

Harvest 45.6 million statewide

# Salmon catch down from '85

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Commercial salmon harvests statewide appear to be down this year compared to last year, but officials of the Alaska Department of Fish and Game say it's too early to tell yet how serious the decline will be.

"I don't think it's cause for concern," said Ken Florey, regional supervisor for the department's Commercial Fisheries Division in Anchorage.

He attributed the reduction to natural cycles of the fish.

The harvest of all species of salmon statewide by July 26 was 45.6 million salmon, compared to 55.6 million salmon at the same time last year, according to Michael Dean, department fisheries information officer in Juneau.

Dean said the pre-season salmon catch forecast for this year was 138 million fish. The season harvest last

year was 144.6 million fish.

Both Florey and Dean said one of the bigger concerns for commercial fishing in the state is that the department's 15 percent budget cut will translate to a decrease of \$2.7 million in the budget. They said that means fish may have to be managed more conservatively next year than before.

Dean said the decrease of about 10 million salmon harvested so far this year compared to last year is mostly due to a decrease of sockeye in the Bristol Bay region.

The low return is a particular problem in the Kvichak River, which he attributed to the five-year cycle of the fish.

In Southeast, the sockeye harvest is showing some of the weakest returns since 1975, Dean said. The harvest currently is about 358,000 fish. In

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# Salmon harvest declines, prices soar from '85 level

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Prince William Sound, the harvest is going well with a catch of 1.2 million fish, he added.

Dean said in Upper Cook Inlet the pre-season forecast was for a harvest of 4.2 million fish, and the harvest so far is slightly more than 4 million.

In the Kodiak area, the harvest of 1.3 million sockeye is one of the best since the early 1940s, he said.

As for the pink salmon harvest, Dean said the southern Southeast purse seine districts are having strong harvests of the early run pink salmon returns.

Pink salmon returns to the northern Southeast region, however, are very weak now, Dean said.

Returns also seem to be slow in developing in the Prince William Sound area, with only 2.4 million salmon caught and fishing three days a week. Last year, in Prince William Sound the fishery for pinks was five days a week.

Kodiak currently has a pink salmon harvest of around 6.1 million fish, where fishermen were harvesting

about 700,000 pinks a day and have been continuously fishing since mid-July.

"They are expecting a season harvest of around 15.7 million pinks," Dean said.

In the Bristol Bay region, the pink salmon harvest is projected to be about 2 million fish, but Dean said little interest has been expressed by processors and fishermen at this time and that the run is somewhat late.

Dean said the southern Peninsula pink run has been slow in developing, but the harvest is projected to be 6.4 million fish.

In the Lower Yukon River, the harvest produced about 96,000 pink salmon and about 669,000 summer chums, Dean said.

"The fishery has been closed for a period of time as fall chum start to enter the river," he said. "However, it appears that fair numbers of fall chum salmon are present in the river, and a very limited fishery to assess run strength may be allowed."

Dean said in the Kuskokwim area,

the Kuskokwim River had a weak Chinook return this year, but that fishermen had harvested a fair number of sockeye and that a good return of chum salmon was expected.

Dean said the Quinhagak and Kuskokwim River districts have been closed due to lagging escapement into the various area river systems and probably will re-open to coho fishing in early August.

In the Norton Sound area, the harvest has been slow, Dean said, except for the Golovin District area where fishermen caught a record 69,725 chum salmon. And in the Kotzebue area, he said fishermen have had good catches since the opening July 10.

"However, the early portion of the chum runs have been mainly 5-year-old fish, and a declining catch per unit of effort during the current fishing period indicates a declining chum run at present and a weakness of age 4 chums returning to the area."

Dean said prices appear quite favorable throughout the state early in

the season. Sockeye last year in Bristol Bay brought 81 cents a pound, compared to \$1.50 this year.

"Sockeye prices also have increased to high levels of \$1.20 to \$1.50 throughout the other major sockeye producing areas in the state," he said.

Dean said for pinks, however, factors such as large carryovers from the last several years have lowered the price to around 15 cents a pound, compared to about 20 to 25 cents a pound last year.