

Subject: Salmon season forecast optimistic

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While trollers in Southeast Alaska provide king salmon to markets nearly year round (their spring fishery got under way April 25), it is the runs of reds and kings to the famous Copper River that mark the start. The state has set May 16 as the opener there, three days later than last year.

The Copper River forecast calls for a catch of 1.2 million sockeyes, 9,000 kings and 293,000 cohos this season. Fishermen hope the catch will come in on target, unlike last year when Copper River catches were well below the 10-year average. Last year's sockeye catch, for example, was 636,000, about half of what was expected.

Overall, last year's statewide catch of 171 million salmon was valued at \$534 million at the dock, the best showing in 18 years. State managers predict even better catches this year -- nearly 204 million fish. If projections prove true, it will be the fifth-largest harvest on record.

The boost stems from a projected pink catch topping 133 million fish, about 25 percent higher than last year. All major pink salmon regions -- Prince William Sound, Kodiak and Southeast -- are expected to produce abundant humpy harvests.

Projected catches are up for other salmon species as well: sockeye, the big money fish, 45 million; coho, 4.6 million; and chums, nearly 20 million (it would be the fifth-best since 1960). For kings, a catch just shy of 122,000 is expected in areas outside of Southeast Alaska, where a treaty with Canada dictates the number that can be taken. The Southeast chinook catch for all users is pegged at just under 295,000 fish, 73,000 more than last year.

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