



THE STATE
of ALASKA

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MEMORANDUM

TO: Members
Alaska Board of Fisheries

DATE: October 2, 2026

FROM: Israel Payton, Director
Division of Sport Fish *IP*
and

SUBJECT: Lower Cook Inlet
Stock of Concern
Recommendations

Forrest Bowers, Acting Director *FRB*
Division of Commercial Fisheries

The *Policy for the management of sustainable salmon fisheries* (SSFP; 5 AAC 39.222) directs the Alaska Department of Fish and Game (department) to report to the Alaska Board of Fisheries (board) on the status of salmon stocks and identify any stocks that present a concern related to yield, management, or conservation during regular board meetings. This memorandum summarizes the results of the stock of concern (SOC) evaluation for Lower Cook Inlet (LCI) salmon stocks for the 2026–2027 board regulatory cycle. The evaluation incorporated input from headquarters, regional, and area staff from both fishery divisions.

Following the 2026 salmon season, all king, sockeye, pink, and chum salmon stocks in the LCI management area were evaluated for potential SOC status. Two stocks are currently designated as stocks of management concern in LCI: McNeil River chum salmon and Mikfik Lake sockeye salmon. For this review, staff used the definition of “chronic inability” within the *Policy for the management of sustainable salmon fisheries* (5 AAC 39.222) to identify potential stocks of concern. Chronic inability is defined as “the continuing or anticipated inability to meet escapement thresholds over a 4-to-5-year period, which is approximately the generation time of most salmon species”.

Based on this evaluation, the department recommends continuing the stock of management concern designations for McNeil River chum salmon and Mikfik Lake sockeye salmon and recommends designating Ninilchik River king salmon as a stock of management concern. Details supporting these recommendations are provided below.

KING SALMON

Ninilchik River

Ninilchik River king salmon escapement is monitored with a video weir (floating resistance board weir fitted with underwater video) at river mile 2. An additional weir at river mile 4.8 is used to hold and collect broodstock, and spawning does take place between the two weirs. The previous sustainable escapement goal (SEG) of 750 to 1,300 naturally-produced fish was in place in 2017 through 2023 and only accounted for the escapement upstream of the broodstock weir. The current SEG of 900 to 1,600 naturally-produced fish was adopted in 2024 and accounts for the escapement to the entire system. Though enhancement efforts occur on the Ninilchik River, only naturally-produced king salmon as defined in [5 AAC 56.122\(c\)\(4\)](#) are counted towards achieving the escapement goal. The SEG was last achieved in 2025, and escapements have been below the lower bound in 4 of the past 5 years (Table 1).

Stock of Concern Recommendation: Because the lower bound of the escapement goal has been missed in 4 of the past 5 years, the department recommends designating Ninilchik River king salmon as a stock of management concern.

CHUM SALMON

McNeil River

In 2016, the board designated McNeil River chum salmon run as a stock of management concern. Stock assessment information and management measures were summarized in an action plan developed at the 2016 board meeting (Otis et al. 2016a). The former SEG range of 24,000 to 48,000 chum salmon was eliminated in 2023 with the adoption of the Kamishak District aggregate escapement goal. Because the stock of concern determination predates adoption of the aggregate goal, the former SEG range 24,000 to 48,000 continues to be used as the management target for evaluating the delisting criteria. The McNeil River chum salmon management target has only been achieved once (2023) in the past 5 years and three of the last 10 years (2017 through 2026; Table 1), despite annual closures to all directed chum salmon commercial fisheries in the McNeil and Paint River subdistricts throughout the period.

To consider delisting this stock, the management target must be met or exceeded in three consecutive years and expected to be met in the future years or is met in three out of five consecutive years and expected to be met in future years.

Stock of Concern Recommendation: Because the delisting criteria for this stock have not been met and are not expected to be met in the near future, the department recommends continuing the stock of management concern designation for McNeil River chum salmon.

PINK SALMON

No pink salmon stocks are recommended for stock of concern.

SOCKEYE SALMON

Mikfik Lake

Mikfik Lake sockeye salmon were listed as a stock of management concern in 2023. Stock assessment information and management measures were summarized in an action plan developed at the 2023 board meeting (Hollowell and Otis 2024). The current SEG range of 3,400 to 11,000 spawners was established in 2017 (Otis et al. 2016b) using the percentile approach (Clark et al. 2014). The Mikfik Lake salmon escapement goal has been achieved in 2 of the past 5 years for which reliable escapement estimates are available (Table 1). In 2024, the Mikfik Lake video weir lost power on July 9 through the remainder of the season, resulting in a “no count” that cannot be used to assess whether the escapement goal was achieved. The preliminary 2026 escapement index (6,455) is within the SEG range but does not represent a complete index, as this number represents passage only through July 14. Passage in late summer has yet to be counted.

To consider delisting this stock, the midpoint (7,200) of the SEG range (3,400–11,000) needs to be met or exceeded in 3 consecutive years and is expected to be met in future years, or is met in 3 out of 5 consecutive years and expected to be met in future years

Stock of Concern Recommendation: The department recommends the continuation of the stock of management concern designation for Mikfik Lake sockeye salmon because the delisting criteria for this stock have not been met.

SUMMARY

The department recommends that the stock of management concern designations for McNeil River chum salmon and Mikfik Lake sockeye salmon be continued. Additionally, the department recommends the Ninilchik River king salmon be designated as a stock of management concern.

REFERENCES CITED

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- Otis, E. O., G. Hollowell, and J. W. Erickson. 2016a. McNeil River Chum Salmon Stock Status and Action Plan, 2016. Alaska Department of Fish and Game, Special Publication No. 16-12, Anchorage.
- Otis, E. O., J. W. Erickson, C. Kerkvliet, and T. McKinley. 2016b. A review of escapement goals for salmon stocks in Lower Cook Inlet, Alaska, 2016. Alaska Department of Fish and Game, Fishery Manuscript Series No. 16-08, Anchorage.

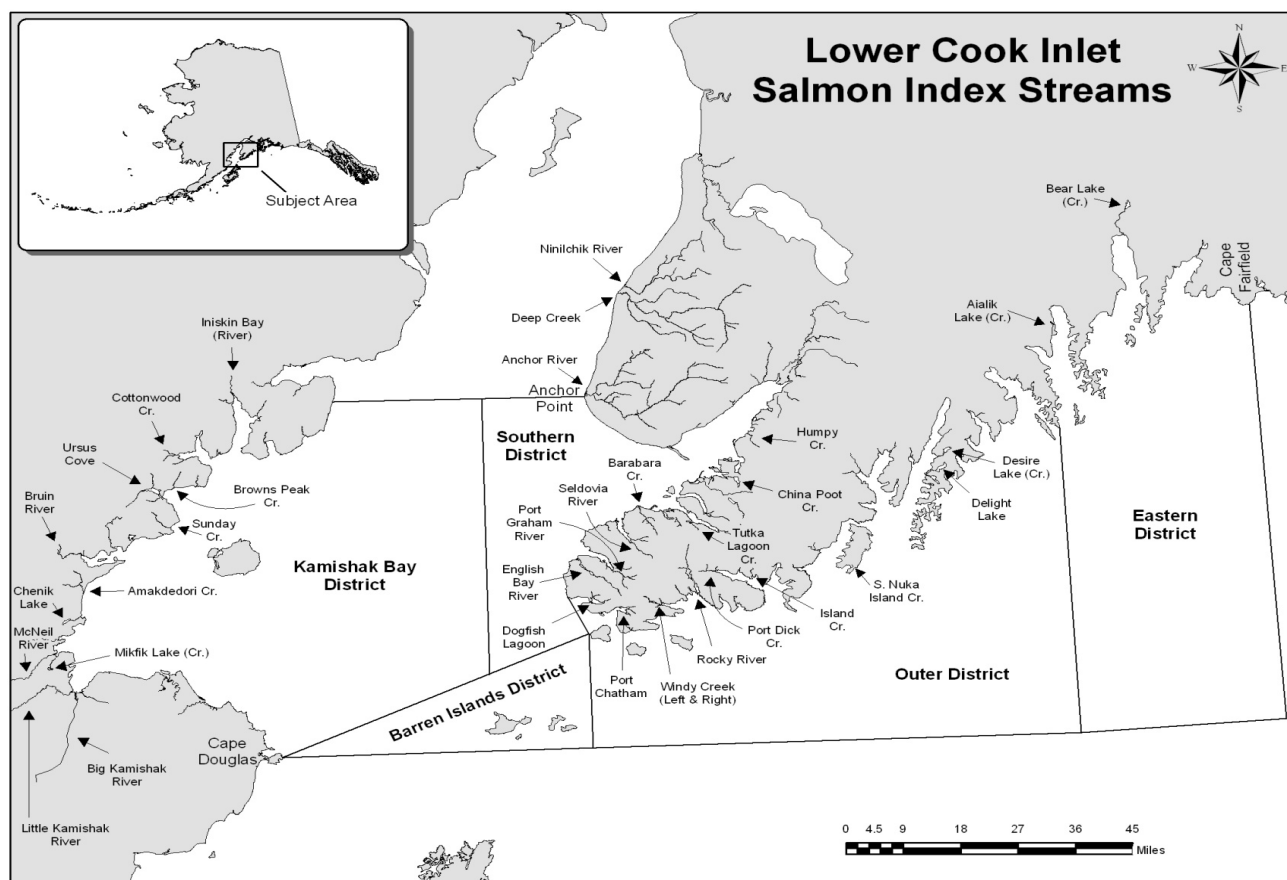


Figure 1.—Lower Cook Inlet fishery management area, by district.

Table 1.— Lower Cook Inlet king, chum, coho, pink, and sockeye salmon escapement goals and escapements, 2017 to 2026. Escapements in shaded cells were below the escapement goal in place that year for that stock.

System	2026 Goal		Type ^a	Initial Year										
	Lower	Upper			2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025	2026
KING SALMON														
Anchor River	3,200	6,400	SEG	2024	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	3,331	4,036	3,431
	3,800	7,600	SEG	2017	5,700	3,129	5,603	3,624	4,300	3,123	2,338	—	—	—
Deep Creek	350		LB SEG	2017	753	182	751	327	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
Ninilchik River	900	1,600	SEG	2024	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	676	1,083	757
	750	1,300	SEG	2017	855	979	1,092	835	772	687	330	—	—	—
CHUM SALMON														
McNeil River ^b	24,000	48,000	management objective	2024	38,679	37,331	9,205	8,850	15,219	17,739	25,142	8,419 ^c	8,252 ^c	3,944 ^d
Southern District-aggregate	1,500	110,000	SEG	2024	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	1,928	8,301	3,917
Outer District-aggregate	17,500	235,000	SEG	2024	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	11,146	34,908	23,610
Kamishak District-aggregate	50,000	150,000	SEG	2024	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	32,538	154,440	46,223
COHO SALMON														
There are no coho salmon stocks with escapement goals in Lower Cook Inlet														
PINK SALMON														
Southern District-aggregate	50,000	110,000	SEG	2024	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	10,760	39,494	87,740 ^d
Outer District-aggregate	105,000	235,000	SEG	2024	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	51,694	237,259	11,8954 ^d
Kamishak District-aggregate	35,000	150,000	SEG	2024	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	2,743	107,197	5,875 ^d
SOCKEYE SALMON														
English Bay	6,300	12,200	SEG	2024	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	19,529	NS	4,590 ^d
	6,000	13,500	SEG	2002	20,751	18,804	24,044	31,486	6,328	11,452	24,287	—	—	—
Delight Lake	5,100	10,600	SEG	2017	5,380	13,428	17,410	12,299	7,496	22,777	6,901	8,410	2,310	3,080 ^d
Desire Lake	4,800	11,900	SEG	2017	9,450	9,840	9,040	4,710	3,744	20,460	14,700	12,250	7,520	8,800 ^d
Bear Lake	600	8,600	SEG	2024	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	11,709	10,422	9,908 ^d
	700	8,300	SEG	2002	9,207	10,568	9,185	8,222	11,318	9,961	10,000	—	—	—
Aialik Lake	3,200	5,400	SEG	2017	4,900	2,620	5,000	4,020	2,352	2,863	6,480	11,580	5,700	7,010 ^d
Mikfik Lake	3,400	11,000	SEG	2017	7,495	4,966	2,901	305	2,346	2,870	2,917 ^c	NC	3,746	6,455 ^d
Chenik Lake	2,900	13,700	SEG	2017	21,468	6,651	12,079	11,686	17,134	16,461	7,774	6,284	14,315	9,287 ^d
Amakdedori Creek	1,200	2,600	SEG	2017	1,680	1,916	1,620	6,992	4,370	2,050	1,300	1,552	4,052	690 ^d

Note: NA = no assessment; NC = No count.

^a SEG = sustainable escapement goal; LB SEG = lower-bound SEG

^b The McNeil River Chum salmon SEG was eliminated in 2024 with adoption of the Kamishak District-aggregate escapement goal. The management objective is used to assess stock of concern status.

^c Incomplete count.

^d Preliminary data.