

State of Alaska
FY2021 Governor's Operating Budget

Department of Fish and Game
Sport Fisheries
Results Delivery Unit Budget Summary

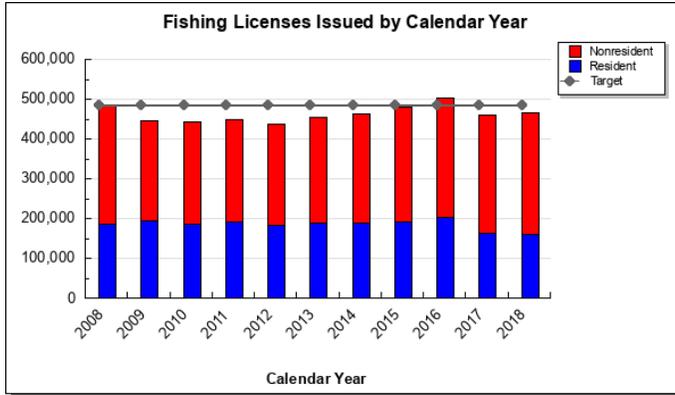
Sport Fisheries Results Delivery Unit

Contribution to Department's Mission

The mission of the Division of Sport Fish is to protect and improve the state's recreational fisheries resources.

Results

(Additional performance information is available on the web at <https://omb.alaska.gov/results>.)



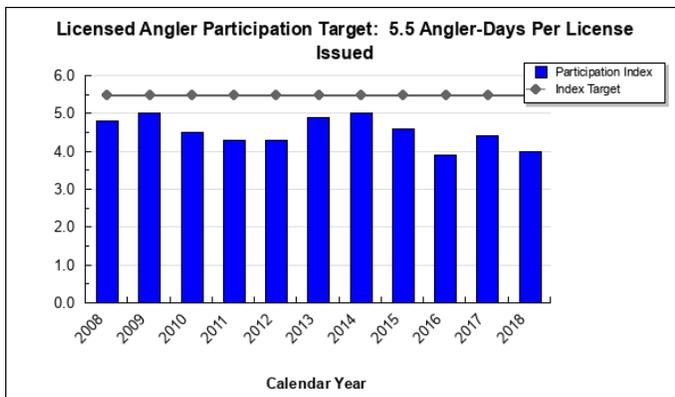
Core Services

- Manage wild fish stocks using scientifically and statistically sound research to ensure sustained use by Alaska's sport fisheries.
- Diversify and enhance sport fishing opportunities via supplemental stocking of hatchery-reared fish.

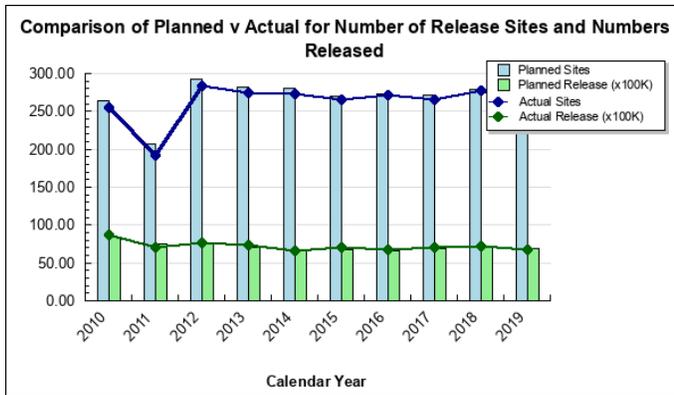
Measures by Core Service

(Additional performance information is available on the web at <https://omb.alaska.gov/results>.)

1. Manage wild fish stocks using scientifically and statistically sound research to ensure sustained use by Alaska's sport fisheries.



2. Diversify and enhance sport fishing opportunities via supplemental stocking of hatchery-reared fish.



Major RDU Accomplishments in 2019

Sustaining Fishing Opportunities

The division continued to conduct many quantitative stock assessment projects (weirs, counting towers, and aerial surveys) statewide to provide objective in-season data. This data is key for informed decision making to provide fishing opportunity and to manage stocks for sustained yield. Area Managers issued a total of 105 Emergency Orders and Advisory Announcements during 2019 that either restricted or liberalized fisheries and 47 Advisory Announcements that informed the public of fishing opportunities during the season. Opportunities for sockeye salmon fishing were liberalized in the Redoubt Bay/Lake, Chilkoot River, Fish Creek, Resurrection Bay, Saltery Cove, Buskin, Wood, Nushagak-Mulchatna, Naknek, Alagnak, Togiak, Kenai, Kasilof, Russian, and Copper Rivers. The Upper Cook Inlet personal use fishery for sockeye salmon was liberalized as well, providing a four-day opening at 24 hours per day when it would have been open 6:00 am – 11:00 pm. Chilkoot River coho salmon and Valdez area pink salmon were liberalized for much of the 2019 run.

Communication and Public Service

The division continued to strive toward improving public service through the modernization of online services and improved communication. To date, the division has moved all licensing and permitting to the online store and has built web tools to allow online harvest reporting for personal use permits. The division has broadened its use of the GovDelivery email subscription service to deliver important and timely information to the angling public such as emergency orders, news releases, fishing reports, the *Reel Times* monthly newsletter, and to send email reminders to personal use permit holders to report their harvest. The division also implemented a social media strategy to increase public awareness about important conservation issues and events, to increase public engagement, and launched several social media sites to improve engagement with the public.

Delivering sport fishing regulations to the public in a manner that improves their understanding and compliance is a longer-term strategy and remains a priority. The division began to implement the angler survey report recommendations, which included rephrasing sport fishing regulation summaries in a way that remains enforceable and rewriting fishery announcements that accompany emergency orders. Additionally, following recommendations of a 'business needs analysis' conducted in 2017, the division has nearly completed building a content management system (CMS) to house geographically referenced regulatory content so it can be delivered dynamically through multiple platforms such as the website or a mobile app.

In the division's ongoing efforts to simplify complex regulations, 10 staff proposals were submitted to the Alaska Board of Fisheries, all were adopted. Division staff in Interior and Southcentral Regions operated a booth at the Great Alaska Sportsman's Show and Fairbanks Outdoor Show to answer questions on regulations, fisheries management, and fishing opportunities. Staff held meetings with various sport fishing groups in southeast Alaska to discuss conservative management actions needed to achieve Chinook salmon escapement goals in 2019.

Exhibit design, fabrication and installation of interactive displays and informational signage at Ship Creek Fisheries Center (SCFC), the William Jack Hernandez Sport Fish Hatchery in Anchorage, and the Tanana Valley Fisheries

Center (TVFC) at the Ruth Burnett Sport Fish Hatchery were ongoing. Additionally, the SCFC hosted monthly public fishing forums that were well attended. Both the SCFC and the TVFC were staffed for public tours and visitation during times of high visitor use (May-August), with the TVFC serving 1,400 visitors and the SCFC serving over 27,500. This represents a significant increase in number of visitors from previous years.

Hatchery Production

The division's enhancement program continued support for some of Alaska's most popular and reliable fisheries by increasing opportunities for anglers while reducing fishing pressure on wild stocks. The "*Statewide Stocking Plan for Sport Fisheries, 2019*" outlined objectives that included the number and locations of the division's enhancement efforts for the next five years and received public input. In 2019, the division's hatcheries, with support from cooperating Private Non-Profit (PNP) facilities, produced and released 6.7 million Chinook and coho salmon, rainbow trout, Arctic char and Arctic grayling at 258 different locations.

Production of lake trout and catchable sized Arctic grayling were reinstated as part of the division's enhancement efforts, with the release of catchable sized Arctic grayling and the collection of lake trout eggs for release in 2020. Division Chinook salmon enhancement projects in southeast, Prince William Sound, and Cook Inlet continued to provide expanded harvest opportunities in Juneau, Petersburg, Ketchikan, Homer, Seward, Anchorage, and the Mat/Su.

Habitat Research and Restoration

The division plays a supporting role in the data collection and compilation of information used to protect and conserve habitat for fish. In 2019, nearly 400 miles of fish habitat on rivers and streams throughout the state were provided protection under state law, and four water right certificates were issued. A survey to document fish species presence occurred at 120 sites covering over 62 miles (100 km) of stream habitat in the Kobuk and Koyukuk watersheds. As a result, 41 new or extended water bodies were added to the Anadromous Waters Catalog (AWC), adding 481.4 miles (774.7 km) of anadromous fish habitat to the AWC, as well as supporting backup or additional life stage information on seven previously listed AWC water bodies. Nearly 0.4 miles of streambank was conserved and sustained, and an additional 0.45 miles was restored in heavily used/modified sections of high valued rivers in Alaska. During the process, 540 feet of material detrimental to fish was removed as well. Fish passage was restored to allow unimpeded access to nearly 57 miles of stream habitat and 27 acres of lake habitat carrying out six barrier removal projects in Kenai, Tyonek, and the Mat-Su Borough, with additional projects completed and others ongoing on Kodiak Island.

Key RDU Challenges

Sustaining Fishing Opportunities

Poor Chinook salmon production experienced statewide since 2007 continues to threaten sport fishing opportunity with personal impacts to anglers and economic impacts to businesses and communities throughout the state. Poor runs were again experienced in 2019, which required increasingly severe fishing restrictions over large areas such as Southeast Alaska and Northern Cook Inlet to achieve escapement goals and conserve stocks. Some areas, the Susitna River for example, were closed to fishing for Chinook salmon altogether. Despite these restrictions, several Chinook salmon escapement and hatchery egg take goals were not achieved. Chinook salmon runs in 2020 are likely to remain low and will continue to challenge managers with providing fishing opportunity while attaining adequate conservation goals. Preseason fishing restrictions will likely be needed to ensure that Chinook salmon escapement goals are met, and stocking levels are maintained.

While Chinook salmon returns to enhancement sites improved this past summer, low marine survival will continue to challenge the division's ability to meet brood collection and egg take goals statewide resulting in reduced release numbers in the out years.

Northern pike continue to challenge salmon production in Southcentral Region. This includes not only existing invasive populations but also populations that have re-established due to reintroductions through illegal human activity.

A reduction in king salmon stamp revenue that results from lower sales of king salmon stamps due to reduced fishing opportunities impacts the department's efforts to assess the causes of the Chinook salmon population declines. Similarly, erratic coho salmon runs and high competition among fisheries in Cook Inlet have created substantial stock

assessment gaps for that species. In the absence of this information, available fishing opportunity in places like the Susitna and Kenai Rivers remains less certain and will be managed more conservatively.

There are no fishery independent assessments of state managed groundfish including lingcod and rockfish. These species have complex life histories that make research and stock assessment inherently difficult and presents a significant data gap. However, rockfish workshops continue to work toward prioritizing information needs and how to conduct those assessments.

Charter Logbooks

Timely reporting of charter logbook information for halibut and salmon are required to meet the state's international treaty obligations. This has become more challenging with the repeal of the saltwater charter license that provided funding for these needs. As a result, the division has had to reprioritize work to ensure that these needs are being met. The division supports reinstatement of the saltwater charter license program as a means of providing funding to meet these needs. The division is also examining means to functionally move from a paper logbook to an electronic logbook which would improve timeliness of reporting.

Hatchery Production

Bonds to pay back the capital costs associated with the construction of the William Jack Hernandez and Ruth Burnett Sport Fish Hatcheries are expected to be paid off in 2021. Funds used to pay off the debt have come from a surcharge for hatchery bond payments on all sport fishing licenses. By statute, once the bonds are paid, the surcharge sunsets. An additional use of the surcharge has been to pay for releases of hatchery Chinook and coho salmon in southeast Alaska. These stocking programs will be directly impacted by the sunset of the hatchery surcharge. In addition, operation of the two sport fish hatcheries and necessary maintenance will be a challenge with the loss of the surcharge.

Communications and Public Service

Approximately 500,000 anglers participate in Alaska's sport fisheries annually. Many are new to the activity in any given year, and many participate in some but not all years. Interests vary among anglers: some fish to put food on the table while others practice catch-and-release as a form of conservation. Some fish because they enjoy the challenge and others to spend time outdoors. Because of the vast differences in interests, species, and areas, Alaska residents and visitors alike face an inherent challenge in gaining and maintaining awareness of ever-changing fishing opportunities, and in understanding and complying with fishing regulations.

Habitat Research and Restoration

Fish passage, streambank restoration and aquatic invasive species programs will likely experience an increasing workload due to climatic events. Increasing frequency and severity of flood events and unpredictable stream flows increase public and private landowners' requests for help to conserve and rehabilitate their property. This is especially true in areas of the state that experienced a 100-year flood event, a flooding event that has 1 percent likelihood of happening in any given year, in the past decade. The occurrence of 100-year flood events is increasing. Similarly, changing hydrology is accelerating the rate of culvert replacement statewide and increasing the demand for technical and funding support for fish passage projects. Detection and cost of controlling invasive species is ever increasing as well.

Significant Changes in Results to be Delivered in FY2021

Sustaining Fishing Opportunities

Research projects conducted in collaboration with Division of Commercial Fisheries will inform development of management strategies for black and yelloweye rockfish in the Gulf of Alaska. In FY2020, the division continued to host internal workshops regarding management issues and stock assessment needs for groundfish species, primarily yellow and black rockfish. Given growing concerns over stock status, the division continues to engage state and federal agency staff with rockfish management expertise, reviewing, and if appropriate, modifying management strategies and collaboratively exploring stock assessment needs. It is expected that more conservative management strategies will need to be employed over the next decade to ensure for conservation of these stocks.

Communication and Public Service

Communication using methods that reach intended audiences and messages that resonate will continue to be a challenge for the division. Measuring the effectiveness of communication efforts and modifying the approach

accordingly can be challenging as well, but it is necessary to improve public service and efficiency. A consistent system of measurement and the regular reporting results should be in place by FY2021. The division will also look to have fully implemented a digital branding strategy and public outreach campaign for "wefishak", a program that is designed to connect Alaskans with sport fishing opportunities in their local areas and increase the number of residents that are purchasing a sport fishing license.

Passage of House Bill 260 (Ch 54 SLA 2018) increased awareness of the ability for anglers to carry digital copies of their license on mobile devices. However, technical challenges preclude the department from offering licenses in a valid, secure digital display format along with harvest recording functions currently required by regulation. The department continues to address these challenges and is pursuing a mobile app that will allow for the purchase and display of a digital license, along with the required harvest recording capabilities.

Modernization of the Statewide Harvest Survey

Plans to modernize the Statewide Harvest Survey have been initiated by developing web-based data collection protocols to improve response rate and angler recall of households selected for survey information. The division is currently forming a team to address new ways to solicit survey participant's input. This should improve accuracy and precision of the estimates moving forward and improve public support for the program.

Contact Information
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**Sport Fisheries
RDU Financial Summary by Component**

All dollars shown in thousands

	FY2019 Actuals				FY2020 Management Plan				FY2021 Governor			
	UGF+DGF Funds	Other Funds	Federal Funds	Total Funds	UGF+DGF Funds	Other Funds	Federal Funds	Total Funds	UGF+DGF Funds	Other Funds	Federal Funds	Total Funds
Formula Expenditures None.												
Non-Formula Expenditures												
Sport Fish Operations	0.0	500.0	0.0	500.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Sport Fisheries	2,168.6	20,693.5	15,425.7	38,287.8	2,056.9	23,859.2	17,369.8	43,285.9	1,814.3	23,798.4	17,415.8	43,028.5
Sport Fish Hatcheries	0.0	157.6	5,251.8	5,409.4	0.0	319.2	5,574.8	5,894.0	0.0	279.7	5,589.9	5,869.6
Totals	2,168.6	21,351.1	20,677.5	44,197.2	2,056.9	24,178.4	22,944.6	49,179.9	1,814.3	24,078.1	23,005.7	48,898.1

Sport Fisheries
Summary of RDU Budget Changes by Component
From FY2020 Management Plan to FY2021 Governor

All dollars shown in thousands

	<u>Unrestricted Gen (UGF)</u>	<u>Designated Gen (DGF)</u>	<u>Other Funds</u>	<u>Federal Funds</u>	<u>Total Funds</u>
FY2020 Management Plan	2,056.9	0.0	24,178.4	22,944.6	49,179.9
One-time items:					
-Sport Fisheries	0.0	0.0	-500.0	0.0	-500.0
Adjustments which continue current level of service:					
-Sport Fisheries	7.4	0.0	439.2	46.0	492.6
-Sport Fish Hatcheries	0.0	0.0	-39.5	15.1	-24.4
Proposed budget decreases:					
-Sport Fisheries	-250.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	-250.0
FY2021 Governor	1,814.3	0.0	24,078.1	23,005.7	48,898.1