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2026 PRINCE WILLIAM SOUND SALMON SEASON SUMMARY

This summarizes the 2026 Prince William Sound (PWS) Area commercial salmon season. Numbers in this summary are rounded for simplicity; all data are preliminary; and 10-year averages are for 2016 through 2025. The 2026 PWS Area salmon harvest was 7.70 million fish composed of 4,760 Chinook, 763,000 sockeye, 406,000 coho, 5.40 million pink, and 1.13 million chum salmon. The 2026 harvest included 4.4 million (57%) commercial and 3.27 million (43%) hatchery cost recovery and broodstock fish (Table 1).

The estimated value of salmon harvest, commercial, and hatchery cost recovery was approximately $49.57 million and 45% less than the 10-year average of $90.63 million. This below-average value largely reflects below-forecast sockeye, pink, and chum salmon runs. During the 2026 season, 382 drift gillnet, 24 set gillnet, and 176 (157 primary and 19 dual) purse seine commercial permit holders fished in at least one fishing period. Drift gillnet exvessel harvest value was an estimated $17.92 million (average permit earnings of $46,900 compared to a 10-year average of $64,500); set gillnet exvessel harvest value was an estimated $1.31 million (average permit earnings at $54,600 compared to a 10-year average of $70,300); and purse seine exvessel harvest value was an estimated $13.05 million (average permit earnings at $74,100 compared to a 10-year average of $176,000). Hatchery operations generated approximately $16.22 million in revenue.

GILLNET FISHERIES

COPPER RIVER DISTRICT

The 2026 Copper River sockeye salmon total run forecast was 1.46 million fish. Gulkana Hatchery accounted for 42,000 sockeye salmon in that total run forecast. The preseason commercial harvest forecast for the Copper River District sockeye salmon was 728,000 fish. Overall, the 2026 Copper River sockeye salmon run was below forecast for both hatchery and wild stocks. The 2026 Chinook salmon total run forecast was 33,000 fish, and the actual run was below forecast. Early in the season, the Copper River sockeye and Chinook salmon harvest were below average, and in-river passage tracked below anticipated, leading to short-duration fishing periods, expansion of closed waters, and extended closures starting in early June and lasting through the start of the coho salmon fishery in mid-August. The sockeye salmon commercial harvest was 248,000 fish, 66% less than the 10-year average of 727,000 fish.

The sockeye salmon season was open for only 96 hours, compared with a 10-year average of 600 hours, reflecting conservative management throughout the season. The average sockeye salmon weight of 5.9 pounds was 0.2 pounds higher than the 20-year average (2006-2025) of 5.7 pounds. The Copper River District commercial harvest included 235,000 wild sockeye salmon, or 96% of the total commercial harvest. Gulkana Hatchery contributed 6,100 sockeye salmon, or 3% of the total commercial harvest. Main Bay Hatchery (MBH) contributed 2,060 sockeye salmon, or <1% of the Copper River sockeye salmon harvest. The commercial harvest of 4,380 Chinook salmon was 58% below the 10-year average harvest of 10,400 fish. The commercial harvest of 256,000 coho salmon was 40% above the previous 10-year average of 183,000 coho salmon.

The 2026 preliminary Miles Lake sonar cumulative passage estimate as of July 28, the last day of operation, was 569,971 salmon and fell below the cumulative inriver goal of 600,897 salmon for this date. The Copper River sockeye salmon sustainable escapement goal (SEG) of 360,000 – 750,000 fish was achieved based on preliminary projections of inriver harvest. The 2026 Chinook salmon inriver abundance and harvest estimates are still being assessed and it is too early to know whether the SEG of 21,000 – 31,000 fish was achieved. The Copper River Delta sockeye salmon escapement estimate of 64,820 sockeye salmon was within the SEG range of 55,000–130,000 fish. Copper River Delta coho salmon spawning escapement estimate was 43,555 fish and within the SEG range of 32,000–50,000 fish.

BERING RIVER DISTRICT

During the initial 2026 season, the Bering River District was opened concurrently with the Copper River District only along the western edge of the district. At first, there was no directed commercial sockeye salmon harvest due to the recent trend in poor annual escapement. Inseason aerial survey escapement estimates trended near the average anticipated inseason weekly index, and the fishery remained restricted through early July. Starting July 9, due to improving escapement and minimal participation, the department elected to keep the Bering River District open to commercial harvest concurrent with the Copper River District until the start of coho salmon season in mid-August. The sockeye salmon commercial harvest of 390 fish compared to the previous 10-year harvest average of 11,700 fish. Almost all sockeye salmon harvest occurred on the western edge of the district, associated with the Copper River District harvest near the Martin Islands. The aerial survey escapement index of 17,470 sockeye salmon was within the SEG range of 15,000–33,000 fish.

The coho salmon commercial harvest of 60,000 fish was 11% above the previous 10-year harvest average of 54,200. Commercial fishing effort in the coho salmon fishery was high, coinciding with productive fishing in the eastern portion of the Copper River Delta. The Bering River District coho salmon spawning escapement estimate was 17,800 fish and within the SEG range of 13,000–33,000 fish.

COGHILL DISTRICT

The 2026 sockeye salmon forecast for Coghill Lake was 104,000 fish, with 74,000 available for commercial harvest. The Coghill River weir operated from June 10 to July 26, passing a minimum of 6,907 sockeye salmon, in comparison to the SEG range of 20,000–75,000 fish. A minimum count was used for the Coghill Lake escapement due to high water events and compromised weir panels. The Coghill District drift gillnet sockeye salmon commercial harvest of 29,600 fish was below the 10-year average of 173,000. Due to cost recovery needs and a small Coghill Lake forecast, conservative management was implemented throughout the district, allowing for short-duration fishing periods outside of hatchery subdistricts due to low fleet participation.

The 2026 PWSAC hatchery chum salmon run was well below forecast. The PWSAC forecast for the 2026 hatchery chum salmon run to Wally Noerenberg Hatchery (WNH) was 1.87 million fish. PWSAC projected approximately 1.09 million fish for cost recovery and broodstock, leaving 785,000 for commercial harvest. In total, PWSAC harvested 372,000 chum salmon for cost recovery and broodstock. The drift gillnet harvest of chum in the Coghill District totaled 106,000 fish, which was below the forecast and below the 10-year average of 1.15 million fish, with wild chum comprising 1% of this commercial catch.

Prince William Sound Aquaculture Corporation (PWSAC) projected a total run of 37,000 coho salmon to WNH. The commercial drift gillnet coho harvest was 37,500 fish, all assumed to be WNH origin. This harvest was above forecast and 80% higher than the 10-year average of 20,800 fish.

ESHAMY DISTRICT

The 2026 PWSAC hatchery sockeye salmon run was weak. PWSAC projected a total run of 431,000 hatchery sockeye salmon to MBH in 2026, with 142,000 required for broodstock and cost recovery, leaving 289,000 for commercial harvest. The MBH harvested 159,000 sockeye salmon for cost recovery and broodstock, 5% above the 10-year average of 151,000. In the Eshamy District, 247 drift gillnet permit holders harvested 231,000 sockeye, 50,200 chum, and 134,000 pink salmon, while 24 set gillnet permit holders harvested 99,100 sockeye,

7,860 chum, and 7,090 pink salmon. The total sockeye, chum, and pink salmon harvest in Eshamy District were all well below 10-year averages, in large part due to limited fishing time associated with the MBH sockeye salmon run being small, necessitating pauses in fishing time to meet hatchery escapement objectives. There was no 2026 Eshamy Lake sockeye salmon total run forecast due to the limited escapement monitoring in recent years. The Eshamy River weir operated from July 27 to September 3 and passed 14,968 sockeye salmon, above the SEG range of 13,000–28,000 fish and 42% below the long-term average.

Unakwik District

The Unakwik District fishery primarily targets sockeye salmon returning to Miners Lake; commercial harvest in 2026 was 607 sockeye salmon, well below the 10-year average harvest of 5,400 sockeye salmon.

PURSE SEINE FISHERIES

Chum Salmon

The 2026 PWS chum salmon forecast was 3.62 million fish, with an estimated commercial harvest of 1.53 million fish. Of the total run forecast, 3.04 million (84%) were expected to return from PWSAC hatchery production, with 330,000 fish returning to the Armin F. Koernig hatchery (AFK) and 840,000 to Port Chalmers; the remaining fish were returning to WNH. Based on the department's wild chum salmon forecast of 586,000 fish and subtracting the 10-year average escapement of 173,000, the potential harvestable surplus was 413,000 wild chum salmon.

Chum salmon commercial harvest was 797,000 fish, 48% below the preseason forecast. The purse seine fleet harvested 625,000 chum salmon in 2026. The AFK chum salmon fishery harvested approximately 172,000 fish, 48% below the preseason forecast of 330,000. A total of 8,700 sockeye salmon were harvested in the AFK chum salmon commercial fishery, composed of 4,700 MBH and 4,000 wild fish. The preliminary wild stock chum salmon harvest was 104,000 fish compared to the preseason harvest forecast of 413,000 fish.

Port Chalmers Subdistrict

The purse seine gear group had exclusive access to the forecasted Port Chalmers in 2026. The Montague District purse seine chum salmon harvest was 385,000 fish, 54% below the forecast of 840,000 fish. The proportion of wild chum salmon in the Port Chalmers Subdistrict commercial fishery was 2% of the harvest.

Pink Salmon

The 2026 season had the lowest pink salmon harvest since the late 1970's when PWS hatcheries were established. The 2026 pink salmon total run forecast was 21.28 million fish, comprised of 10.18 million VFDA, 6.37 million PWSAC, and 4.73 million wild fish. Approximately 3.62 million (36%) of VFDA's pink salmon preseason forecast was projected for cost recovery and broodstock, with the remaining 6.56 million VFDA fish expected to be available for commercial harvest. Approximately 3.53 million (55%) of PWSAC's pink salmon preseason forecast was projected for cost recovery and broodstock. The remaining 2.85 million PWSAC fish were expected to be available for commercial harvest. Based on the department's wild stock pink salmon forecast, there was a potential commercial harvest of 3.94 million fish. Considering both VFDA and PWSAC's cost recovery, broodstock needs, and a median escapement of 784,000 wild pink salmon, approximately 13.34 million pink salmon were expected to be available for commercial harvest.

The 2026 commercial harvest of 2.57 million pink salmon was 81% below the 13.34 million commercial harvest forecast. The pink salmon commercial harvest comprised an estimated 1.69 million PWSAC fish, 73,000 VFDA fish, and 819,000 wild fish. The total pink salmon harvest was 5.40 million fish, including 2.80 million for hatchery cost recovery and broodstock (2.10 million for PWSAC and 454,000 for VFDA). The VFDA pink salmon run of 527,000 fish was 95% below the forecast of 10.18 million. The PWSAC pink salmon run of 3.80 million fish was 40.4% below the 6.37 million forecast. The PWS wild pink salmon harvest of 819,000 fish was 79% below the forecast of 3.94 million fish. PWSAC achieved its egg-take goals, while VFDA collected 92% of its egg-take goal.

There were 149 purse seine vessels participating in the fishery in 2026. Of those vessels, 130 were single-permit operations, and 19 were dual-permit operations. Some dual permit operations use different secondary permit holders throughout the season. In 2026, 20 secondary permits involved at least one delivery. In total, including both primary and secondary permits, 177 out of 267 available seine permits were accounted for in 2026.

Aerial surveys in PWS were flown from mid-June through early September. Preliminary aerial survey escapement estimates are below the lower end of the SEGs for Eastern, Northern, and Southwestern Districts; escapement goals were within the SEG ranges in Coghill, Northwestern, Montague, and Southeastern Districts, and the SEG was exceeded in the Eshamy District. Wild stock pink salmon escapement indices supported some very limited openings outside hatchery subdistricts starting mid-July and running through September.

COHO SALMON

The 2026 Solomon Gulch Hatchery coho salmon forecast was 53,800 fish, with a projected commercial harvest of 14,700. Data for the VFDA coho salmon run is currently unavailable, as they have just recently completed their egg-take. The overall purse seine harvest of coho salmon in PWS was 47,700 fish.

Table 1.–Preliminary Area E salmon harvest, 2026.

District	Chinook	Sockeye	Coho	Pink	Chum	Total
Bering River	1	390	59,994	8	8	60,401
Copper River	4,377	248,001	255,610	2,442	8,060	518,490
Eastern	2	376	32,163	194,442	57,152	284,135
Northern	7	580	4,905	1,041,451	1,371	1,048,314
Coghill	76	29,706	40,880	139,800	106,173	316,635
Northwestern	1	991	1,111	168,861	2,018	172,982
Eshamy	193	329,763	4,521	141,380	58,047	533,904
Southwestern	9	9,072	4,196	668,138	167,621	849,036
Montague	89	657	1,371	91,560	384,983	478,660
Southeastern	3	144	504	153,131	11,788	165,570
Unakwik	-	607	-	-	166	773
Commercial Total	583	4,758	620,287	405,255	2,601,213	797,387
Hatchery						
Solomon Gulch	-	-	89	550,811	-	550,900
Cannery Creek	-	64	12	916,939	40	917,055
Wally Noerenberg	-	104	508	561,448	334,126	896,186
Main Bay	-	142,160	-	-	-	142,160
Armin F. Koernig	-	81	23	768,167	306	768,577
Hatchery Total [a]	-	142,409	632	2,797,365	334,472	3,274,878
PWS Total Harvest	4,758	762,615	403,851	5,398,578	1,131,813	7,701,615

[a] Hatchery harvest to meet cost recovery and broodstock needs.