

Predicts Fish Harvest

JUNEAU — The Department of Fish and Game is predicting a statewide commercial salmon harvest of 37.8 million fish in 1976. If realized, the catch would be an increase of about 12 million over last year and the highest since 1971.

Steve Pennoyer, senior research biologist for the department, told the Board of Fisheries meeting in Juneau Dec. 2 that while the fisheries are still suffering from the effects of the severe winters of 1970-1971 and 1971-1972, improvements in a number of areas are possible this coming season.

Pennoyer cited the pink salmon fishery at Kodiak and the pink and chum salmon runs in Prince William Sound as examples of fisheries showing recovery because of adequate escapement and good stream-bed survival.

The Prince William Sound forecast, for example, projects an allowable harvest of 5.2 million pink salmon and a chum harvest of 2.8 million. Even if the 1976 chum run is in the lower part of the forecast range, it will still be the largest on record for the Prince William Sound area.

The Department of Fish and Game is predicting a harvest

of about 10.1 million pink salmon in the Kodiak area out of a run that could total about 12.9 million fish. Fishermen harvested about 2.9 million pinks at Kodiak in 1975.

The forecasts predict harvestable returns of sockeye salmon in all Bristol Bay systems except the Snake River. A harvest of about 5.1 million fish should be possible out of the projected sockeye run of 12 million. Nushagak district pink salmon harvests are expected to total about 2.2 million fish.

A small pink salmon harvest is expected in southern Cook Inlet and the Chignik fishery probably will be limited.

Extremely low pink salmon are expected in Southeastern Alaska with virtually no harvests expected.

A total run of 5.6 million pinks is predicted for Southeastern Alaska and unless the returns are stronger than expected, all or most of the fish will be needed for escapement, Pennoyer said.

Returns of chum, chinook, sockeye and coho salmon are expected to be about average in Southeastern Alaska.

"But if the factors which weakened the 1975 runs of chum, sockeye and coho influence the 1976 return, runs of these species could also be less than anticipated," Pennoyer said.

The extremely cold winters of 1970-1971 and 1971-1972 are believed to be the major factor causing the currently depressed salmon runs throughout much of Alaska.

The Board of Fisheries is meeting in Juneau to consider proposed changes in the sport, commercial and subsistence fishing regulations.