

State of Alaska FY2022 Governor's Operating Budget

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

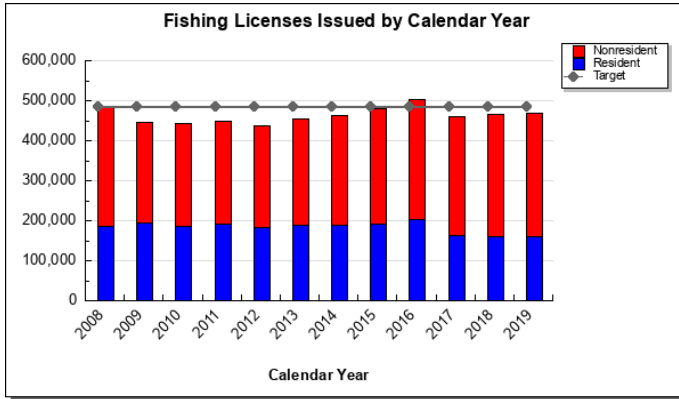
Sport Fisheries Results Delivery Unit

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>.)



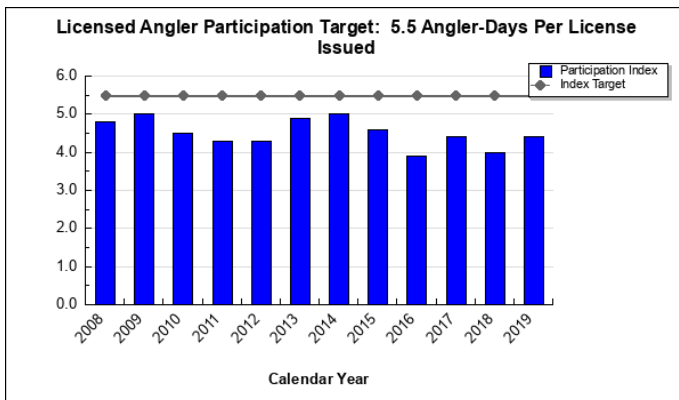
Core Services

- 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.

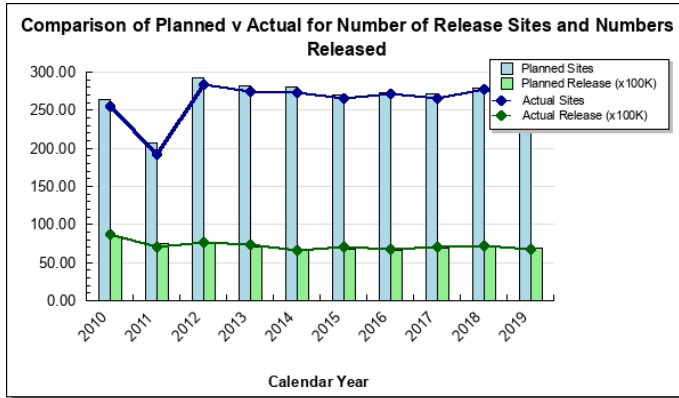
Measures by Core Service

(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 2020

COVID 19 Response

2020 will be defined as the Year of the COVID-19 Pandemic. This pandemic significantly impacted Alaskans and the Alaskans economy. To minimize economic impacts to Alaskans, the department early in this pandemic decided that the state would have fisheries this year. The department worked to ensure the necessary research and management infrastructure was in place to safely conduct fisheries across Alaska. This allowed sport and personal use fisheries to operate, allowing anglers an opportunity to fill their freezers, feed their families, and get outside.

Every state agency was challenged by COVID-19 and the Division of Sport Fish was no exception. The challenges transitioning staff to telework situations while simultaneously developing action plans to operate assessment projects required to open fisheries and hunts around the state. The department's staff worked with the sport fish industry and communities to establish ways to safely open fisheries. The department constructed a situational telework agreement for staff members that could transition telework and developed staggered schedules and other solutions for staff members who had jobs that did not fit a telework situation. Staff members worked with rural communities to develop ways to conduct necessary field work while protecting the community. Additional planning was required to ensure safety of staff in remote field camps including securing hard to find protective equipment and sanitation supplies, quarantining protocols, contingency plans if a staff member became symptomatic, and adjustment of field camp operations. The department was able to successfully open nearly every fishery which is a testament to the hard-working, dedicated staff.

Sustaining Fishing Opportunities

The division continued to conduct many quantitative stock assessment projects (weirs, counting towers, and aerial surveys) statewide to provide objective inseason data. This data is key to informing managers in decision making to provide fishing opportunity and manage stocks for sustained yield. Area Managers issued a total of 101 Emergency Orders and Advisory Announcements during 2020 that either restricted or liberalized fisheries and 51 Advisory Announcements or Press Releases that informed the public of fishing opportunities during the season. Opportunities for sockeye salmon fishing were liberalized in the Redoubt Bay/Lake, Fish Creek, Resurrection Bay, Wood, Nushagak-Mulchatna, Naknek, Alagnak, Kasilof, and Russian rivers. Pasagshak, Olds and American rivers; Fish and Ship creeks coho salmon; Valdez area pink salmon; and southeast Alaska Chinook salmon were liberalized for much of the 2020 run.

In the ongoing efforts to reduce complex regulations, the division submitted eighteen staff proposals to the Alaska Board of Fisheries to simplify confusing regulations, and all were adopted. Due to COVID-19 restrictions and concerns in-person staff attendance did not occur at the Anchorage and Fairbanks outdoor shows which were cancelled; and limited meetings with advisory committees and various sport fishing groups due to cancellations or attendance was virtual or socially distanced.

Biologists from both the Divisions of Commercial Fisheries and Sport Fish began using stock assessment modeling tools and held virtual workshops and other meetings to discuss management issues and stock assessment needs for black and yelloweye rockfish.

Communication and Public Service

The division continued to strive toward improving public service through the modernization of online services and improved communication. The division's online licensing, permitting, and harvest reporting services have been fully implemented and are readily available to the public. We continue to deliver important and timely information to the angling public such as emergency orders, news releases, fishing reports, the *Reel Times* monthly newsletter and email reminders to personal use permit holders to report their harvest via our GovDelivery email subscription service. The division's social media strategy to increase public awareness about important conservation issues and events as well as increase public engagement is proving successful in meeting our objectives.

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 continued to implement recommendations resulting from an angler survey, which included rephrasing sport fishing regulation summaries in a way that remains enforceable and rewriting news releases that accompany emergency orders. Additionally, following recommendations of a 'business needs analysis' conducted in 2017, the division completed the development of a content management system (CMS) to house geographically referenced regulatory content and began working with an independent contractor to develop a mobile app.

Exhibit design, fabrication, and installation of interactive displays and informational signage at Ship Creek Fisheries Center (SCFC) at 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, up until the COVID-19 pandemic found its way to Alaska, 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 2019-August 2019), but were closed to the public in April 2020 due to COVID-19.

Hatchery Production

Sport Fish 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, 2020*" outlined objectives that included the number and locations of the division's enhancement efforts for the next five years and received public input. In 2020, the division's hatcheries, with support from cooperating Private Non-Profit (PNP) facilities, produced and released nearly 7 million Chinook and coho salmon, rainbow trout, Arctic char, Lake trout, and Arctic grayling at more than 250 different locations.

Stocking of lake trout and catchable sized Arctic grayling were conducted as part of the division's diverse enhancement efforts, with the release of catchable sized Arctic grayling lake trout. Division of Sport Fish Chinook and coho salmon enhancement projects in southeast, Prince William Sound, Kodiak and Cook Inlet continued to provide expanded harvest opportunities in Juneau, Petersburg, Ketchikan, Homer, Seward, Anchorage, Kodiak road system, 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 water for fish. In 2020, 185 water bodies and nearly 200 miles (307 km) of fish habitat on rivers and streams throughout the state were provided protection under state law, and five water right certificate applications were submitted. A survey to document fish species presence occurred at 106 sites covering over 67 miles (107.7 km) of stream habitat in the upper Yukon River watersheds. As a result, 52 new water bodies were added to the Anadromous Waters Catalog (AWC), as well as supporting backup or additional life-stage information on previously listed AWC water bodies. The Streambank Restoration Cost Share program worked with local landowners on the Kenai Peninsula, Mat-Su Borough, and Fairbanks/Tanana River area to conserve, sustain, and restore heavily used/modified sections of high-valued rivers in Alaska. These efforts also removed material detrimental to fish during the process. Fish passage was restored to allow unimpeded access to stream and lake habitats by carrying out barrier removal projects throughout southcentral Alaska, as well as, providing technical assistance to other agencies and entities to improve fish passage.

Key RDU Challenges

COVID-19 Pandemic

The COVID-19 pandemic in early 2020 caused severe travel restrictions which in turn significantly reduced revenues from the sale of sport fishing licenses and king salmon stamps that are important financial resources for running the division's programs. Year to date sales are not even half of an average fishing season given most of the licenses sold are to non-resident anglers who were hamstrung with travel restrictions getting to Alaska. Even though Alaska's mandates were relaxed in late June, restrictions in Canada allowed zero non-essential travel border crossings; despite a planned lifting on October 21, 2020, their restrictions remain in place through November 2020 at this time. Cruise ship visits is an unknown going into CY2021 and could continue to exacerbate the revenue issue forcing key core service program reductions and deletions.

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 2020 and required increasingly severe fishing restrictions across large geographic areas in southeast Alaska, interior Alaska, and Northern Cook Inlet to achieve escapement goals and conserve stocks. Some areas, the Kenai River and Cook Inlet marine waters for example, were closed to fishing for late run Chinook salmon for a portion of the season. Despite these restrictions, several Chinook salmon escapement and hatchery egg take goals were not achieved. Chinook salmon runs in 2021 will likely remain low and will continue to challenge managers with providing fishing opportunity while attaining adequate conservation goals. Preseason fishing restrictions will again likely be needed to ensure that Chinook salmon escapement goals are met, and stocking levels are maintained.

Chinook salmon returns to enhancement sites were generally good this past summer, but low marine survival continues to challenge the ability to meet brood collection and egg take goals statewide resulting in reduced release numbers at some locations.

There are no fishery independent assessments of state managed groundfish including lingcod and rockfish. This presents a significant data gap for these species with complex life histories that make research and stock assessment inherently difficult. However, the rockfish workshops mentioned in the Accomplishments section continue to work toward prioritizing information needs and how to fund those assessments.

Outreach and Education

Without the ability to safely meet with large groups of people in a public setting, the division is finding new, creative ways to deliver angler skills based training to the public and our Salmon in the Classroom curriculum to students. Technology has been embraced by the division by equipping staff with the appropriate training to deliver educational content via video, live online forums, etc.

Significant Changes in Results to be Delivered in FY2022

COVID-19 pandemic

As mentioned for FY2021 *Challenges*, the unknowns surrounding COVID-19 has the potential to force necessary changes in planned high priority core services for the division due to reduced revenues that could result from the lack of non-resident anglers traveling into the state during the fishing season. If similar purchasing patterns continue as observed during FY2020-FY2021, the division runs the risk of depleting the balance of the Fish and Game Fund thus losing the ability to meet match requirements of the Dingell-Johnson grant awards.

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 but will be subject to impacts of COVID-19 and associated travel mandates. In FY2021, the division continued to host internal discussions 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. But this ongoing work could be jeopardized if funding needs to be steered back to the division's highest priority core services.

Hatchery Production

The bond debt incurred over a decade ago to build the two new state of the art sport fish hatchery facilities in Anchorage and Fairbanks was paid in full June 2020. The debt was paid back nearly five years early by surcharge collections on the sale of sport fishing licenses. The bond debt and surcharge statutes articulate that the surcharge collection sunsets on December 31 in the year the bond debt is paid in full. Therefore, effective January 1, 2021, there will be no surcharge deposits into the Sport Fish Enterprise Account (SFEA); a sub-account of the Fish and Game Fund. With no funding going into the SFEA, there is a \$0.5M loss of funding to support Chinook salmon enhancement in southeast Alaska and runs the potential to eliminate the entire regional enhancement program.

Due to budget restrictions the Arctic grayling program has once again been suspended to reduce spending with no eggs collected in CY2020, no Arctic grayling will be released in CY2021. Major maintenance and upgrade projects at all three state Sport Fish facilities are on hold as well leading to increased risk of fish loss.

Modernization of the Statewide Harvest Survey

Efforts to modernize the Statewide Harvest Survey will continue to eventually develop web-based data collection protocols to improve response rate and angler recall of households selected for survey information. The division created a team to address possible 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.

Habitat Research and Restoration

Fish passage, streambank restoration, freshwater fish inventory survey, instream flow reservation, and aquatic invasive species programs will likely experience an increasing workload due to climatic events and the pandemic. 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 100+ year flood events in the past decade. 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 costs to control invasive species is ever increasing. Working and coordinating with landowners, contractors, other agencies, and the public on fish habitat and aquatic invasive species projects is more complex because of health and safety concerns related to the pandemic.

Communication and Public Service

It is unknown when the Ship Creek Fisheries Center may safely open to the public again. A virtual video tour of the facility will be released within the next two months which will allow the public to learn more about the William Jack Hernandez Sport Fish Hatchery and how the fisheries enhancement program benefits anglers. Additionally, the division anticipates making its mobile app with geo-referenced and real time sport fishing regulations available to the public by March 2021.

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

All dollars shown in thousands

| | FY2020 Actuals | | | | FY2021 Management Plan | | | | FY2022 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 Fisheries | 2,038.4 | 20,774.2 | 16,244.0 | 39,056.6 | 1,815.2 | 23,795.9 | 17,416.0 | 43,027.1 | 1,822.7 | 23,343.3 | 17,470.8 | 42,636.8 |
| Sport Fish Hatcheries | 0.0 | 160.1 | 5,244.3 | 5,404.4 | 0.0 | 279.7 | 5,580.7 | 5,860.4 | 0.0 | 280.0 | 5,587.5 | 5,867.5 |
| Totals | 2,038.4 | 20,934.3 | 21,488.3 | 44,461.0 | 1,815.2 | 24,075.6 | 22,996.7 | 48,887.5 | 1,822.7 | 23,623.3 | 23,058.3 | 48,504.3 |

Sport Fisheries
Summary of RDU Budget Changes by Component
From FY2021 Management Plan to FY2022 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> |
|---|-----------------------------------|---------------------------------|--------------------|--------------------------|--------------------|
| FY2021 Management Plan | 1,815.2 | 0.0 | 24,075.6 | 22,996.7 | 48,887.5 |
| One-time items: | | | | | |
| -Sport Fisheries | 0.0 | 0.0 | -500.0 | 0.0 | -500.0 |
| Adjustments which continue current level of service: | | | | | |
| -Sport Fisheries | 7.5 | 0.0 | 47.4 | 54.8 | 109.7 |
| -Sport Fish Hatcheries | 0.0 | 0.0 | 0.3 | 6.8 | 7.1 |
| FY2022 Governor | 1,822.7 | 0.0 | 23,623.3 | 23,058.3 | 48,504.3 |