

# Kenai River Late-Run Sockeye Salmon Escapement Record 2000-2021

Year	In-river Goal <sup>1</sup>	In-river Goal	Goal	Sonar	Number fish	Total	Number fish	Total
	Lower end	Upper end	Midpoint <sup>2</sup>	Count	Over Midpoint	Pounds	Over Upper End	Pounds
2000	600,000	850,000	725,000	624,578				
2001	600,000	850,000	725,000	650,036				
2002	750,000	950,000	850,000	957,924	107,924	647,544	7,924	47,544
2003	750,000	950,000	850,000	1,181,309	331,309	1,987,854	231,309	1,387,854
2004	850,000	1,100,000	975,000	1,385,981	410,981	2,465,886	285,981	1,715,886
2005	850,000	1,100,000	975,000	1,376,452	401,452	2,408,712	276,452	1,658,712
2006	750,000	950,000	850,000	1,499,692	649,692	3,898,152	549,692	3,298,152
2007	750,000	950,000	850,000	867,572	17,572	105,432		
2008	650,000	850,000	750,000	614,946				
2009	650,000	850,000	750,000	745,170				
2010	750,000	950,000	850,000	970,662	120,662	723,972	20,662	123,972
2011	1,100,000	1,350,000	1,225,000	1,599,217	374,217	2,245,302	249,217	1,495,302
2012	1,100,000	1,350,000	1,225,000	1,581,555	356,555	2,139,330	231,555	1,389,330
2013	1,000,000	1,200,000	1,100,000	1,359,893	259,893	1,559,358	159,893	959,358
2014	1,000,000	1,200,000	1,100,000	1,520,340	420,340	2,522,040	320,340	1,922,040
2015	1,000,000	1,200,000	1,100,000	1,709,051	609,051	3,654,306	509,051	3,054,306
2016	1,100,000	1,350,000	1,225,000	1,383,692	158,692	952,152	33,692	202,152
2017	1,100,000	1,300,000	1,200,000	1,308,498	108,498	650,988	8,498	50,988
2018	900,000	1,100,000	1,000,000	1,035,761	35,761	214,566		
2019	1,000,000	1,300,000	1,150,000	1,848,157	698,157	4,188,942	548,157	3,288,942
2020	1,000,000	1,200,000	1,100,000	1,814,252	714,252	4,285,512	614,252	3,685,512
2021	1,000,000	1,200,000	1,100,000	2,441,825	1,341,825	8,050,950	1,241,825	7,450,950
				<b>TOTALS<sup>3</sup></b>	<b>7,116,833</b>	<b>42,700,998</b>	<b>3,432,474</b>	<b>31,731,000</b>
			<b>Lost Ex-Vessel Value (averaged At \$2.00/lb)</b>			<b>\$ 85,401,996</b>		<b>\$ 63,462,000</b>
			<b>Lost First Wholesale Value</b>			<b>\$ 170,803,992</b>		<b>\$ 126,924,000</b>

<sup>1</sup> In-river goals include amount allocated for in-river harvesters. Goal ranges and sonar counts are taken from ADF&G season summaries.

<sup>2</sup> The midpoint of the goal range is the goal. The midpoint now far exceeds the Maximum Sustainable Yield (MSY) goal for the Kenai, which is 800,000.

<sup>3</sup> The totals show the range of sockeye salmon harvest that was wasted by ADFG; and the lost income to harvesters and processors. The values don't include any multiplier effects to the region or tax revenues to the state. The increased losses over the last three years are the direct result of Dunleavy Administration policies.



# Opinion: Special interest hit piece unfairly targets Southeast fisheries

I was disappointed by what I consider to be a targeted attack on Southeast Alaska salmon fisheries.

Friday, January 14, 2022 12:00pm **OPINION**

**By Doug Vincent-Lang**

A report on interceptions of British Columbia salmon in Southeast Alaska salmon fisheries was publicly released on Tuesday by Canadian environmental groups.

Many Pacific salmon stocks are highly migratory and often travel across state and international borders. Several stocks migrate into Alaska's waters to take advantage of the rich marine environment in coastal Southeast Alaska and the Gulf of Alaska

where they feed and grow before starting their journey back to their natal streams to spawn. Our quality habitat allows these salmon to thrive and return healthy to their natal streams to renew their life cycle.

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On their return voyage, these highly migratory salmon are subject to a multitude of fisheries which are managed under the auspices of the Pacific Salmon Treaty. The Pacific Salmon Treaty is a conservation-based international agreement between the United States and Canada to carry out their salmon fisheries and enhancement programs so as to “prevent over-fishing and provide for optimum production of salmon resources and to ensure that both countries receive benefits equal to the production of salmon originating in their waters”.

It is common knowledge that Alaska harvests salmon that originate from rivers outside the state just as British Columbia harvests salmon that originate in Alaska, Washington, Oregon, and Idaho. This is precisely why there is a Treaty in place.

The Alaska Department of Fish and Game manages Southeast Alaska salmon fisheries consistent with the Pacific Salmon Treaty, Magnuson Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act, Endangered Species Act, Marine Mammal Protection Act, and State of Alaska policies and regulations such as the State’s precautionary Policy for the Management of Sustainable Salmon Fisheries. The ADF&G carefully monitors catches and escapements inseason to make sure fisheries are in compliance with all of these policies including the terms of the Pacific Salmon Treaty and managed to sustain salmon populations into the future.

Southeast Alaska has the most robust and comprehensive stock and fishery assessment program on the Pacific seaboard. This includes high fishery sampling rates, scientifically defensible escapement monitoring programs, and juvenile salmon wild tagging programs. The latter is rare on the Pacific coast and the data provide rare and valuable insights into freshwater and marine survival as well as greater precision on where and when stocks are caught. And these data are publicly available with most of it available in real-time.

I was disappointed by what I consider to be a targeted attack on Southeast Alaska salmon fisheries by these special interest groups. I take our obligations to fulfill treaty commitments seriously. Moreover, I find the timing of the release of this report to be suspect as it coincides with on-going Pacific Salmon Treaty meetings. The summary comments were subjective and one-sided and appear to be designed to derail Pacific Salmon Treaty talks.

- *Doug Vincent-Lang is commissioner of the Alaska Department of Fish and Game.*

# Dunleavy administration enters court fight alongside feds to keep Cook Inlet fishing grounds closed

By Elwood Brehmer, Alaska Journal of Commerce

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A commercial salmon fishing boat heads out of the Kenai River toward Cook Inlet on Sunday, June 16, 2019. (Matt Tunseth / ADN)

Alaska Gov. Mike Dunleavy's administration will be fighting in court to keep much of Cook Inlet closed to commercial salmon fishing after a federal judge approved the state's request to intervene in a lawsuit over the fishery.

U.S. District Court of Alaska Judge Josh Kindred granted the state's motion Jan. 6 to join the National Marine Fisheries Service as a defendant in suits filed last fall by the United Cook Inlet Drift Association and individual fishermen in an attempt to force the agency to reopen the federal waters of central Cook Inlet to salmon fishing this coming season.



Often referred to as the EEZ — an abbreviation for its formal name, the exclusive, economic zone — the area currently closed by federal regulations this year covers all of the waters beyond 3 miles offshore in central Cook Inlet. Fishing would still be allowed in state waters up to the 3-mile line.

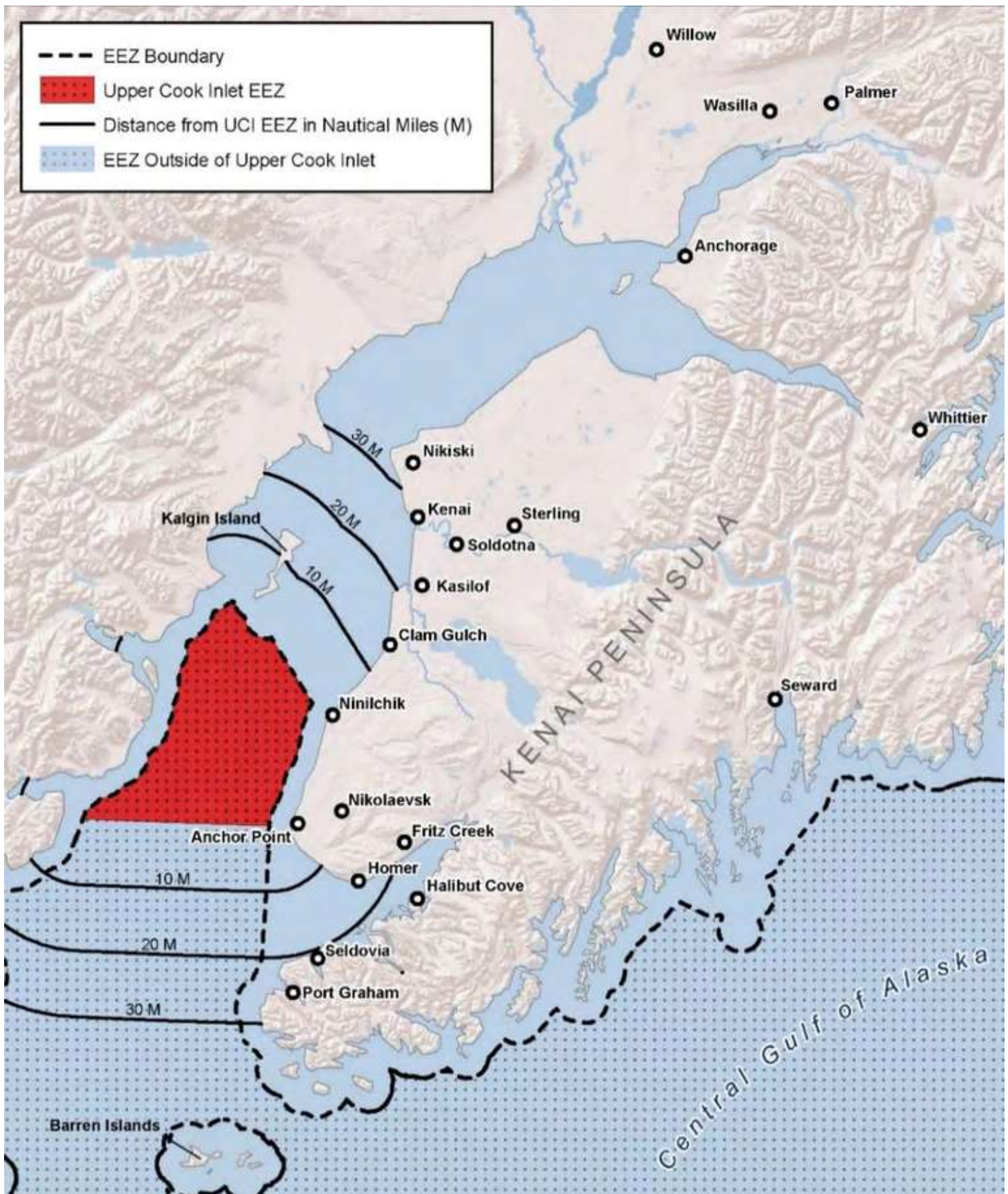
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*[Previous coverage: [Fisheries council shuts down commercial salmon fishing in Cook Inlet federal waters](#)]*

Intervening in the consolidated lawsuits also puts the state in the odd legal circumstance of arguing alongside the federal government in court to prevent what Dunleavy administration officials insist would be a gross example of federal overreach.

State attorneys wrote in their intervening motion that if UCIDA were to win their suit, “Alaska would face the prospect of NMFS being forced by judicial order to manage fisheries in Alaska’s sovereign waters, and without the preemption procedure required by the (Magnuson-Stevens Act).”



The federal waters of upper Cook Inlet, also known as the Cook Inlet EEZ, are seen in red. (NMFS)

At issue is not just what boundaries will be placed on the Inlet fleet, but likely the fate of the otherwise viable, productive fishery, according to UCIDA President David Martin.

“If the EEZ is closed, basically commercial fishing in Cook Inlet is going to be put out of business,” Martin said.

The offshore area extending north from roughly Anchor Point accounts for roughly 20% of the total Cook Inlet salmon harvest and nearly half of the drift gillnet fleet’s catch, according to a North Pacific Fishery Management Council analysis of the fishery.

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The council voted in December 2020 to close the Cook Inlet EEZ to commercial salmon fishing after state officials would not agree to the terms of co-management of the Inlet’s



salmon runs or federal oversight presented to them — an attempt to comply with a 9th Circuit Court of Appeals ruling in a prior lawsuit by UCIDA.

Commercial fishing in the EEZ remained open last year as the council went through the process to finalize the rule, which happened in November.

The 2015 ruling directed the council to draft a fishery management plan for Cook Inlet salmon that covered the entire range of the highly transient species. A prior plan delegated management authority over the EEZ to the state, which spurred UCIDA's first lawsuit.

Salmon management has largely been deferred to the state, in part because the species is managed by escapement goals in the rivers, which are in state jurisdiction.

Fish and Game manages salmon returns to a variety of rivers and oversees subsistence, sport, commercial, and personal use fisheries throughout the basin. That's gotten more complicated over the past few decades as the populations of Anchorage, the Kenai Peninsula, and the Mat-Su have grown, personal-use fisheries have been established, and sport fisheries have become major economic drivers for tourism.

*[Dunleavy announces members of new fisheries bycatch task force]*

Fish and Game officials told the council in 2020 that closing the EEZ might lead to a decline in the drift fleet's harvest, but the variable nature of salmon fishing made it difficult to quantify the likely impacts.

Martin questioned whether the two processors still operating on the Kenai Peninsula would open if the EEZ remains closed this year.

"It's the state systematically putting the Cook Inlet commercial fisheries out of business," he said.

A spokesman for Dunleavy said the administration couldn't comment on the situation while the lawsuit is pending.

Agreeing to close off a large portion of the drift fleet's fishing grounds is the latest, and likely the most dramatic, step taken by state regulators under Dunleavy to squeeze commercial fishing in the Inlet, Martin said, whether it's the drifters or east side setnetters. Both groups primarily target sockeye bound for the Kenai and Kasilof rivers.

The Kenai River Sportfishing Association was the only group to support the original proposal to shut down commercial fishing in the EEZ when it was before the council.

KRSA founder Bob Penney donated more than \$350,000 to a political group that supported Dunleavy's 2018 campaign for governor. Penney's grandson, Clark Penney, was also issued a since canceled no-bid contract to work on projects for the state's development bank in the months after Dunleavy took office.

The Board of Fisheries also took several steps at its 2020 Upper Cook Inlet meeting to increase in-river objectives for salmon runs on the Inlet's major river systems and limit the likelihood for commercial fishermen to catch king and coho salmon, citing the need to conserve some stocks and the desire to increase sport fishing opportunities for others.

The drift fleet was down to about 250 permits last year, down from a historic peak of nearly 570 participants, according to Martin.

Fish and Game Deputy Commissioner Rachel Baker, the state's representative on the council, acknowledged the situation has put the state in somewhat of an odd position but insisted department officials were faced with two bad options. The challenges of Cook

Inlet salmon management were further exemplified by the fact that it took the council nearly six years — right up to its deadline — to reach a decision, she said.

The structure of NMFS oversight for management delegated to the state would have interfered with the way the state manages salmon fisheries to the point that “it just wouldn’t work,” Baker said. “We just couldn’t live by those requirements, frankly.”

The other alternatives dictated to the state created inefficient and duplicative management structures led by NMFS, an agency with no salmon management experience, according to Baker.

“The court didn’t mandate how the council or the National Marine Fisheries Service or the state would manage the Cook Inlet EEZ, all the court order said was that the council’s fishery management plan for salmon had to somehow include the Cook Inlet EEZ,” she said.

Baker also stressed that state officials understand the importance of commercial salmon fishing to the Kenai Peninsula’s economy and way of life. More than 75% of Cook Inlet permit holders are area residents based on state permit data, one of the highest rates of local participation among the state’s major salmon fisheries.

“I don’t think any of us are glad we ended up here,” she said. “It was just a series of very unfortunate events.”

Martin said the drifters just want the state to follow the law.

“The Magnuson-Stevens Act has the 10 national standards on how fish are supposed to be managed. We would like the state to manage it but under the legal guidelines of Magnuson and other applicable laws,” said Martin. “They said they don’t want to do it.”

Judge Kindred also agreed to an expedited hearing schedule on Jan. 6 in an attempt to resolve the case before the late June start to the Cook Inlet sockeye season, but not on quite as quick of a timeline as the fishing group requested.

Kindred scheduled oral arguments in the case for April 15, with a decision following “as soon as practicable, but not later than June 20, 2022,” the scheduling order states.

UCIDA had requested the April 15 hearing date but also asked for a ruling deadline of May 15.

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