



MEMORANDUM

TO: Members
Alaska Board of Fisheries

DATE: October 08, 2026

FROM: Forrest R. Bowers, Director *FRB*
Division of Commercial Fisheries

SUBJECT: Upper Cook Inlet Management
Area Stock of Concern
Recommendations

and

Israel Payton, Director *IP*
Division of Sport Fish

The *Policy for the Management of Sustainable Salmon Fisheries* (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. An interdivisional review team, consisting of staff from the divisions of Commercial Fisheries and Sport Fish, was formed to review existing Pacific salmon *Oncorhynchus* spp. escapement goals for the Upper Cook Inlet (UCI) management area as part of the current board meeting cycle. In conjunction with the escapement goal review, the team examined potential stocks of yield, management, or conservation concern, as defined in the *Policy for the Management of Sustainable Salmon Fisheries*. This memorandum summarizes the results of the stock of concern evaluation for the UCI management area salmon stocks for the 2026–2027 board regulatory cycle.

Currently there are 28 escapement goals in UCI (14 king, 9 sockeye, 4 coho, and 1 chum salmon) and 5 of the king salmon stocks are currently listed as a stock of management concern (Munro and Gatt. 2025; Table 1). Escapement is monitored using weirs, sonar, foot and aerial surveys. Note that there are two goals for Little Susitna king salmon; the primary goal is based on the weir assessment, and a second goal based on aerial surveys is used to assess performance of the stock when the weir is inoperable, usually due to high water events.

Following the 2026 salmon season all king, sockeye, coho, and chum salmon stocks in the UCI management area were evaluated for potential stock of concern status. For this review, staff relied on 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 four-to-five year period, which is approximately the generation time of most salmon species."

The department recommends continuing the stock of management concern designations for Alexander Creek, Chuitna River, Eastside Susitna, Kenai River late-run, and Theodore River king salmon stocks. The department also recommends all remaining king salmon stocks in Upper Cook Inlet be designated as stocks of management concern. From 2022 to 2026, every king salmon stock with an escapement goal in Upper Cook Inlet experienced at least two escapements below the lower bound in years when escapement was successfully measured (Table 1). This happened despite being closed to sport and directed commercial fishing, and with significant restrictions to commercial fisheries for the purpose of bringing incidental harvest of king salmon as close to zero as possible. Further, the department is recommending that Little Susitna coho salmon be designated a stock of management concern. This will be the first listing of a coho salmon stock in Alaska. Sockeye salmon runs have generally been performing well to extremely well in Cook Inlet for the past decade and are therefore excluded from discussion in this memo. There is only one chum salmon stock with an escapement goal in UCI, Clearwater Creek, and it has generally been performing well. Escapement and goal information is provided for both sockeye and Clearwater Creek chum salmon (Table 1). There are no pink salmon escapement goals in UCI.

In summary, the department recommends:

King salmon

Continued listing of existing UCI stocks of management concern:

- Alexander Creek
- Chuitna River
- Eastside Susitna River
- Kenai River late run
- Theodore River

New listing as stock of management concern:

- Campbell Creek
- Chulitna River
- Crooked Creek
- Deshka River
- Kenai River early run
- Little Susitna River
- Talkeetna River
- Yentna River

Coho salmon

New listing as stock of management concern:

- Little Susitna River

The following is a synopsis of escapement performance for each king and coho salmon stock in Upper Cook Inlet for which an escapement goal is in place.

King salmon

There are currently five stocks of management concern in Upper Cook Inlet: Alexander Creek, Chuitna River, Eastside Susitna River, Kenai River late run, and the Theodore River. In general, escapements to these systems have not improved, and all remaining king salmon stocks in Upper Cook Inlet with escapement goals now qualify as stocks of concern under the “chronic inability” definition.

West Cook Inlet

Theodore River: Recommend continued stock of management concern status.

Escapement for this stock is evaluated via a single aerial survey using a helicopter which indexes spawning abundance. In 2011, the board designated Theodore River king salmon a stock of management concern. The current sustainable escapement goal (SEG) for this stock of 500 to 1,000 fish was adopted in 2020. The escapement goal for this stock was last achieved in 2006. Successful aerial surveys were conducted in 5 of the last 8 years, with counts in 2024 and 2025 of 33 and 30 fish, respectively (Table 1).

Chuitna River: Recommend continued stock of management concern status.

Chuitna River king salmon were also designated a stock of management concern in 2011. The current escapement goal for this stock, based on aerial survey index counts, was updated in 2020 to an SEG of 1,000 to 1,500 fish. Successful surveys in 2023, 2024, and 2025 were below the lower bound of the SEG. High-water conditions prevented successful survey assessments in 2022 and 2026. The escapement goal for the Chuitna River was last achieved in 2019 (Table1).

Susitna River

Alexander Creek: Recommend continued stock of management concern status.

The board designated Alexander Creek king salmon a stock of management concern in 2011. This stock has been heavily impacted by the spread of invasive northern pike. The king salmon escapement goal in Alexander Creek was last achieved in 2005. Successful aerial index surveys were performed in 2024 and 2025, with counts of only 51 and 36 fish respectively (Table 1).

Deshka River: Recommend designating a stock of management concern.

Returns of king salmon to the Deshka River are assessed via a weir at river mile 7. The weir at this site has been used since 1995. The escapement goal was updated in 2020 to a biological escapement goal (BEG) of 9,000 to 18,000 fish. The BEG was exceeded in 2021 and has not been achieved since. Escapements have been less than one half the lower bound of the SEG in 3 of the last 5 years (Table 1).

Eastside Susitna: Recommend continued stock of management concern status.

Prior to the 2020 salmon season, the individual escapement goals for all five king salmon spawning populations of the Eastside Susitna stock were discontinued and replaced with a single SEG of 13,000 to 25,000 fish. At that time, 3 of the 5 king salmon spawning populations of the Eastside Susitna stock were designated as stocks of concern. The board designated Willow Creek and Goose Creek king salmon stocks as stocks of yield concern in 2011; Goose Creek designation was revised to a management concern in 2014, and Sheep Creek was also designated as a stock of management concern at that time. Accordingly, the department recommended and the board subsequently designated the Eastside Susitna stock collectively as a stock of management concern at the 2020 UCI board meeting. In the action plan associated with that recommendation, delisting criteria for the Eastside Susitna stock were specified as achieving the lower bound of the biological escapement goal range in at least 3 consecutive years or at least 4 out of 6 consecutive years. Escapements have only been above the 13,000 fish lower bound of the SEG twice (2020 and 2021) since the goal was adopted (Table 1).

Talkeetna River: Recommend designating a stock of management concern.

Prior to the 2020 salmon season, the individual escapement goals for the two Talkeetna king salmon spawning populations were discontinued and replaced with a single SEG of 9,000 to 17,500 fish. Neither stock was a stock of concern at that time. Escapements have not been met in any year since the current escapement goal was adopted.

Chulitna River: Recommend designating a stock of management concern.

King salmon escapement to the Chulitna River is assessed via a single aerial index survey. The escapement goal for the Chulitna River was updated in 2020 to an SEG of 1,200 to 2,900 fish, and the escapement goal has not been met since 2023 (Table 1).

Yentna River: Recommend designating a stock of management concern.

Prior to the 2020 salmon season, the individual escapement goals for the three Yentna River king salmon spawning populations were discontinued and replaced with a single escapement goal. None of the stocks were designated a stock of concern at that time. Both a department-determined SEG and a board-determined OEG (Optimum Escapement Goal) were adopted for this stock in 2020. The lower bound of OEG for this stock was achieved in 2020 and 2021 (2021 exceeded the upper bound of the SEG) and was missed from 2022 through 2025 (Table 1). Although escapements for this stock are faring better than the other Susitna River stocks, the department anticipates a continued trend of failing to achieve the lower bound of the escapement goal.

Knik Arm

Little Susitna River: Recommend designating a stock of management concern.

There are two escapement goals for Little Susitna River king salmon; an SEG of 2,100 to 4,300 based on weir counts adopted in 2017, and an SEG based on aerial index counts of 700 to 1,500 fish that was updated in 2020. The weir-based escapement goal is the primary escapement goal and the aerial index-based goal is used for years when the weir is inoperable due to water conditions. The weir-based escapement goal was last achieved in 2022, and the aerial index goal was not achieved in 2025, when the weir was not operated because it was being moved to a new location. The escapement goal for this stock has been missed in the most recent 4 years, with the weir count for 2026 being only 663 fish.

Anchorage

Campbell Creek: Recommend designating a stock of management concern.

Campbell Creek king salmon are assessed via a foot survey through the heart of Anchorage. The lower-bound SEG was updated in 2024 to 340 fish. The king salmon escapement goal for Campbell Creek was last achieved in 2022,.

Kenai Peninsula

Crooked Creek: Recommend designating a stock of management concern.

Crooked Creek is a tributary of the Kasilof River and has been enhanced with hatchery-produced king salmon smolt since the mid-1970s. Naturally-produced king salmon in Crooked Creek are assessed via a weir. The king salmon SEG for this stock was updated in 2020 to a range of 700 to 1,400 and was last achieved in 2022. The lower bound of the SEG has been missed in the most recent 4 years.

Kenai River early-run: Recommend designating a stock of management concern.

Large fish (fish ~75 cm mid-eye-to-fork of tail length) of this stock are assessed annually using sonar. There is both a department-determined SEG for this stock and a board-determined OEG, both adopted in 2017. Both the SEG and OEG for this stock were last achieved in 2021. Escapements have been below the lower bound of both goals for the past 5 years.

Kenai River late-run: Recommend continued stock of management concern status.

Large fish (fish ~75 cm mid-eye-to-fork of tail length) of this stock are assessed annually using sonar. There is both a department-determined SEG for this stock and a board-determined OEG. Due to poor run performance relative to these goals, this stock was designated as a stock of

management concern in 2025. As part of the action plan for this listing a recovery goal of 14,250 to 30,000 fish was adopted (Miller, et al. 2023; 5 AAC 21.382). This recovery goal was missed in 2024 and 2026 but achieved in 2025. Escapements have continued to be poor despite substantial fishery closures.

Coho salmon

Knik Arm

Little Susitna River: Recommend designating a stock of management concern.

Assessment of this stock is via a floating weir, which is difficult to maintain due to regular high-water events. Because of this, the weir was moved approximately 6.5 miles upstream from river mile 32.5 to river mile 39 before the start of the coho run in 2025. The new location is shallower and has provided complete coho counts in 2025 and 2026. The SEG for this stock was updated to a range of 9,200 to 17,700 in 2020, and because most coho in the Little Susitna River spawn higher in the drainage, this escapement goal is still applicable to the new weir location. The SEG was last achieved in 2021, and flood events at the old weir location prevented an assessment in 2022 and 2024. The count for 2023 is incomplete due to flooding that year, but the first 80% of the run was counted (Table 1). It is assumed that the 2023 run followed average timing, and the lower bound of the goal was likely missed due to the low count of 3,526 at the time the weir flooded. The weir counts have been below the lower bound of the SEG in 3 of the past 5 years, and continued low returns are anticipated.

REFERENCE CITED

- Miller, M.G., Lipka, C.G., and A.D. Poetter. Kenai River Late-Run King Salmon Stock Status and Action Plan, Alaska Department of Fish and Game Report to the Alaska Board of Fisheries, February 23, 2024. Alaska Department of Fish and Game, Special Publication No. 23-11, Anchorage.
- Munro, A. R., and K. P. Gatt. 2025. Summary of Pacific salmon escapement goals in Alaska with a review of escapements from 2016 to 2024. Alaska Department of Fish and Game, Fishery Manuscript No. 25-05, Anchorage

Table 1. Upper Cook Inlet salmon stock escapement goals and escapements for 2017 through 2026. Cells shaded grey note escapements which were less than the lower bound of the escapement goal. Escapements for 2026 that are blank were not available at the time of this memo.

	Escapement goal(s)													
System	Lower	Upper	Type ^a	Year adopted	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025	2026
KING SALMON														
Alexander Creek	1,900	3,700	SEG	2020	—	—	—	596	288	NC	NC	51	36	NC
	2,100	6,000	SEG	2002	170	296	1,297	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Campbell Creek	340		LB SEG	2024	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	160	160	142
	380		LB SEG	2008	475	287	393	154	339 ^b	423 ^b	171	—	—	—
Chuitna River	1,000	1,500	SEG	2020	—	—	—	869	806	NC	372	402	490	NC
	1,200	2,900	SEG	2002	235	939	2,115	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Chulitna River	1,200	2,900	SEG	2020	—	—	—	845	1,535	NC	494	272	289	289
	1,800	5,100	SEG	2002	NC	1,125	2,765	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Crooked Creek	700	1,400	SEG	2020	—	—	—	830	594	735	500	521	305	563
	650	1,700	SEG	2002	911	714	1,444	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Deshka River	9,000	18,000	BEG	2020	—	—	—	10,638	18,674	5,440	3,741	3,445	1,791	6,687
	13,000	28,000	SEG	2011	11,034	8,549	9,705	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Eastside Susitna ^c	13,000	25,000	SEG	2020	—	—	—	13,249	15,034	7,677	4,315	5,380	3,966	
Kenai R. - early run (LF)	3,900	6,600	OEG	2017	6,678	2,934	4,055	2,443	4,024	2,047	1,975	1,365	2,541	1,499
	2,800	5,600	SEG	2017	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Kenai R. - late run (LF)	14,250	30,000	Recovery	2024	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	6,630	15,641	10,211
	15,000	30,000	OEG	2020	—	—	—	11,854	12,238	13,911	14,502	—	—	—
	13,500	27,000	SEG	2017	20,583	17,405	11,709	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Little Susitna R. (aerial) ^d	700	1,500	SEG	2020	—	—	—	558	889	NA	NA	NA	437	NA
	900	1,800	SEG	2002	1,192	530 ^b	NA	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Little Susitna R. (weir)	2,100	4,300	SEG	2017	2,531	549 ^b	3,666	2,445 ^b	3,121	2,288	799 ^b	1,014 ^b	NA	663
Talkeetna River ^e	9,000	17,500	SEG	2020 ^c	—	—	—	7,229	8,530	4,292	2,484	3,496	2,725	
Theodore River	500	1,000	SEG	2020	—	—	—	111	38	NC	NC	33	30	NC
	500	1,700	SEG	2002	NC	NC	201	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Yentna River	16,000	22,000	OEG	2020	—	—	—	17,045	23,396	14,926	11,227	13,032	10,536	
	13,000	22,000	SEG	2020 ^f	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
CHUM SALMON														
Clearwater Creek	3,500	8,000	SEG	2017	7,040	1,800	9,600	3,970	9,440	4,681	6,350	830	6,431	
COHO SALMON														
Deshka River	10,200	24,100	SEG	2017	36,869	13,072	10,445	NC	NC	NC	NC	NC	3,869	NC
Fish Creek (Knik)	1,200	6,000	SEG	2020	—	—	—	4,555 ^b	6,462 ^b	3,137	1,534	235	3,398	
	1,200	4,400	SEG	2011	8,966	5,022	3,025	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Jim Cr.(McRoberts Cr.)	250	700	SEG	2020	—	—	—	735	1,499	1,899	378	376	482	
	450	1,400	SEG	2014	607	758	162	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Little Susitna R.	9,200	17,700	SEG	2020	—	—	—	10,765	10,923	NA	3,526 ^g	NA	4,553	1,726
	10,100	17,700	SEG	2002	17,781	7,583	4,229 ^g	—	—	—	—	—	—	—

Table 1 continued.

	Escapement goal(s)													
System	Lower	Upper	Type	Year adopted	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025	2026
PINK SALMON														
There are no pink salmon stocks with escapement goals in Upper Cook Inlet.														
SOCKEYE SALMON														
Fish Creek (Knik)	15,000	45,000	SEG	2017	63,882	72,157	75,411	64,408	99,324	58,333 ^b	44,985	37,983	45,019	140,325
Kasilof River	140,000	370,000	OEG	2020	358,724	394,309	378,416	540,872	521,859	968,148	933,145	1,045,479	1,198,424	1,055,564
	140,000	320,000	BEG	2020	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
	160,000	340,000	BEG	2011	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Kenai River	750,000	1,300,000	SEG	2020	—	—	—	1,605,627	2,003,373	1,203,196	1,885,416	1,374,675	3,307,496	912,560 ^h
	700,000	1,200,000	SEG	2011	1,071,064	886,761	1,457,031	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Packers Creek	15,000	30,000	SEG	2008	17,164	16,247	7,719 ^b	15,903 ^b	19,975	15,451	22,860	15,429	NA	NA
Russian R. - early run	22,000	42,000	BEG	2011	37,123	44,110	125,942	27,103	49,976	61,098	66,818	34,697	37,153	47,093
Russian R.- late run	44,000	85,000	SEG	2020	—	—	—	78,832	123,950	124,561	160,430	70,009	66,681	56,206
	30,000	110,000	SEG	2005	45,012	71,052	64,585	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Chelatna Lake	20,000	45,000	SEG	2017	26,986	20,434	26,303	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	59,978	NA
Judd Lake	15,000	40,000	SEG	2017	35,731	30,844	44,145	31,219	49,440	38,369	NA	NA	NA	13,857 ^b
	25,000	55,000	SEG	2009	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Larson Lake	15,000	35,000	SEG	2017	31,666	23,632	9,699	12,074	21,993	17,436	38,069	15,692	32,904	19,230 ^b

Note: NC = no count; NA = No assessment; LF= large fish (75 cm METF or longer)

^a BEG = biological escapement goal; SEG = sustainable escapement goal; LB SEG = lower-bound SEG; OEG = optimal escapement goal; Recovery = recovery escapement goal

^b Incomplete survey, remote video, or weir count.

^c The Eastside Susitna River goal Chinook salmon goal is an aggregate SEG range that replaced individual tributary SEGs for Goose, Little Willow, Montana, Sheep, and Willow creeks.

^d Little Susitna River Chinook salmon aerial survey goal is only used to assess escapement if weir count is not available.

^e The Talkeetna River Chinook salmon goal is an aggregate SEG range that replaced individual tributary SEGs for the Talachulitna River, Lake Creek, and Peters Creek.

^f The Yentna River Chinook salmon goal is an aggregate SEG range that replaced individual tributary SEGs for the Talachulitna River, Lake Creek, and Peters Creek.

^g The 2019 Little Susitna weir count is incomplete, but the weir was pulled at 96% of average run timing. In 2024, the weir was pulled at 80% of average run timing, so both years are considered to be below the SEG.

^h Preliminary data.