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PRESS RELEASE

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UPPER SUBDISTRICT SET GILLNET GEAR REDUCTION OPTIONS FOR 2019

The *Kenai River Late-Run King Salmon Management Plan* was developed to ensure the achievement of the Kenai River late-run king salmon sustainable escapement goal while providing reasonable harvest opportunity for all stakeholders. The plan directs the department to reduce the total number of hours the Upper Subdistrict set gillnet fishery is allowed to be opened each week if the Kenai River sport fishery is restricted to no-bait or to no-bait and no-retention. Furthermore, when the sport fishery is restricted to fishing with no bait, the plan allows the department to further restrict the set gillnet fishery by reducing the amount of gear allowed to be fished.

Under that provision, set gillnet gear may be restricted to one of the following options:

- (1) four set gillnets that are each not more than 35 fathoms in length, 105 fathoms in aggregate length, and 29 meshes in depth, or two set gillnets that are each not more than 35 fathoms in length and 45 meshes in depth; or
- (2) two set gillnets that are each not more than 35 fathoms in length and 29 meshes in depth or one set gillnet that is not more than 35 fathoms in length and 45 meshes in depth.

The outlook for the late run of Kenai River king salmon in 2019 is well below average, with a large fish (≥ 75 cm METF) forecast of approximately 21,746 fish. The 2019 forecasted total run of large fish approximates the mid-point of the large fish sustainable escapement goal (SEG) of 13,500 to 27,000 fish. If the run performs as forecast, it is unlikely the SEG would be achieved if commercial sport, and personal use fisheries were prosecuted without any restrictions. Given the tendency to over forecast runs in periods of low productivity, it is likely the inriver fishery will begin in July with no bait. That decision will be made in June as the department assesses the performance of June king salmon runs throughout Cook Inlet.

In compliance with the *Kenai River Late-Run King Salmon Management Plan*, for the 2019 fishing season, if the Kenai River king salmon sport fishery is restricted to no bait, the Department intends to implement the set gillnet gear reduction options found in the *Kenai River Late-Run King Salmon Management Plan*. We are providing this intent now to allow fishermen time to modify their fishing strategies and gear. Please call Brian Marston for questions regarding the commercial fishery or Colton Lipka for questions regarding the sport fishery.