

**ALASKA DEPARTMENT OF FISH AND GAME
DIVISION OF COMMERCIAL FISHERIES
NEWS RELEASE**



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Arctic-Yukon-Kuskokwim Herring Outlook and Management Strategy for 2009

Projections from postseason escapement estimates suggest that the 2009 spawning biomass for northeastern Bering Sea herring stocks (Security Cove to Norton Sound Districts) will be 63,735 tons, with an anticipated allowable harvest of 12,600 tons. If the return is as expected, a small reduction in biomass will be observed in most districts. The most abundant age classes expected to occur in the herring biomass are age 7 (37%), age 5 (16%), and age 6 (13%). Age 9 and older herring are expected to comprise 29% of the returning biomass.

At this time, the department does not anticipate a commercial herring fishery in the AYK Region in 2009 because of a lack of a herring market and processor interest. Similar market conditions existed in 2008 resulting in no sac-roe harvest and a small harvest of 90 tons in Norton Sound for bait. This news release is to inform fishers of projected biomass, guideline harvest levels, and the strategies to be employed if commercial fishing does occur.

Variability in the quality of aerial survey assessments of biomass and deviations from the assumed survival or recruitment rates may result in the observed biomass being either above or below these projections. Therefore, guideline harvest levels may be adjusted during the season according to observed herring spawning biomass. If determining herring abundance using aerial survey methods is not possible, stock abundance will be assessed using information from the projected biomass, test, and commercial catches, and spawn deposition observations. In accordance with the AYK Region harvest strategy, the commercial fishery will not target newly recruited age classes (age 2 through age 5 herring). If market conditions improve, the department will work cooperatively with fishers and buyers to optimize roe recovery. In each district, the occurrence, period duration, and harvests depend on inseason biomass estimates, roe quality, spawning activity, weather conditions, fishing effort, and processor interest.

Security Cove District

The 2009 projected return to the Security Cove District is 6,442 tons. A 20% exploitation rate would result in a harvest of 1,137 tons. Commercial fishing will not be allowed until the observed biomass reaches 1,200 tons, or significant spawning activity is observed. Ages 5, 7, and 11 are

expected to comprise 50% of the returning biomass (16%, 18%, and 16%, respectively). Age 9 and older herring are expected to comprise 43 % of the biomass.

Goodnews Bay District

The management strategy for the Goodnews Bay District will be similar to that planned for Security Cove. The season will open and close by emergency order when a biomass of 1,200 tons or significant spawning activity is observed. The 2009 projected return of herring to the Goodnews Bay District is 5,736 tons. A 20% exploitation rate would result in a harvest of 1,147 tons. Ages 5, 7, and 11 herring are expected to comprise 50% the biomass (16%, 18%, and 16% respectively). Age 9 and older herring are expected to comprise 43% of the biomass.

Cape Avinof District

Either significant spawning activity or a biomass of 500 tons must be observed before the commercial herring season can be opened. The 2009 projected biomass for the Cape Avinof District is 2,251 tons. The exploitation rate will be no greater than 15% because of the limited database for this area and to ensure the subsistence fishing priority. A 15% commercial exploitation rate would result in a harvest of 338 tons. Ages 5, 7, and 11 are expected to comprise 50% of the returning biomass (16%, 18%, and 16% respectively). Age 9 and older herring are expected to comprise 43% of the biomass.

Nelson Island District

In the Bering Sea Herring Fishery Management Plan, the Alaska Board of Fisheries set a minimum biomass threshold of 3,000 tons for the Nelson Island District. The inseason estimate of herring biomass must exceed the threshold level before a commercial fishery can be allowed. The spawning biomass projected to return in 2009 to the Nelson Island District is 5,152 tons. At a total exploitation rate of 20%, minus 200 tons (6%) for subsistence harvest, the commercial harvest guideline will be 830 tons. Ages 5, 7, and 11 are expected to constitute 50% of the returning population, contributing 16%, 18%, and 16%, respectively. Age 9 and older herring are expected to comprise 43% of the biomass.

Nunivak Island District

The biomass of herring projected to return to the Nunivak Island District in 2009 is 3,141 tons. A 20% exploitation rate would result in a harvest of 628 tons. The commercial season will open when the biomass reaches 1,500 tons or when significant spawning is observed. Ages 5, 7, and 11 are expected to comprise 50% of the returning biomass (16%, 18%, and 16%, respectively). Age 9 and older herring are expected to comprise 43% of the biomass.

Cape Romanzof District

The projected biomass of herring to return to Cape Romanzof District in 2009 is expected to be 4,852 tons. At a 20% exploitation rate, the allowable harvest is expected to be 970 tons and will be based on inseason indicators of abundance. Since water turbidity in the Cape Romanzof area generally prevents aerial observations of herring, spawn deposition, test fishing and commercial catch rates, and the amount of fishing effort will be used to determine the timing and duration of

commercial fishing periods. Ages 5, 6, and 7 are expected to comprise 77% of the returning biomass (16%, 14%, and 47%, respectively). Age 9 and older herring are expected to comprise 20% of the biomass.

Norton Sound District

The biomass of herring projected to return in 2009 to Norton Sound is 36,917 tons. A 20% exploitation rate would result in a harvest guideline of 7,383 tons. A maximum of 320 tons of herring are reserved to allow for the pound fishery to harvest a maximum of 90 tons of product (combined weight of herring roe and kelp). This leaves 7,063 tons for sac roe harvest. The beach seine harvest is, by regulation, 10% of the sac roe projected harvest, or 706 tons. The 2009 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. Ages 5, 6, and 7 are expected to dominate the returning population, contributing 15%, 14%, and 46%, respectively. Age 9 and older herring are expected to comprise 22% of the biomass.

Port Clarence District

Generally, the department does not project an outlook for the Port Clarence fishery because of the lack of data for Port Clarence herring and the limited scope of the fishery. The guideline harvest of 165 tons established by the Alaska Board of Fisheries in 1981 will determine the allowable harvest in 2009. This harvest guideline is based on two years of research conducted by the department in both the Port Clarence and Kotzebue Districts. Even though this guideline has not appeared in the regulation book since 1984, it still represents the best estimate of harvestable biomass.

Table 1. Projections of Pacific herring spawning biomass and harvest guideline for commercial fishing districts in the northeastern Bering Sea, Alaska, 2009.

District	Threshold	2008 Observed Biomass (st)	2009 Projected Biomass (st)	Exploitation Rate (%)	2009 Harvest Guideline
Security Cove	1,200	6,442 ^d	5,686	20	1,137
Goodnews Bay	1,200	6,479 ^b	5,736	20	1,147
Cape Avinof	500	2,536 ^c	2,251	15	338
Nelson Island ^a	3,000	5,827 ^c	5,152	16	830
Nunivak Island	1,500	3,559 ^c	3,141	20	628
Cape Romanzof	1,500	4,998 ^c	4,852	20	970
Norton Sound	7,000	37,401 ^d	36,917	20	7,383
Port Clarence	-	-	-	-	165
Totals			63,735	20	12,600

^a Nelson Island commercial harvest is 20% of projected biomass minus 200 st for subsistence harvest.

^b Good aerial survey estimates from 2008 were used to estimate the biomass.

^c Bayesian techniques were used when both 2008 aerial survey estimates and biomass projections were unavailable.

^d Biomass projections from 2008 were available.