

Copper River Prince William Sound Salmon Harvest Task Force

AGENDA

Monday, April 15, 2024 @ 1pm

The Cordova Center + [ZOOM](#)

Meeting ID: 835 2918 3454

1. Call to Order - *Chair, Bret Bradford, Copper River Prince William Sound Marketing Association*
2. Roll Call - Cordova Center + Zoom
3. Chair announcements
4. Action: Approve meeting agenda
5. Action: Approve Fall 2023 meeting minutes (pp. 1-6)
6. Action: Eliminate annual processor seat ex-officio rotations
7. Action: Recognize 2024 SHTF member roster (p. 7)
8. Updates, Reports, Outlooks (*Each followed by a brief Q&A from Task Force Members Only*)
 - a. Upriver Management - *Mark Somerville*
 - b. Gillnet Management - *Jeremy Botz*
 - c. Seine Management - *Heather Scannell*
 - d. PWSAC - *Geoff Clark*
 - e. VFDA - *Mike Wells* (pp. 9-10)
9. Review of Fall 2023 Adopted Recommendations (p. 8)
10. New Recommendations
 - a. Gillnet
 - i. CDFU: Recommendation to limit time and area in the Port Chalmers Subdistrict to allow passage of Esther Chum for Cost Recovery and Brood Stock collection.
 - ii. NVE: Recommendation for the inside chinook closure area to be open to subsistence unless other fisheries have already been restricted first.
 - iii. Other
 - iv. Action: Approve slate or individual gillnet recommendations, roll call vote
 - b. Seine
 - i. CDFU: Recommendation for ADFG to explore taking a female percentage when doing odolith samples to help separate run timing of wild vs hatchery stock.

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- ii. Other
 - iii. Action: Approve slate or individual seine recommendations, roll call vote
11. Public Comment (3 minute limit per person)
 12. Calendar 2025
 13. Closing Task Force Member comments
 14. Closing Chair Announcements
 15. Adjourn

Copper River Prince William Sound Salmon Harvest Task Force

MINUTES

October 3, 2023 @ 10am

Minutes taken from the meeting audio recording, available at www.cdfu.org/shtf-meeting.

1. Call to Order - Chair, Thea Thomas, Copper River Prince William Sound Marketing Association
10:02am (Recording 15:15)
2. Roll Call (16:10)
 - Cordova Center:
 - Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ex-officio)
 - Heather Scannel
 - Jenni Morella
 - Jeremy Botz
 - Mark Somerville
 - Cordova District Fishermen United - Gillnet seat
 - Phyllis Shirron
 - Cordova District Fishermen United - Seine seat
 - Jeff Bailey
 - Copper River & Prince William Sound Marketing Association
 - Christa Hoover
 - Prince William Sound Aquaculture Corporation
 - Geoff Clark
 - Valdez Fisheries Development Association
 - Mike Wells
 - Prince William Sound Setnet Association
 - Forest Jenkins
 - Native Village of Eyak
 - John Whissel
 - Task Force members present on Zoom but not identified during Roll Call:
 - OBI Seafoods
 - Ben Kirk
 - Trident Seafoods
 - Leo Vargas
3. Approve meeting agenda (19:00)
Motion to approve the agenda. John Whissel / second Jeff Bailey. Unanimous. Motion carries.
4. Approve Fall 2023 meeting minutes (19:30)
Motion to approve the fall 2023 meeting minutes. John Whissel / second Phyllis Shirron.
Unanimous. Motion carries.

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5. Updates, Reports, Outlooks (20:50)

- Jenni Morella, ADFG provided a preliminary outlook on PWS Herring stock assessment (21:30).
- Mark Somerville, ADFG provided an upriver management report (35:00).
Task force members asked Mr. Somerville follow up questions. (40:45)
 - Thea Thomas asked about subsistence fishery above the bridge and shift of fishwheels to dipnets. Mr. Somerville issued 931 for dipnetting (drop from 1,200 in 2022) and 237 for fishwheels (313 in 2022; lowest number of permits issued since 1980's).
 - Phyllis Shirron asked about whether sport predictions for king harvests are meeting or exceeding expectations. Mr. Somerville doesn't form expectations until the size of run and he tends to plan a little higher. Ms. Shirron also asked whether "local" subsistence permits is Alaskans, or Chitina/Basin residents. Mark defined as local, mixed of dipnets and fishwheels.
 - John Whissel asked if PU was below the bridge. Mr. Somerville defined federal subsistence below the bridge as 75 permits.
 - Jeff Bailey asked if "local" was a specific user group of subsistence. Mr. Somerville said no.
- Jeremy Botz provided a gillnet management report (48:30).
[John Renner of the Copper River Prince William Sound Advisory Committee joined via Zoom]
Task force members asked follow ups of Mr. Botz's presentation (55:00).
 - John Renner asked Mr. Botz whether there were restrictions on the coho sport fishery. Mr. Botz described the longstanding practices of management and what different periods could look like depending on run strength.
 - John Whissel asked whether management could detect low abundance and manage to nuances of data sets. Mr. Botz spoke to the 2013 run.
 - Thea Thomas asked about new trend of more kings harvested upriver than downriver. Mr. Botz described commercial management and inriver data. Ms. Thomas asked whether kings are coming in later. Mr. Botz agreed; Jenni Morella described the mid-point and observations of a later run.
 - Jeff Bailey suggested that coho management should be adjusted to escapement for later runs. Mr. Botz spoke to being tasked with representative escapement and conservative strategies.

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- John Renner asked why a difference in Controller Bay this year being shut down. Mr. Botz described surveys and concurrent Copper management and tracking. Mr. Renner asked about upriver sockeye escapement. Mark Somerville responded with approximately 750K. Mr. Renner asked about other restrictions on the Copper; Mr. Botz responded no. Mr. Renner asked about the spring SHTF recommendations and whether they were followed. Mr. Botz reviewed the recommendations.
- Phyllis Shirron asked how many coho aerial surveys were planned and done. Mr. Botz planned for one a week but has four surveys. Ms. Shirron asked Jenni Morella late data affects sockeye escapement. Ms. Morella explained wild run timing curves and how they set daily counts and objectives. Ms. Shirron asked how many years or what kind of data is needed for changes to occur. Ms. Morella described how that would depend on the various approaches.
- Heather Scannell presented a seine management report (1:22:00)
Task Force members followed up with Ms. Scannell's presentation (1:26:55).
 - John Renner offered kudos on a difficult management season and provided a personal opinion.
 - Jeff Bailey described seine fleet appreciation of Ms. Scannell's management this year. Mr. Bailey also thanked CDFU for facilitating the SHTF.

The group took a break to address technical issues in the Cordova Center (1:30:00).

Reconvened at (1:38:30)

- Mike Wells presented the VFDA season report (1:38:30).
The Task Force responded to Mr. Wells' presentation (1:43:35).
 - John Renner asked about coho and whether there are AMP percentages for sport or recommended guidelines. Mr. Wells said no but that the way it's structured they are provided for sport and any surplus is open after Labor Day weekend; the commercial fleet accesses regularly in the harvest opportunity in the eastern district.
 - Jeff Bailey thanked VFDA for its consistency producing fish and adding value for commercial.
 - John Renner offered the same kudos.

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- Phyllis Shirron asked how long the VFDA/WNH collaboration has been happening. Mr. Wells thinks coho stocks were transferred in the 1990s, and tries to work collaboratively with PWSAC last 3-5 years.
 - Geoff Clark presented a PWSAC season report (1:49:30).
The Task Force responded to Mr. Clark's presentation (1:58:50).
 - John Whissel asked about the egg take goals for Gulkana. Mr. Clark responded the G2 component 1.75M (got 1.45M, early run portion); G1 35M (got 11.5M). Mr. Whissel asked specifically about cost recovery. Mr. Clark described it was less than budgeting, market conditions drastically changed by spring and caught those off guard but processors honored agreements.
 - Jeff Bailey talked about market collapse and expressed happiness that didn't affect PWSAC pre-season sales.
 - John Renner asked what can be done to get eggs at Gulkana. Mr. Clark suggested talking with Mark Somerville more. He described the challenges and questions but was transparent there aren't answers.
 - Thea Thomas asked about Main Bay cost recovery and interference with subsistence fishery. Mr. Clark didn't have a number of the times that happened but commended sport fish for making way for catcher boats.
 - Jeff Bailey asked for 2023 revenue goals. Mr. Clark responded \$16.1M with 9.3 for pink, remainder chum and sockeye
 - John Renner asked how operations would be affected if money came from another source. Mr. Clark answered no, the revenue goals are there for continued operations and brood goals.
6. New Business
- Gillnet (2:06:45)
- CDFU recommendations: Phyllis Shirron thanked PWSAC for installing buoys as sea lion deterrents at Lake Bay and thanked management for acknowledging the spring SHTF recommendations.
- To use the commercial fleet for reliable Copper River coho harvest data collection in place of unreliable aerial surveys and offering consistent, 24-hour or 36-hour commercial openers twice per week.
 - To open the inside waters at the Copper River flats for commercial fishing beginning with the first opener in May, recognizing that inside closure areas have achieved their purpose and king escapement numbers have achieved their goals.

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- For the Esther subdistrict chum fishery to be open earlier and consistently, and allow sockeye headed for Coghill to be harvested.

NVE recommendations: John Whissel

- Rescind the inside closure area for subsistence fishing on the Copper River flats.

The Task Force discussed the recommendations. Jeff Bailey requested a report for the next SHTF of all sport harvests.

Motion to accept the CDFU gillnet recommendations as written. Phyllis Shirron / second John Renner. Abstain: VFDA and PWSAC. Motion carries.

Motion to accept the NVE gillnet recommendation as written, and to increase the number of escapement enumeration projects for coho data collection on the Copper River and the delta. John Whissel / second Jeff Bailey. Abstain: VFDA and PWSAC. Motion carries.

Seine (2:41:00)

CDFU seine recommendations: Jeff Bailey again recognized Heather Scannell for her work this year.

- For PWSAC to limit their recommendations to ADFG to the subdistricts outlined in the hatchery management plan regulations.
- For PWSAC to present and use most recent data to support any recommendations put forth to ADFG: including fleet harvest, female percentages, odolith contributions, harvests by statistics area, run timing curves, estimates of run entry, and amount of fish in hatchery subdistricts to include more than just the THA and SHA.
- For PWSAC to hire a spotter pilot to help them determine run entry and estimate fish in hatchery subdistricts.
- For ADFG to capture average weights for salmon harvested, instead of tender operators.
- For PWSAC to make its recommendations public.

The Task Force discussed the recommendations.

Motion to accept the CDFU seine recommendations as written. Jeff Bailey / second John Whissel. Abstain: VFDA and PWSAC. Motion carries.

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Discussion (2:57:30)

John Whissel NVE suggested formally deconflicting subsistence fishing from cost recovery/broodstock recovery fishing at Main Bay. He plans to take to BOF in-cycle but is taking input on whether it should be an ACR. Jeremy Botz described his EO authority.

7. Public Comment (3:04:30)

- Jacob Hand commented on tender weight averages: they are fabricated and that ADFG should ignore them.
- Hayley Hoover asked ADFG what the king escapement looked like for the parent run of 2023. Mr. Botz described being within escapement goals those years. Mr. Somerville shared spawning escapements for 2018 - 42K, 2019 - 35K. Ms. Hoover asked for the parent year for 2024. Mr. Somerville: 22K.

8. Closing Task Force Member comments

- John Renner enjoyed the meeting. Concerned about commercial catch and opportunity. How do we go forward? Working together. Making recommendations that are followed. Revamping coho management.
- Phyllis Shirron thanked the department for presentations and requested in future ADFG data and presentations even from those absent.
- Jeff Bailey thanked the group for information and transparency.
- John Whissel remarked that the fall SHTF is most useful. Remarked on chinook spawning beds at 18 mile that may be developed by BLM.
- Thea Thomas thanked the Cordova Center and Kelsey Hayden for so much support. Ran over housekeeping.

9. Calendar 2024 (3:15:30)

The group calendared to align next SHTF meeting with spring Regional Planning Team.

10. Adjourn at 1:05pm. (3:18:00)

Copper River Prince William Sound Salmon Harvest Task Force

TASK FORCE MEMBERS

2024

Each organizational member casts one vote.

Camtu's Wild Alaska Seafoods

Copper River / Prince William Sound Marketing Association

Copper River Seafoods

Cordova District Fishermen United

Native Village of Eyak (NVE)

Ocean Beauty Icicle Seafoods

Peter Pan Seafoods (*ex-officio*)

Prince William Sound Aquaculture Corporation (PWSAC)

Prince William Sound / Copper River Fish & Game Advisory Committee

Prince William Sound Set Net Association

Silver Bay Seafoods (*ex-officio*)

60 North Seafoods

Trident Seafoods

Valdez Fisheries Development Association (VFDA)

Copper River Prince William Sound Salmon Harvest Task Force

ADOPTED RECOMMENDATIONS

FALL 2023

- 1) To use the commercial fleet for reliable Copper River coho harvest data collection in place of unreliable aerial surveys and offering consistent, 24-hour or 36-hour commercial openers twice per week.
- 2) To open the inside waters at the Copper River flats for commercial fishing beginning with the first opener in May, recognizing that inside closure areas have achieved their purpose and king escapement numbers have achieved their goals.
- 3) For the Esther subdistrict chum fishery to be open earlier and consistently, and allow sockeye headed for Coghill to be harvested.
- 4) To rescind the inside closure area for subsistence fishing on the Copper River flats.
- 5) To increase the number of escapement enumeration projects for coho data collection on the Copper River and the delta.
- 6) For PWSAC to limit their recommendations to ADFG to the subdistricts outlined in the hatchery management plan regulations.
- 7) For PWSAC to present and use most recent data to support any recommendations put forth to ADFG: including fleet harvest, female percentages, odolith contributions, harvests by statistics area, run timing curves, estimates of run entry, and amount of fish in hatchery subdistricts to include more than just the THA and SHA.
- 8) For PWSAC to hire a spotter pilot to help them determine run entry and estimate fish in hatchery subdistricts.
- 9) For ADFG to capture average weights for salmon harvested, instead of tender operators.
- 10) For PWSAC to make its recommendations public.

VFDA Pre-Season Report

2023 Fry Release

VFDA's spring 2023 pink salmon fry release went very well with little mortality on ponded fry. Port Valdez zooplankton abundance was adequate, more in line with the last three years, but below the five year average. A single humpback whale was observed in Port Valdez, so hatchery staff released its salmon fry using a staggered schedule to reduce the attractant of large fry groupings. No direct whale predation on fry was observed.

VFDA released approximately 261 million BY22 pink fry in two stages, as planned. The first release period occurred May 5-12 with the second release May 26-29. These dates were within the normal date range for release timing. Average weight on the first group achieved a target weight of 0.47 grams, which is above the desired target weight of 0.40 grams, but slightly under the 10-year average of 0.49 grams. The second release achieved an average weight of 0.83 grams, above the target weight of 0.80 grams but below the 10-year average of 0.89 grams. In addition, VFDA released 1.85 million BY21 Coho Salmon smolt at an average weight of 20.2 grams, which is within the target range of 18 to 20 grams.

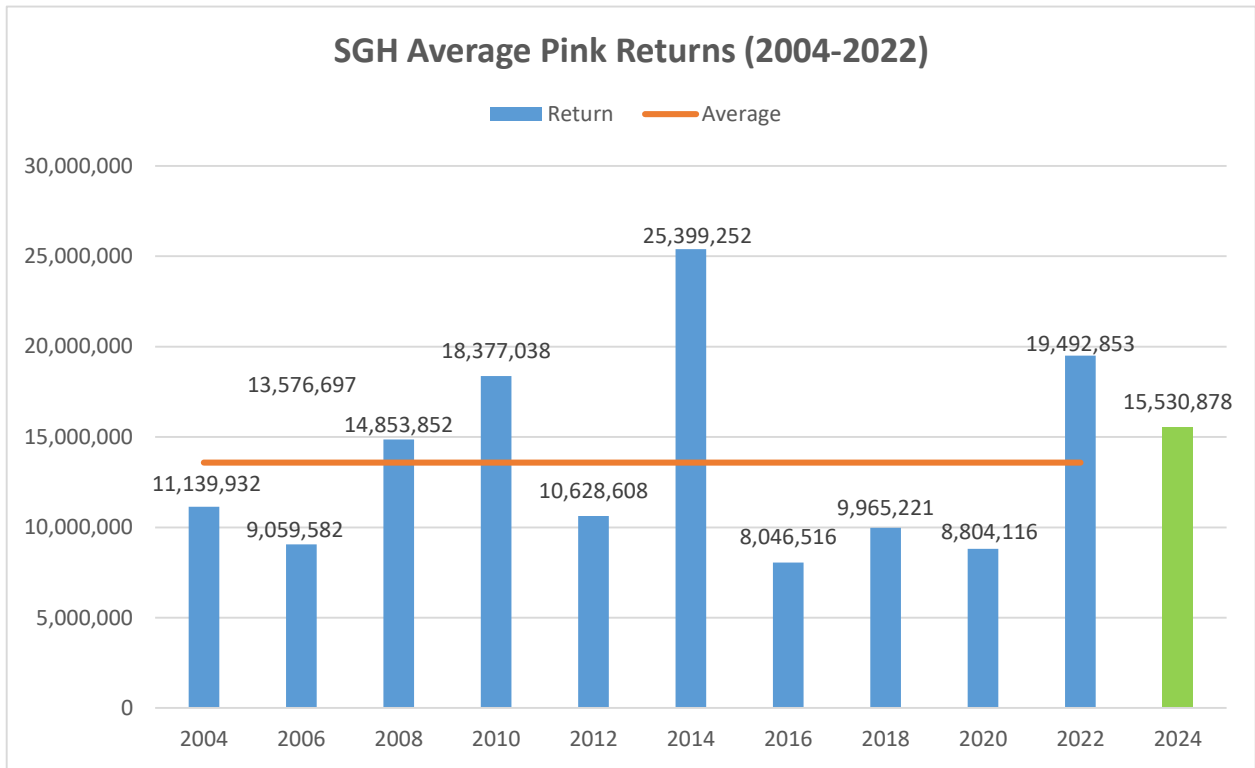
2024 Return Forecast

The forecasted Solomon Gulch Hatchery midrange pink return for 2024 is estimated to be 15.5 million fish. The ten-year, even year average return has been 13.6 million fish and the last two even year returns have averaged 14.1 million fish. The 2024 estimated return is based on an average marine survival of 5.94% over the last ten, even year returns. The coho return is forecast to be approximately 55,319 fish, based on a ten-year average marine survival of 2.99%

2024 Return Forecast Table

2024 Pink Salmon Forecast (Numbers of Fish)	Low 7,765,439	Mid 15,530,878	High 23,296,318
2024 Coho Salmon Forecast (Numbers of Fish)	Solomon Gulch 54,375		Tatitlek 944

VFDA has set a pre-season pink salmon revenue goal of approximately \$4.0 million dollars. The 2024 cost recovery goal reflects a significant reduction of approximately \$994,000 from last year's pink salmon revenue goal. VFDA requires a minimum of 408,000 pink salmon based on a 50/50 male to female ratio for brood stock. Cost recovery test fishing is expected to start in Port Valdez around June 25.



2024 Outmigration

VFDA achieved its full permitted capacity of 270 million green pink salmon eggs in 2023 and its full permitted coho egg take of 2 million eggs. In addition, VFDA supplied 3 million coho salmon eggs to PWSAC for incubation and release at its Wally Noerenberg Hatchery. Incubation conditions at the Solomon Gulch Hatchery were generally good again this year with minimal mortality for both species over the winter months. BY23 pink salmon egg take was again late due in large part to later fish ripeness. Egg takes began on August 4 and were completed on August 31. Average female percentage for egg takes was 41%, so the total number of fish needed to complete egg take was approximately 473,000. VFDA finished with an estimated surplus of 47,000 pinks harvested for raceway sales. Freshwater temperatures over the winter were more in line with historic ranges, resulting in a start of outmigration on April 1, with an anticipated completion date of April 19. Final release numbers will not be available until mid-summer, but VFDA anticipates a release of approximately 252 million pink salmon fry in late May. VFDA expects to pond approximately 1.9 million BY22 coho smolt later this spring as well.

Major Projects

VFDA completed the first phase of a major structural renovation of the Solomon Gulch incubation building last spring. The work included replacing nearly all of the incubation building roof, purlins and a significant portion of the building's exterior siding with insulated metal panels. Beginning April 15th, contractors will begin phase two, which will replace corroded interior steel columns and install seismic bracing to improve structural integrity. Total project cost is estimated to be \$3.5M with funding coming from reserves and a state fisheries enhancement loan. With this last work to be completed this summer, the core systems for raising pink salmon are ready for many more decades of production. VFDA completed engineering on several projects last year. These including the future replacement of the Solomon Gulch Creek freshwater piping, net pen mooring improvements, and brood pond earthwork. A planned Coho building replacement is waiting funding.

Please feel free to visit www.valdezfisheries.org and like us on Facebook for in-season harvest and run entry information. Good luck, and good fishing!