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**Advisory Announcement**  
***For Immediate Release:***  
**September 23, 2021**

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## **2021 KOTZEBUE SOUND SALMON SEASON SUMMARY**

### **COMMERCIAL SALMON FISHERY**

The commercial salmon season opened July 11 and the last day buyers purchased fish was August 27. There were two buyers throughout the season, Copper River Seafoods and E & E Foods doing business as Pacific Star Seafoods. A third buyer, Arctic Circle Wild Salmon began buying on August 11.

During the first week, fishing was allowed from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. daily with no fishing on Saturday due to the lack of plane availability to ship the catch out on the following day.

Below average commercial catches compared to historical data and low catches at the Kobuk River test fish project near Kiana resulted in the department continuing to limit commercial fishing to 8 hours daily throughout the season.

During the second week of commercial fishing, the department reduced fishing to five days a week but commercial and test fishing catches continued to be poor compared to historical catches and fishing was further reduced to three days per week until late August.

In mid-August, the buyers notified the department that they were not interested in staying through August 31, the last day for commercial fishing allowed in regulation. The department then allowed 5 days of fishing during the final week with the last fishing period occurring on August 27.

Throughout most of the season, the catch per unit of effort (CPUE) was similar to 2020 but, for most of the time this year, about 25% fewer permit holders were fishing. During the last week of fishing, the CPUE was double the previous year with nearly the same amount of permit holders fishing.

In the commercial salmon fishery, gear is limited to set gillnets with an aggregate of no more than 150 fathoms per permit holder. Permit holders generally operate with one end on or near shore and they also set in deeper channels from the mud flats farther out from shore. Most gear used in the district is 5-3/4 inch to 6-inch stretched mesh gillnet.

The 2021 commercial harvest of 96,492 was well below last year's harvest of 149,808 chum salmon and was the lowest since 2007. Additionally, 5 sockeye salmon and 2 coho salmon were sold. There were 12 Chinook salmon, 42 sockeye salmon, 25 chum salmon, 192 pink salmon, 63 coho salmon, 175 Dolly Varden, 34 sheefish and 6 whitefish were kept for personal use.

There were 52 permit holders that sold fish in 2021, much less than last year when 68 permit holders sold fish (Figure 1 and Table 1) and was the lowest participation since 2008. The highest daily fishing effort occurred on August 16 when 34 permit holders fished.

Chum salmon had an average weight of 7.4 pounds in 2021. This was the lowest weight on record and the first year since 2012 that the average weight was below 8 pounds. There have only been 5 years in the history of the commercial fishery when the average weight has been below 8.0 pounds. Prior to this year, the lowest average weight was 7.5 pounds in 2006.

A total of 714,067 pounds of chum salmon was sold at an average price of \$0.46 per pound. This year's average price was \$0.01 per pound more than the 2020 price of \$0.45 per pound. The total exvessel value for 2021 is \$332,064 which was one-third less than last year and the second year in a row since 2015 that the exvessel value was below one million dollars. The historical average exvessel value of fishery is \$705,032 without adjusting for inflation (Table 1).

## **ESCAPEMENT**

Primary fishery management objectives are to provide adequate chum salmon escapement throughout the duration of the commercial fishery to ensure sustainability of the fishery and to provide for the subsistence priority. A test fishery conducted on the Kobuk River provides the only inseason escapement index of the Kotzebue Sound District. This year's test fishery was flooded out on July 29 and, although fishing resumed on August 2, no fish were caught for over a week likely due to extremely high water and the project was terminated. Last year's chum salmon cumulative daily CPUE index at the department test fish project on Kobuk River near Kiana was 692 and was the 3<sup>rd</sup> lowest in the 28-year project history. This year's project had been tracking similar to 2020 before the flood. No aerial surveys were conducted in 2021.

## **SUBSISTENCE SALMON FISHERY**

No subsistence salmon surveys are scheduled. Subsistence harvesters reported difficulty in fishing this season because of high water conditions.

Table 1.– Kotzebue District chum salmon catch and dollar value, 1962–2021.

Year	Total Catch	Number of Permits <sup>a</sup>	Average Catch per Permit Holder	Gross Value of Catch to Permit Holders <sup>b</sup>
1962	129,948	84	1,547	\$4,500
1963	54,445	61	893	\$9,140
1964	76,449	52	1,470	\$34,660
1965	40,025	45	889	\$18,000
1966	30,764	44	699	\$25,000
1967	29,400	30	980	\$28,700
1968	30,212	59	512	\$46,000
1969	59,335	52	1,141	\$71,000
1970	159,664	82	1,947	\$186,000
1971	154,956	91	1,703	\$200,000
1972	169,664	104	1,631	\$260,000
1973	375,432	148	2,537	\$925,000
1974	627,912	185	3,394	\$1,822,784
1975	563,345	267	2,110	\$1,365,648
1976	159,796	220	726	\$580,375
1977	195,895	224	875	\$1,033,950
1978	111,494	208	536	\$575,260
1979	141,623	181	782	\$990,263
1980	367,284	176	2,087	\$1,446,633
1981	677,239	187	3,622	\$3,246,793
1982	417,790	199	2,099	\$1,961,518
1983	175,762	189	930	\$420,736
1984	320,206	181	1,769	\$1,148,884
1985	521,406	189	2,759	\$2,137,368
1986	261,436	187	1,398	\$931,241
1987	109,467	160	684	\$515,000
1988	352,915	193	1,829	\$2,581,333
1989	254,617	165	1,543	\$613,823
1990	163,263	153	1,067	\$438,044
1991	239,923	142	1,690	\$437,948
1992	289,184	149	1,941	\$533,731
1993 <sup>c</sup>	73,071	114	641	\$235,061
1994	153,452	109	1,408	\$233,512
1995	290,730	92	3,160	\$316,031
1996	82,110	55	1,493	\$56,310
1997	142,720	68	2,099	\$187,978
1998	55,907	45	1,242	\$70,587
1999	138,605	60	2,310	\$179,781
2000	159,802	64	2,497	\$246,786
2001	211,672	66	3,207	\$322,650
2002	8,390	3	2,797	\$7,572
2003	25,763	4	6,441	\$26,377
2004	51,077	43	1,188	\$64,420
2005	75,971	41	1,853	\$124,820
Average 1962-2021	228,613	106	2,367	\$705,032

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Year	Total Catch	Number of Permits <sup>a</sup>	Average Catch per Permit Holder	Gross Value of Catch to Permit Holders <sup>b</sup>
2006	137,961	42	3,301	\$229,086
2007	147,087	46	3,198	\$243,149
2008	190,550	48	3,970	\$385,270
2009	187,562	62	3,025	\$376,554
2010	270,343	67	4,035	\$860,125
2011	264,321	89	2,970	\$867,085
2012	227,965	83	2,747	\$567,664
2013	319,062	66	4,834	\$689,163
2014	636,187	94	6,768	\$2,879,016
2015	305,383	105	2,908	\$867,583
2016	400,417	86	4,656	\$1,123,248
2017	463,749	98	4,732	\$1,839,637
2018	695,153	95	7,317	\$2,279,477
2019	494,593	92	5,376	\$1,559,260
2020	149,808	68	2,203	\$542,308
2021	96,492	52	1,856	\$332,064
Average 1962-2021	228,613	106	2,367	\$705,032

<sup>a</sup> During 1962–1966 and 1968–1971 figures represent the number of vessels licensed to fish in the Kotzebue District, not the number of permit holders.

<sup>b</sup> Some estimates of fishery value between 1962 and 1981 include only chum salmon (and typically represents over 99% of the total value). Figures after 1981 represent the chum salmon value as well as incidental species such as Dolly Varden, whitefish and other salmon.

<sup>c</sup> Includes 2,000 chum salmon and \$3,648 from the Sikusuilaq Springs hatchery terminal fishery.

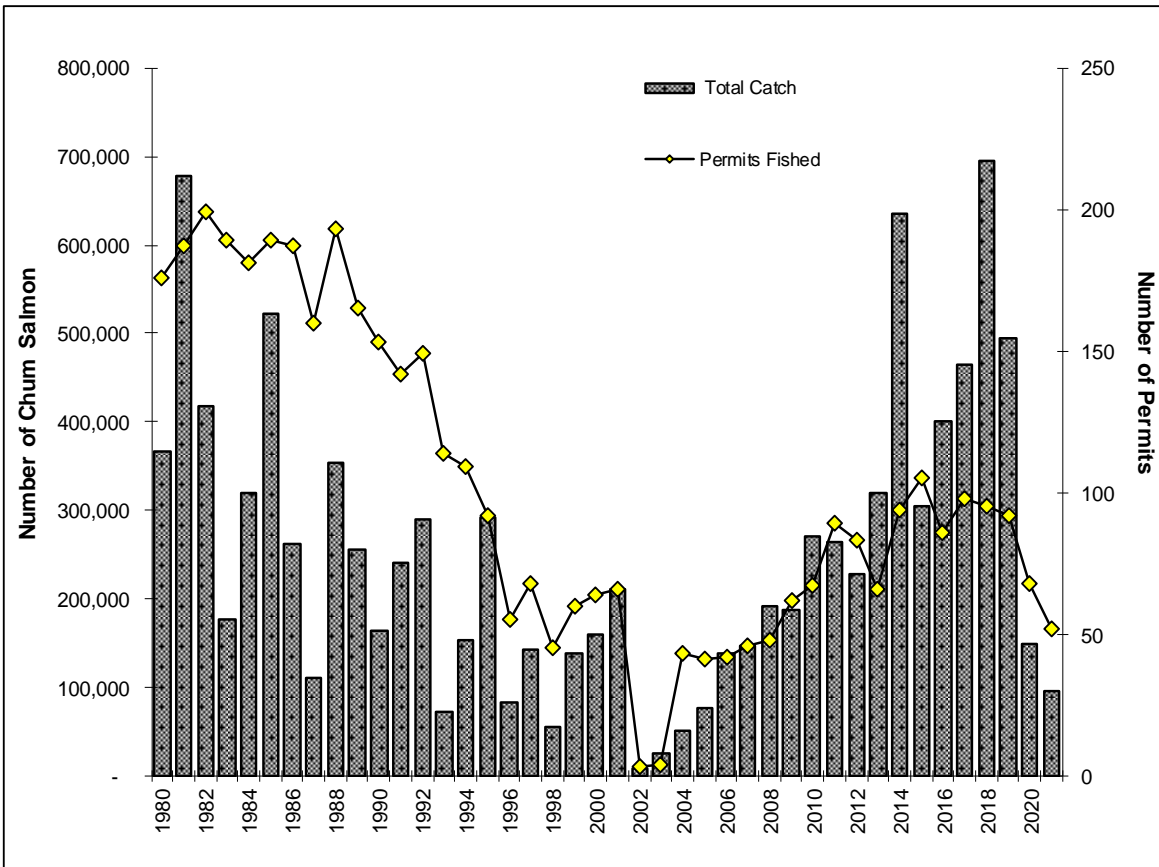


Figure 1.—Kotzebue District commercial chum salmon harvest and number of permits fished, 1980 - 2021.