

ALASKA DEPARTMENT OF FISH AND GAME

DIVISION OF COMMERCIAL FISHERIES

NEWS RELEASE



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2016 Arctic-Yukon-Kuskokwim Herring Outlook

This news release is to inform fishermen of projected herring biomass and GHGs in the Arctic-Yukon-Kuskokwim (AYK) Region in 2016. At this time, it is anticipated that commercial herring fishing will occur in Norton Sound District for a small amount of bait. There has been very minimal commercial fishing in the AYK Region since 2006 because of a lack of markets. Under the *Bering Sea Herring Fishery Management Plan 5 AAC 27.060*, commercial fishing will not open in a district unless the minimum threshold biomass is observed in that district. Since all preseason projected biomass thresholds have been exceeded, commercial fishing may occur in any of the AYK districts unless inseason biomass assessments show that the thresholds will not be met.

The 2016 AYK herring forecast and guideline harvest levels (GHLs), given a maximum 20% exploitation rate of the projected biomass, are listed below for the northeastern Bering Sea herring stocks (Table 1). The 2016 estimated spawning biomass for northeastern Bering Sea herring stocks (Security Cove to Norton Sound districts) is 72,748 short tons and the total allowable harvest is 14,148 short tons. Based on previous years, only a small portion of the total allowable harvest is anticipated to be taken in 2016.

In previous years, the AYK region herring biomass projection was based on an age-structured assessment (ASA) model. The ASA model requires age composition information, harvest data, and good aerial survey biomass estimates from each of the northeastern Bering Sea stocks. Test fishing projects and aerial surveys were not conducted in any of the AYK herring districts in 2015, and these data have been severely limited since 2006. Data deficiencies make it impossible to continue using the ASA model to project herring biomass. The 2016 projected biomass is an average of the long-term (1981–2014) biomass estimates from “good” (rating 3 or higher) aerial surveys in AYK districts. The actual biomass observed in 2016 may fall above or below the preseason projections given that herring experience annual fluctuations in survival and recruitment rates.

2016 Management Strategies

The department will monitor catch statistics inseason if commercial fishing occurs. Given current resources available, it is unlikely the department will be able to conduct aerial surveys or test fishing projects for herring. Commercial fishery openings may be adjusted according to inseason

assessments of herring biomass. In accordance with the AYK Region harvest strategy, any operational commercial fishery will not target newly recruited age classes (age-2 through age-5 herring). The duration of fishing periods will vary in each district depending on inseason biomass estimates, roe quality, spawning activity, weather conditions, fishing effort, and processor input.

Kuskokwim and Cape Romanzof Districts

A commercial fishery is not anticipated in 2016 given the lack of a buyer.

Norton Sound District

The 2016 projected biomass for the Norton Sound District is 35,355 tons which surpasses the minimum biomass threshold of 7,000 tons. A 20% exploitation rate would result in a guideline harvest of 7,071 tons. The allocation for the herring pound spawn-on-kelp fishery may not be more than 320 tons leaving 6,751 tons of the guideline harvest remaining (5 AAC 27.965 (d)). Additionally, the spawn-on-kelp guideline harvest is no more than 90 tons of product (combined weight of herring roe and kelp; 5 AAC 27.965 (e)). The beach seine harvest is allocated 10% of the sac roe projected harvest, or 675 tons (5 AAC 27.960 (a)). The 2016 herring fishery will be opened by emergency order and the fishery will close by emergency order when up to 20% of the available herring biomass has been harvested. Varied harvest rates may be applied to individual subdistricts based on biomass distribution, roe quality, weather, and sea ice conditions.

Table 1. Projections of Pacific herring spawning biomass and GHGs for commercial fishing districts in the northeastern Bering Sea, Alaska, 2016.

District	Threshold (short tons)	2016 Projected Biomass (short tons)	Exploitation Rate (%)	2016 Harvest Guideline (short tons)
Security Cove	1,200	6,980	20	1,396
Goodnews Bay	1,200	7,448	20	1,490
Cape Avinof ^a	500	4,189	15	628
Nelson Island ^b	3,000	9,258	20	1,652
Nunivak Island	1,500	3,712	20	742
Cape Romanzof	1,500	5,843	20	1,169
Norton Sound ^c	7,000	35,355	20	7,071
Totals		72,748		14,148

^a Cape Avinof commercial harvest is 15% of projected biomass (5 AAC 27.895(a)).

^b Nelson Island commercial harvest is 20% of projected biomass minus 200 tons for subsistence harvest (5 AAC 27.895 (d)).

^c See Norton Sound District management strategies for more details on GHG allocations (5 AAC 27.960).