funded in FY2024 to the Department of Commerce, Community, and Economic Development as a grant to the Bering Sea Fisherman's Association (BSFA). The remaining funds of \$324,750 UGF were transferred to ADF&G in FY2025 as a capital project.

The funding provided to ADF&G in FY2025 for this work is not sufficient for a three-year project. The remaining funds are expected to cover only the harvest sampling portion of the project.

Incorporating this project and associated funding into the FY2026 Gulf of Alaska Chinook Salmon Research capital request will allow ADF&G to fully develop and implement the project with \$400,000 anticipated to be allocated annually to complete estimation of stock composition of all marine harvests of Chinook salmon in South Alaska Peninsula fisheries. This information will improve understanding of the presence of Western Alaska Chinook salmon in these mixed stock fisheries.

ADF&G has already begun work on the Stock Identification of the Chinook Salmon Harvested in South Alaska Peninsula Fisheries project, including utilizing an initial budget of \$34,928 for the development and publication of a project operational plan, which informs the remaining budget and plan execution. Below is a summary of the project activity:

- Fall 2023: discussions began with BSFA for a co-operative agreement with ADF&G to develop an operational plan for the project and an associated budget
- Winter/Spring 2024: when the funding became available within ADF&G, regional and genetics lab staff began work on an operational plan for a project. This document was completed in May and published in July:  
<https://www.adfg.alaska.gov/FedAidPDFs/ROP.CF.4K.2024.08.pdf>
- Summer 2024: the operational plan was not completed in time to sample the 2024 South Alaska Peninsula June Fishery harvest, but ADF&G successfully sampled post-June harvests as a pilot study
- Spring/Summer 2025: as described in the operational plan, ADF&G will begin to sample Chinook salmon in the June fishery harvest and continue through the post-June fishery

#### Federal Funds in Whole Dollars

In recent years, ADF&G has secured new federal money to support research efforts for AYK Chinook salmon and other Western Alaska salmon species such as summer chum, fall chum, and coho salmon. This includes funding through the Pacific Salmon Treaty process to support needed work, increasing from \$295,000 in FY2020 to \$1,539,894 million in FY2025.

In the FY2025 capital budget, ADF&G received federal authority for Pacific Salmon Coastal Recovery Fund projects, fisheries disaster funds for related research, and congressionally directed appropriations, including two \$2,000,000 federal earmarks (\$4,000,000 total): one for fish health research such as monitoring for *Ichthyophonus* and other pathogens in Western Alaska; and the other for ADF&G-led cooperative and comprehensive critical stock research and enhancement work to address widespread decline of salmon abundances in coastal Western Alaska systems. This work is also being done by and in coordination with other agencies including the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) and National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) – also known as NOAA Fisheries.

Recent allocations of federal funds for current and pending research and assessments specific to Western Alaska Chinook salmon total \$2,223,978, and examples can be found below.

Initiated Planning	Implementation	Project Title	Total Allocation
FY2019	FY2021	Border Sonar	\$244,000
FY2019	FY2021	Subsistence Division Comprehensive Survey Program	\$240,000
FY2019	FY2021	Enhancement Outreach	\$5,166
FY2019	FY2021	Chinook Assessment	\$546,202
FY2019	FY2021	Regional Data and Publications Support	\$28,900
FY2023	FY2025	Pacific States Marine Fisheries Commission (PSMFC) Southern Bering Sea Juvenile Marine Salmon Survey Juvenile Marine Salmon Survey	\$445,504
FY2024	FY2026	NOAA Earmark Southern Bering Sea Survey Charter Vessel	\$300,000
FY2023	FY2024	U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Juvenile Salmon Marine Research Surveys	\$100,000
FY2024	FY2026	Kuskokwim River Sonar	\$210,325
FY2021	FY2023	AYK <i>Ichthyophonus</i> Yukon River Canadian-origin Chinook	\$47,014
FY2024	FY2026	<i>Ichthyophonus</i> Transmission Yukon Chinook Northern Bering Sea and Southern Bering Sea	\$56,868

Additional allocations of federal funds for current and pending research and assessments inclusive of multiple Western Alaska salmon species total \$1,007,488, and examples can be found below.

Initiated Planning	Implementation	Project Title	Total Allocation
FY2023	FY2025	PSMFC Unalakleet River Coho Salmon Sonar Extension	\$81,480
FY2023	FY2025	PSMFC Kuskokwim Chum Salmon Telemetry	\$279,824
FY2024	FY2026	PSMFC Tatlawiksuk River Weir	\$150,003
FY2024	FY2026	Kuskokwim Chum Salmon Telemetry & Tatlawiksuk River Weir	\$173,326
FY2024	FY2026	Yukon Coho Genetic Baseline	\$65,873
FY2024	FY2026	Kotzebue Chum Noatak River Sonar Feasibility	\$18,963
FY2024	FY2026	Kotzebue Chum Genetic Baseline & Harvest Sampling	\$111,272
FY2024	FY2026	Kotzebue Chum Aerial Survey Expansion	\$26,747
FY2024	FY2026	Pacific Salmon Health Monitoring Initiative	\$100,000

Chair Hoffman  
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Overall, significant federal and State resources are being dedicated to addressing the issue of poor salmon returns in Western Alaska, especially Chinook salmon.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "D. Lang", with a stylized, cursive script.

Doug Vincent-Lang  
Commissioner

cc: Lacey Sanders, Director, Office of Management and Budget  
Jordan Shilling, Director, Governor's Legislative Office