

# **State of Alaska FY2024 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.

### Major RDU Accomplishments in 2022

#### COVID-19

The COVID-19 pandemic is hopefully mostly behind us, and Alaska's economy back on track after the past 2 years. Even so, the department continued working safely to ensure the necessary research and management infrastructure was in place to effectively conduct fisheries across Alaska by minimizing spread. Staff members worked to ensure that offices and field projects were safe environments, and staff that exhibited symptoms stayed at home or teleworked until they were able to return to work per updated CDC guidelines. There were no Covid-19 outbreaks in office or field camps in 2022 due to staff vigilance in maintaining a healthy workplace. 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, sonar 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 120 Emergency Orders and Advisory Announcements during 2022 that either restricted or liberalized fisheries, and 27 Press Releases that informed the public of fishing opportunities or other department activities during the season. Opportunities for sockeye salmon sport fishing were liberalized in the Redoubt Bay/Lake; Resurrection Bay; Saltery Cove; Situk, Coghill, Wood, Nushagak-Mulchatna, Alagnak, Kasilof, Kenai, and Russian Rivers; and Fish Creek and Kenai River personal use sockeye salmon fisheries. Seward Lagoon and Ship Creek coho salmon; Norton Sound and Port Valdez pink salmon, and hatchery-produced king salmon sport fisheries in Juneau, Sitka, Ketchikan, and Petersburg/Wrangell were also liberalized for much of the 2022 run.

In addition to the salmon fisheries, 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.

#### Communication and Public Service

The division continued to strive toward informing, communicating, and providing service to the public with an emphasis on exceptional customer 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 and infrastructure improvements are minimizing downtime of these services.

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 regular analyses on its social media strategies and makes necessary adjustments to increase public awareness about important conservation issues and events while also increasing public engagement. Additionally, the division maintained 24 offices throughout the state where the public could receive in-person customer service.

Delivering sport fishing regulations to the public in a manner that improves their understanding and compliance remains a longer-term strategy and is a continued priority. The division worked with a contractor to complete the first phase of development to provide dynamic and geographically referenced sport fishing regulations within the department's mobile app. Additionally, the division continued adding content to *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. Content provided via both the mobile app and *GoFishAK* continue to be popular with the public.

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 re-opened to the public in April 2022 for self-guided audio tours and pre-scheduled guided tours. Both locations remain popular destinations that allow visitors to learn about the facilities and the division’s enhancement efforts. The division also partnered with Alaska State Parks Division to produce six additional episodes for “The Reel Deal” video series promoting State Parks where the division stocks hatchery fish. The video series is proving to be some of the department’s most popular social media content.

### **Division Strategic Plan**

The Sport Fish Division updated and released its [2022-2027 Strategic Plan](#) and is the 4<sup>th</sup> 5-year update that lays out our upcoming goals and objectives for improving our service to anglers and stakeholders in the coming years. The strategic plan serves as a guidepost for future efforts and holds us accountable as public service agency for what we do.

### **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 FY2022, 548 nominations resulted in protection under state law for an additional 343 water bodies and nearly 329 miles (530 km) of new fish habitat throughout the state. In FY2022, 23 reservation of water applications were submitted for Department of Natural Resources adjudication. Surveys to document fish species presence occurred at 92 sites covering over 59 miles (95 km) of stream habitat in watersheds of the Bering Land Bridge National Preserve and the Yukon and Tanana rivers. As a result, 45 nominations were submitted to the Anadromous Waters Catalog (AWC), resulting in 29 new or extended water bodies totaling 180 miles (289 km), as well as supporting backup or additional life-stage information on 14 existing 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**

Key RDU Challenges—

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### **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 2022 and required increasingly severe fishing restrictions across large geographic areas in southeast Alaska, interior Alaska, Bristol Bay, and Northern Cook Inlet to achieve escapement goals and conserve stocks. Some areas, the Kenai and Kasilof Rivers, Northern Cook Inlet rivers, and Cook Inlet marine waters for example, were closed to fishing for late run Chinook salmon for the majority of the season. King salmon sport fisheries were closed for the entire season in the Yukon (including Tanana River), Kuskokwim, and Norton Sound Drainages. Despite these restrictions, several Chinook salmon escapement and hatchery egg take goals were not achieved. Chinook salmon runs in 2023 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. Coho salmon production was also poor in many drainages resulting in closures or restrictions in SE Alaska (Peterson Creek and terminal hatchery areas in Sitka and Juneau), Buskin River, and Copper River Highway streams (Cordova), as well as closures of the chum and coho salmon sport fisheries in the Yukon (including Tanana River) and Kuskokwim Drainages.

In the ongoing efforts to reduce complex regulations, the division submitted 10 staff proposals to the Alaska Board of Fisheries (Board) to simplify confusing regulations, which will be addressed during upcoming board meetings in December 2022, and in January, February, and March 2023. COVID-19 restrictions have been lifted and all Board meetings will be held in-person as well as most advisory committees and various sport fishing groups meetings.

Chinook salmon runs to enhancement sites were marginal during the summer of 2022, 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.

### **Employee Recruitment and Retention**

The Department is currently leading an effort to assess the non-monetary issues that impact the recruitment, retention, morale, and well-being of our workforce. Our division is constantly competing for skilled employees with other agencies and divisions in our own department. This leads to short pools of applicants. Short of being able to address the monetary piece, it will be increasingly more difficult to find qualified candidates.

Another challenge coming up more and more in many locations is housing for our seasonal employees including prohibitive rent costs and/or quality, or lack of availability in smaller outlying communities.

## **Significant Changes in Results to be Delivered in FY2024**

### **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 FY2024, 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.

### **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. This should improve accuracy and precision of the estimates moving forward and improve public support for the program. The division is seeking funds to accomplish this objective.

### **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. 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 ongoing supply chain issues and overall increased costs.

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**Sport Fisheries  
RDU Financial Summary by Component**

*All dollars shown in thousands*

	FY2022 Actuals				FY2023 Management Plan				FY2024 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
<b>Formula Expenditures</b> None.												
<b>Non-Formula Expenditures</b>												
Sport Fisheries	3,158.1	18,000.0	14,584.5	35,742.6	1,777.3	22,987.0	18,931.9	43,696.2	1,800.0	23,248.5	19,166.0	44,214.5
Sport Fish Hatcheries	125.3	125.9	5,101.0	5,352.2	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
<b>Totals</b>	<b>3,283.4</b>	<b>18,125.9</b>	<b>19,685.5</b>	<b>41,094.8</b>	<b>1,777.3</b>	<b>22,987.0</b>	<b>18,931.9</b>	<b>43,696.2</b>	<b>1,800.0</b>	<b>23,248.5</b>	<b>19,166.0</b>	<b>44,214.5</b>

**Sport Fisheries**  
**Summary of RDU Budget Changes by Component**  
**From FY2023 Management Plan to FY2024 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>
<b>FY2023 Management Plan</b>	1,777.3	0.0	22,987.0	18,931.9	43,696.2
<b>Adjustments which continue current level of service:</b>					
-Sport Fisheries	22.7	0.0	261.5	234.1	518.3
<b>FY2024 Governor</b>	<b>1,800.0</b>	<b>0.0</b>	<b>23,248.5</b>	<b>19,166.0</b>	<b>44,214.5</b>