

State of Alaska
FY2023 Governor's Operating Budget

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

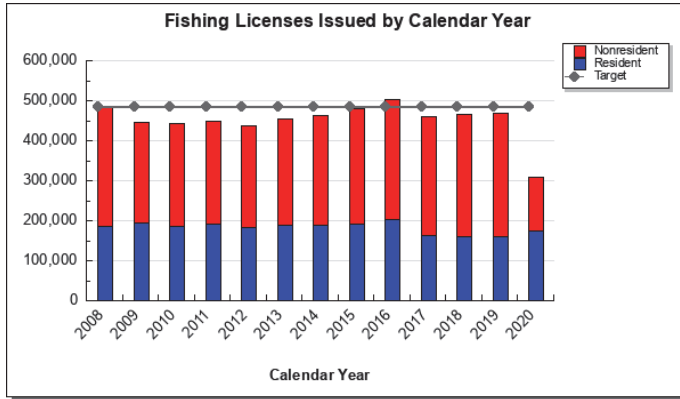
Sport Fisheries Results Delivery Unit

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>.)



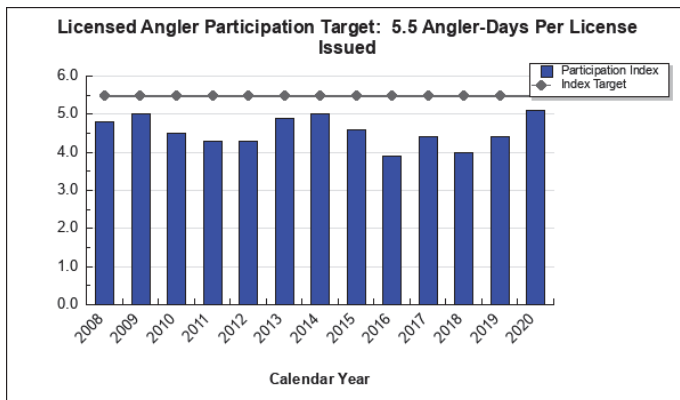
Core Services

- 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.

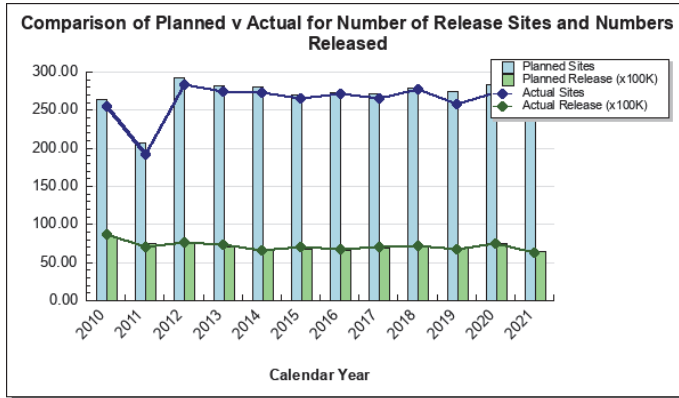
Measures by Core Service

(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 2021

COVID-19 Response

The COVID-19 pandemic continued to impact Alaskans and Alaska's economy. The department continued working 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.

Staff members worked with rural communities to develop ways to conduct necessary field work while protecting and respecting 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, a testament to the hard-working, dedicated staff.

Sustaining Fishing Opportunities

The division continued to conduct many quantitative stock assessment projects (weirs, counting towers, sonars and aerial surveys) statewide to provide objective inseason data. This data is key to informing managers in making decisions to provide fishing opportunity and manage stocks for sustained yield. Area Managers issued a total of 110 Emergency Orders and Advisory Announcements during 2021 that either restricted or liberalized fisheries, and 13 Press Releases that informed the public of fishing opportunities during the season. Opportunities for sockeye salmon sport fishing were liberalized in the Redoubt Bay/Lake; Resurrection Bay; Saltery Cove; Situk, Upper Station, Ayakulik, Coghill, Wood, Nushagak-Mulchatna, Naknek, Alagnak, Kasilof, Kenai, and Russian Rivers; and the China Poot personal use sockeye salmon fishery. Pasagshak and Buskin Rivers and Ship Creek coho salmon; and Niniichik River and Ship Creek hatchery-produced king salmon sport fisheries were also liberalized for much of the 2021 run.

Biologists from both the Divisions of Commercial Fisheries and Sport Fish continued 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 in the face of teleworking and travel restrictions.

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 remain readily available to the public. The division continues to efficiently deliver important and timely information to the angling public via GovDelivery email subscription service such as emergency orders, news releases, fishing reports, the *Reel Times* monthly newsletter, and email reminders to personal use permit holders to report harvest. The division conducts monthly analyses on its social media strategies and makes necessary adjustments in order to increase public awareness about important conservation issues and events in addition to increasing public engagement which is proving successful in meeting objectives. Additionally, while most employees were teleworking, the division kept

every in-person customer service counter open to the public which is a testament to the hard-working and dedicated staff.

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 completed populating a content management system (CMS) to house geographically referenced regulatory content and continued working with an independent contractor to develop the dynamic and geographically referenced fishing regulations component of the department's mobile app. Additionally, the division released GoFishAK, an online interactive mapping tool that allows the public to discover sport fishing opportunities in Alaska. The maps include popular fishing locations, species run timing, fishing gear selection, and boat and angler access tips.

The 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 in Fairbanks remained closed to the public for most of the year. However, a virtual video tour was developed for the SCFC and made available to the public on the department website and various social media channels. A self-guided audio tour was also developed for the SCFC that allows visitors to learn about the facility and the division's enhancement efforts at their own pace and independent of a tour guide. The division also produced and premiered many Fishing Forums on YouTube to share information about sport fishing topics, as well as partnered with Alaska State Parks Division to produce "The Reel Deal" video series promoting State Parks where the division stocks hatchery fish. Both the forums and video series are proving to be some of the department's most popular social media content.

Hatchery Production/Enhancement

The Sport Fish Division's enhancement program continued support for some of Alaska's most popular and reliable fisheries by increasing fishing and harvest opportunities for anglers while reducing pressure on wild stocks. The "*Statewide Stocking Plan for Sport Fisheries, 2021*" outlined objectives that included the number of fish to be stocked and locations of the division's enhancement efforts for the next five years. This plan was distributed for public review and input prior to being finalized. In 2021, 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, and Arctic char at more than 250 locations statewide. Two new lakes were added to the Statewide Stocking plan in 2021. One on the Upper Kenai Peninsula and one in the Mat-Su valley area.

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 FY2021, 750 nominations resulted in the addition of 400 water bodies and nearly 665 miles (1070 km) of fish habitat on rivers and streams throughout the state were provided protection under state law. No applications for water right certificates were submitted for Department of Natural Resources adjudication in FY2021 due to budget reductions; however, fund sources may be secured to submit applications in FY2022. Surveys to document fish species presence occurred at 120 sites covering over 50 miles (80 km) of stream habitat in watersheds of the Yukon and Tanana rivers. As a result, 14 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 continued to limit cruise ship travel to Alaska and for a portion of the season, travel through Canada. But independent air traveler numbers increased, and the corresponding sale of sport fishing licenses and king salmon stamps are at, or will exceed, near pre-pandemic levels which were record setting in CY2019. This was

evident by comparing the average number of 1-day non-resident licenses to 7-day non-resident licenses whereby a flip appeared to account for the increased revenues.

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 2021 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 2022 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.

In the ongoing efforts to reduce complex regulations, the division submitted 16 staff proposals to the Alaska Board of Fisheries to simplify confusing regulations, which will be addressed during upcoming board meetings in December 2021, and in January and March 2022. Due to COVID-19 restrictions and concerns, staff attendance was limited at in-person board meetings (the recent October 2021 Work Session was virtual for the second consecutive year) and limited meetings with advisory committees and various sport fishing groups due to cancellations or attendance was virtual or socially distanced.

Chinook salmon runs to enhancement sites were generally better summer of 2021, 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

The division is continually challenged by finding new, creative ways to deliver angler skills-based training to the public, and Salmon in the Classroom curriculum to students while avoiding large, in-person gatherings. Technology has been embraced by the division by equipping staff with the appropriate training to deliver educational content via video, live online forums, etc., along with, COVID-related mitigation plans were developed for outdoor events with large numbers of participants.

Significant Changes in Results to be Delivered in FY2023

COVID-19 pandemic

As mentioned for FY2022 *Challenges*, the unknowns surrounding COVID-19 will continue to potentially force necessary changes in planned high priority core services. The division is optimistic about license and stamp revenues rebounding to pre-pandemic levels in FY2023 based on what was observed in CY2021. However, federal Dingell-Johnson funding remains an unknown and current projections are showing a downward trend which could place a higher dependence on the Fish and Game Fund still recovering from poor CY2020 revenues.

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 FY2023, the division should continue 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/Enhancement

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 articulated that the surcharge collections sunset on December 31 in the year the bond debt was paid in full. Therefore, effective January 1, 2021, all surcharge deposits into the Sport Fish Enterprise Account (SFEA); a sub-account of the Fish and Game Fund ceased. With no funding going into the SFEA, there is a \$0.5M deficit of funding to support Chinook salmon enhancement in southeast Alaska with the potential to eliminate the entire regional enhancement program.

Reauthorization of the Sport Fish Hatchery Surcharge has been proposed with strong bi-partisan support.

Due to ongoing budget restrictions, the Arctic grayling program remains suspended with no eggs collected in CY2021, and no Arctic grayling being released in CY2022. Major maintenance and upgrade projects at all three state Sport Fish facilities and several remote release and adult salmon egg take sites continue to be on hold leading to increased risk of fish loss or missed production opportunities. Further delay of repair and upgrade work at the Crystal Lake Hatchery continues to pose an increased risk of structural failure and 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 because it is a working facility that requires the onsite Fish Culturist staffing to be as protected from COVID-19 exposure as possible to ensure they can be present on the job without downtime. A virtual video tour of the facility has been released which allows 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 working in cooperation with the Division of Wildlife Conservation to develop and potentially implement a revenue generating raffle program with prize packages that promote and incentivize hunting and fishing in Alaska.

Contact Information

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**Sport Fisheries
RDU Financial Summary by Component**

All dollars shown in thousands

	FY2021 Actuals				FY2022 Management Plan				FY2023 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	1,769.9	17,835.4	15,218.6	34,823.9	3,125.8	23,544.9	20,622.8	47,293.5	1,760.5	22,789.0	18,773.9	43,323.4
Sport Fish Hatcheries	0.0	221.5	4,830.5	5,052.0	125.3	281.1	5,615.5	6,021.9	40.4	281.9	5,657.8	5,980.1
Totals	1,769.9	18,056.9	20,049.1	39,875.9	3,251.1	23,826.0	26,238.3	53,315.4	1,800.9	23,070.9	24,431.7	49,303.5

Sport Fisheries
Summary of RDU Budget Changes by Component
From FY2022 Management Plan to FY2023 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>
FY2022 Management Plan	3,251.1	0.0	23,826.0	26,238.3	53,315.4
Adjustments which continue current level of service:					
-Sport Fisheries	-1,365.3	0.0	-755.9	-1,848.9	-3,970.1
-Sport Fish Hatcheries	-84.9	0.0	0.8	42.3	-41.8
FY2023 Governor	1,800.9	0.0	23,070.9	24,431.7	49,303.5