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**Incidental Catches of Salmonids by U.S. Groundfish Fisheries in the Bering Sea/Aleutian Islands and the Gulf of Alaska, 1990–2020**

by

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# Incidental Catches of Salmonids by U.S. Groundfish Fisheries in the Bering Sea/Aleutian Islands and the Gulf of Alaska, 1990–2020

**Keywords:** Alaskan groundfish, Chinook, chum, incidental salmon catch, Pacific salmon

## ABSTRACT

This report presents the estimated incidental catches and average weights of Pacific salmonids in U.S. groundfish fisheries off Alaska from 1977 through 2020. Estimated annual incidental salmon catches (all species combined) in 2020, were 357,998 salmon in the Bering Sea/Aleutian Islands (BSAI) and 16,929 salmon in the Gulf of Alaska (GOA).

Annual estimated numbers of Chinook salmon (*Oncorhynchus tshawytscha*) incidentally caught in the U.S. groundfish fisheries in the BSAI, have ranged from 8,223 individuals in 2000 to 130,000 individuals in 2007 and the annual average weight has ranged from 2.44 kg in 2016 to 5.21 kg in 1995. Annual estimated numbers of non-Chinook salmon have ranged from 13,278 individuals in 2010 to 711,520 individuals in 2005. Chum salmon (*O. keta*) typically account for over 95% of the non-Chinook salmon catch with an annual average chum salmon weight ranging from 1.73 kg in 2020 to 3.43 kg in 1995.

In the U.S. groundfish fisheries in the GOA, annual estimated numbers of Chinook salmon incidentally caught have ranged from 8,475 individuals in 2009 to 54,696 in 2010 and the annual average weight has ranged from 1.77 kg in 2019 to 4.60 kg in 1991. Annual estimated numbers of non-Chinook salmon have ranged from 1,274 individuals in 2012 to 64,792 in 1995. Chum salmon typically account for over 95% of the non-Chinook salmon catch where the annual average chum salmon weight has ranged from 2.16 kg in 1993 to 4.87 kg in 1999.

Incidental catches of Pacific salmonids in foreign and joint venture groundfish fisheries off Alaska are presented for 1977–1990. The last joint venture operation took place in 1990 in the BSAI, with an incidental catch of 152 salmon.

## INTRODUCTION

Groundfish fisheries in Alaskan waters are conducted primarily by the use of trawl gear that occasionally encounters and catches Pacific salmonids. Other gear used to harvest groundfish, longline and pot, generally do not catch many salmonids. The incidental catches of salmonids are monitored by the U.S. National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS). Estimates are calculated by the NMFS Alaska Regional Office from observer data. Total groundfish catch estimates are derived from multiple sources including landing reports, observer reports, and production reports.

In 2010, NMFS issued regulations to implement Amendment 91 to the BSAI Fisheries Management Plan (FMP). Amendment 91 was implemented in January 2011. The text of Amendment 91 can be found at: <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/FR-2010-08-30/pdf/2010-20618.pdf>. These regulations were intended to minimize the Chinook salmon (*O.*

*tshawytscha*) bycatch in the Bering Sea (BS) pollock fishery while maintaining potential for full harvest of the catch by establishing a cap on Chinook salmon bycatch in the fishery. These regulations increased salmon monitoring requirements to ensure that all catches of BS pollock are monitored and required a substantial change in the observer sampling protocol for salmon to support the estimation of Chinook salmon bycatch and the collection of samples for genetic stock of origin analyses.

All salmon, as well as king and tanner crab, herring, and halibut are classified as prohibited species in the groundfish fishery off Alaska and prohibited species catch (PSC) must be avoided. Prior to January 2011, regulations required all PSC to be returned to the sea as soon as practicable after an observer had collected any required data from the species. With the implementation of Amendment 91 in January 2011, bycatch of all salmon species in the BS pollock fishery must be retained. Furthermore, the operator of a vessel and the manager of a shoreside processor or stationary floating processor (SFP) must not discard, transfer or process (under the Prohibited Species Donation Program) any salmon until the observer has been given the opportunity to identify, count, and collect all necessary biological data.

In July 2011, the North Pacific Fisheries Management Council (NPFMC) addressed the concern of Chinook salmon PSC taken incidentally in the GOA pollock fisheries. Chinook salmon incidentally taken in pollock fishery historically account for the greatest proportion of Chinook salmon taken in GOA groundfish fisheries. As a result, NMFS published regulations to implement Amendment 93 to the GOA Groundfish FMP. These regulations are exclusively for the directed pollock trawl fisheries in the Central and Western Reporting Areas of the GOA (central and western GOA). Amendment 93 established a separate PSC limit in the central and western GOA for Chinook salmon. Reaching the limit would cause NMFS to close the directed pollock fishery in the central and western GOA. This action required full retention of all salmon in pollock trawl fisheries. It also provided direction for NMFS to work with the processors to evaluate the quality of sorting in order to assist the observer with salmon sorting and ultimately salmon retention counts. The final rule for Amendment 93 can be found at: <https://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/FR-2012-07-20/pdf/2012-17747.pdf>.

Historically, the observer program coverage for the groundfish trawl fisheries off Alaska had been 100% for the large-sized vessel fleet (greater than 125 ft. length overall) and 30% for the medium-sized vessel fleet (60–125 ft. length overall). On January 1, 2013, NMFS restructured the observer program and the deployment of observers when it issued regulations to implement Amendment 86 to the BSAI FMP and Amendment 76 to the GOA FMP. Observer coverage and deployment are no longer based on vessel length and processing capacity; rather, NMFS now has the flexibility to decide when and where to deploy observers based on a scientifically defensible sampling design. The design of the new program serves to reduce sources of bias that jeopardized the statistical reliability of catch and bycatch data collected by the North Pacific Observer Program. The final text of the regulations can be found at <https://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/FR-2012-11-21/pdf/2012-28255.pdf>.

This report presents the estimated incidental catches and average weights of Pacific salmonids in the U.S. groundfish fisheries in the BSAI and GOA from 1977 to 2020.

## RESULTS

Table 1 provides a summary of the groundfish catch and estimated bycatch of salmonids reported by NMFS by region (BSAI and GOA) from 1990 through 2020. The U.S. groundfish catch in the BSAI has ranged from 1,335,057 mt in 2009 to 2,154,903 mt in 1991. In 2020, the U.S. groundfish catch in the BSAI was 1,874,785 mt. From 1990–2020, the incidental catch of Chinook salmon has ranged from 8,223 individuals in 2000 to 130,000 individuals in 2007; while the incidental catch of non-Chinook salmon has ranged from 13,278 individuals in 2010 to 711,520 individuals in 2005. In 2020 the incidental catch of Chinook salmon was 34,967 individuals and the incidental catch of non-Chinook salmon was 323,031 individuals.

The U.S. groundfish catch in the GOA has ranged from 165,664 mt in 2002 to 303,577 mt in 2017 (Table 1). The incidental catch of Chinook salmon from 1990–2020 ranged from 8,475 individuals in 2009 to 54,326 individuals in 2010; while the incidental catch of non-Chinook salmon has ranged from 1,274 individuals in 2012 to 64,792 individuals in 1995. In 2020 the incidental catch of Chinook salmon in the GOA was 11,851 individuals and the incidental catch of non-Chinook salmon was 3,087 individuals.

The annual Chinook salmon average weight found in the BSAI incidental catch in 2020 was 3.06 kg compared to the 1990–2020 annual average weight range of 2.44 kg in 2016 to 5.21 kg in 1995 (Table 2). The annual average weight of Chinook salmon in the GOA incidental catch in 2020 was 2.07 kg (Table 3). The 1990–2020 annual average weights of GOA Chinook salmon ranged from 1.77 kg in 2019 to 4.60 kg in 1991.

The annual average weights of chum salmon found in the BSAI incidental catch ranges from 1.73 kg in 2020 to 3.43 kg in 1995 (Table 4). The annual average weight of chum salmon in the GOA incidental catch ranged from 1.95 kg in 2020 to 4.87 kg in (Table 5).

The last year of joint venture operations occurred in the BSAI in 1990, with a groundfish catch of 133,438 mt and an incidental catch of 147 Chinook salmon, 2 chum salmon (*O. keta*), and 3 coho salmon (*O. kisutch*) (Table 6). Table 7 provides the estimated incidental catches of Pacific salmonids in the foreign and joint venture groundfish fisheries off Alaska for 1977–1989.

**Table 1.** Total groundfish catch (mt) and estimated bycatch of Chinook and other Pacific salmon in U.S. groundfish fisheries, 1990–2020.

Year	Region	Domestic Catch Groundfish (mt)	Estimated numbers of salmon bycatch <sup>1</sup>					Total
			Chinook	Chum	Coho	Sockeye	Pink	
1990	BSAI	1,706,379	14,085	16,202	153	30	31	30,501
1991	BSAI	2,154,903	48,880	28,270	656	1,310	26	79,142
1992	BSAI	2,057,849	41,955	40,090	1,266	14	80	83,405
1993	BSAI	1,854,216	46,014	242,916	324	22	8	289,284
1994	BSAI	1,958,788	43,821	94,107	228	20	193	138,369
1995	BSAI	1,928,073	23,436	20,983	871	0	21	45,311
1996	BSAI	1,847,631	63,205	77,819	234	5	2	141,265
1997	BSAI	1,824,188	50,530	66,816	109	3	66	117,524
1998	BSAI	1,615,685	60,549			66,612		127,159
1999	BSAI	1,424,752	14,599			47,234		61,833
2000	BSAI	1,607,549	8,223			59,327		67,550
2001	BSAI	1,813,924	40,547			60,731		101,278
2002	BSAI	1,934,957	39,684			82,483		122,167
2003	BSAI	1,791,040	53,661			188,390		242,051
2004	BSAI	1,979,754	60,038			452,560		512,598
2005	BSAI	1,981,117	75,084			711,520		786,604
2006	BSAI	1,978,836	87,115			307,175		394,290
2007	BSAI	1,856,273	130,000			93,641		223,641
2008	BSAI	1,541,369	23,837			14,980		38,817
2009	BSAI	1,335,057	14,115			45,445		59,560
2010	BSAI	1,350,754	12,397			13,278		25,675
2011	BSAI	1,817,659	26,609			194,819		221,428
2012	BSAI	1,852,753	12,929			24,073		37,002
2013	BSAI	1,909,745	15,989			127,001		142,990
2014	BSAI	1,916,114	18,106			224,263		242,369
2015	BSAI	1,905,886	25,254			243,354		268,608
2016	BSAI	1,952,487	32,568			347,341		379,909
2017	BSAI	1,952,027	36,277			471,447		507,724
2018	BSAI	1,947,840	17,394			309,045		326,439
2019	BSAI	1,939,081	31,411			358,804		390,215
2020 <sup>2</sup>	BSAI	1,874,785 <sup>3</sup>	34,967 <sup>4</sup>			323,031		357,998

<sup>1</sup> For 1998–2020, the estimates of non-Chinook salmon are not separated by species and are thus listed as a single value. [https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/sites/default/files/akro/chum\\_salmon\\_mortality2021.html](https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/sites/default/files/akro/chum_salmon_mortality2021.html)

<sup>2</sup> Data presented for 2020 are based on preliminary numbers.

<sup>3</sup> [https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/sites/default/files/akro/car110\\_bsai\\_with\\_cdq2020.html](https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/sites/default/files/akro/car110_bsai_with_cdq2020.html)

<sup>4</sup> [https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/sites/default/files/akro/chinook\\_salmon\\_mortality2021.html](https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/sites/default/files/akro/chinook_salmon_mortality2021.html)

**Table 1. (Continued)**

Year	Region	Domestic Catch	Estimated numbers of salmon bycatch <sup>1</sup>					Total
		Groundfish (mt)	Chinook	Chum	Coho	Sockeye	Pink	
1990	GOA	244,397	16,913	2,541	1,482	85	64	21,085
1991	GOA	269,616	38,893	13,711	1,133	46	64	53,847
1992	GOA	269,797	16,788	11,140	55	21	0	28,004
1993	GOA	255,434	19,260	55,268	306	15	799	75,648
1994	GOA	239,503	13,616	36,782	42	96	306	50,842
1995	GOA	216,585	14,653	64,067	668	41	16	79,445
1996	GOA	202,054	15,761	3,969	194	2	11	19,937
1997	GOA	230,448	15,229	3,349	41	7	23	18,649
1998 <sup>1</sup>	GOA	245,516	16,983			13,544		30,527
1999	GOA	227,614	30,600			7,529		38,129
2000	GOA	204,398	26,730			10,995		37,725
2001	GOA	182,011	15,104			6,063		21,167
2002	GOA	165,664	12,919			3,219		16,138
2003	GOA	177,597	15,367			9,287		24,654
2004	GOA	172,624	17,778			6,269		24,047
2005	GOA	185,998	31,271			7,011		38,282
2006	GOA	197,365	18,762			4,505		23,267
2007	GOA	177,716	40,519			3,880		44,399
2008	GOA	185,323	16,264			3,251		19,515
2009	GOA	169,771	8,475			2,704		11,179
2010	GOA	216,438	54,326			2,063		56,759
2011	GOA	226,722	19,573			3,220		22,995
2012	GOA	233,773	20,069			1,274		21,269
2013	GOA	228,687	23,352			6,008		29,322
2014	GOA	299,687	15,538			3,089		18,841
2015	GOA	294,106	19,015			2,640		21,623
2016	GOA	297,193	22,037			2,779		24,870
2017	GOA	303,577	25,005			5,639		30,520
2018	GOA	246,662	17,083			8,989		26,093
2019	GOA	214,517	23,911			6,407		30,300
2020 <sup>2</sup>	GOA	187,579 <sup>5</sup>	11,851 <sup>6</sup>			3,087 <sup>7</sup>		16,929

<sup>5</sup> [https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/sites/default/files/akro/car110\\_goa2020.html](https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/sites/default/files/akro/car110_goa2020.html)

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/sites/default/files/akro/goasalmonmort2021.html>

<sup>7</sup> [https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/sites/default/files/akro/car260\\_psc\\_salmon2020.csv](https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/sites/default/files/akro/car260_psc_salmon2020.csv)

**Table 2.** Average body weight of Chinook salmon incidentally caught in the Bering Sea/Aleutian Islands groundfish fisheries, 1990–2020.

Year	Region	Average Body Weight (kg)			
		Male	Female	Unsexed	Combined
1990	BSAI	3.73	3.71	3.56	3.70
1991	BSAI	2.82	3.47	3.03	3.10
1992	BSAI	3.03	3.65	4.23	3.54
1993	BSAI	3.78	4.11	4.74	4.01
1994	BSAI	4.37	4.29	4.11	4.30
1995	BSAI	4.95	5.43	5.19	5.21
1996	BSAI	3.67	3.89	3.39	3.75
1997	BSAI	4.02	4.17	4.41	4.14
1998	BSAI	2.91	3.30	2.40	3.02
1999	BSAI	3.53	3.73	3.91	3.64
2000	BSAI	3.67	3.87	4.12	3.78
2001	BSAI	2.94	3.32	1.50	3.04
2002	BSAI	3.79	4.15	3.07	3.89
2003 <sup>8</sup>	BSAI	--	--	--	3.44
2004	BSAI	--	--	--	3.50
2005	BSAI	--	--	--	3.29
2006	BSAI	--	--	--	3.01
2007	BSAI	2.81	2.95	2.40	2.82
2008	BSAI	3.67	3.53	4.98	3.62
2009	BSAI	3.58	3.93	4.02	3.80
2010	BSAI	4.09	4.08	3.40	4.08
2011	BSAI	2.58	2.80	1.48	2.60
2012	BSAI	3.53	3.40	3.11	3.47
2013	BSAI	2.62	3.13	2.10	2.82
2014	BSAI	2.86	2.59	3.02	2.74
2015	BSAI	2.40	3.04	2.83	2.74
2016	BSAI	2.28	2.59	2.82	2.44
2017	BSAI	2.57	3.04	4.13	2.89
2018	BSAI	2.58	2.96	2.10	2.75
2019	BSAI	2.63	3.32	2.84	3.02
2020	BSAI	2.68	3.25	3.41	3.06

<sup>8</sup> For years 2003–2006, only the combined average weight is shown because observers were combining sexes prior to weighing the salmon.

**Table 3.** Average body weight of Chinook salmon incidentally caught in the Gulf of Alaska groundfish fisheries, 1990–2020.

Year	Region	Average Body Weight (kg)			
		Male	Female	Unsexed	Combined
1990	GOA	3.94	4.29	3.91	4.10
1991	GOA	3.05	5.10	4.08	4.60
1992	GOA	4.46	4.11	3.58	4.14
1993	GOA	2.83	2.76	3.40	2.90
1994	GOA	3.72	3.69	2.85	3.63
1995	GOA	4.48	3.31	3.00	3.67
1996	GOA	2.71	2.97	2.80	2.83
1997	GOA	4.28	4.08	5.08	4.49
1998	GOA	3.00	3.07	3.47	3.08
1999	GOA	2.69	3.16	2.49	2.82
2000	GOA	3.34	3.21	3.45	3.32
2001	GOA	3.36	3.08	2.95	3.20
2002	GOA	2.76	2.59	3.38	2.73
2003 <sup>8</sup>	GOA	--	--	--	2.84
2004	GOA	--	--	--	2.47
2005	GOA	--	--	--	2.46
2006	GOA	--	--	--	3.41
2007	GOA	2.84	3.35	2.75	2.99
2008	GOA	4.55	2.67	2.58	3.44
2009	GOA	3.74	2.96	4.31	3.37
2010	GOA	2.20	2.36	2.25	2.28
2011	GOA	2.27	2.43	1.95	2.14
2012	GOA	2.04	2.24	2.37	2.28
2013	GOA	2.24	2.53	2.01	2.26
2014	GOA	2.13	2.26	2.56	2.31
2015	GOA	2.11	2.39	1.86	2.06
2016	GOA	2.35	2.25	1.82	1.89
2017	GOA	2.49	3.81	2.13	2.38
2018	GOA	1.70	3.49	2.31	2.32
2019	GOA	1.76	1.48	1.94	1.77
2020	GOA	1.92	2.21	2.03	2.07



**Table 4.** Average body weight of chum salmon incidentally caught in the Bering Sea/Aleutian Islands groundfish fisheries, 1990–2020.

Year	Region	Average Body Weight (kg)			
		Male	Female	Unsexed	Combined
1990	BSAI	2.27	2.26	2.45	2.32
1991	BSAI	2.76	2.41	2.91	2.66
1992	BSAI	2.54	2.48	2.61	2.56
1993	BSAI	2.16	1.96	2.07	2.07
1994	BSAI	2.72	2.65	2.62	2.66
1995	BSAI	3.46	3.17	3.83	3.43
1996	BSAI	2.47	2.23	2.1	2.31
1997	BSAI	2.35	2.24	1.98	2.25
1998	BSAI	2.88	2.5	3.02	2.86
1999	BSAI	2.97	2.82	3.1	2.96
2000	BSAI	2.97	2.79	2.64	2.77
2001	BSAI	2.7	2.47	2.56	2.61
2002	BSAI	2.97	2.71	3.04	2.91
2003 <sup>8</sup>	BSAI	--	--	--	2.52
2004	BSAI	--	--	--	2.41
2005	BSAI	--	--	--	2.15
2006	BSAI	--	--	--	2.77
2007	BSAI	2.4	2.19	2.12	2.26
2008	BSAI	3.48	3.03	2.69	3.26
2009	BSAI	2.6	2.34	2.33	2.45
2010	BSAI	2.75	2.57	2.22	2.67
2011	BSAI	2.76	2.52	2.65	2.65
2012	BSAI	2.75	2.56	2.92	2.67
2013	BSAI	2.63	2.45	2.64	2.55
2014	BSAI	2.24	2.13	2.40	2.20
2015	BSAI	2.25	2.21	2.11	2.23
2016	BSAI	2.36	2.26	2.44	2.32
2017	BSAI	1.98	1.89	1.80	1.92
2018	BSAI	2.24	2.15	1.49	2.17
2019	BSAI	1.86	1.78	1.93	1.82
2020	BSAI	1.78	1.69	1.53	1.73

**Table 5.** Average body weight of chum salmon incidentally caught in the Gulf of Alaska groundfish fisheries, 1990–2020.

Year	Region	Average Body Weight (kg)			
		Male	Female	Unsexed	Combined
1990	GOA	3.22	3.16	2.94	3.12
1991	GOA	3.27	2.9	3.11	3.11
1992	GOA	3.09	3.02	2.44	2.88
1993	GOA	2.4	2.27	1.93	2.16
1994	GOA	3.4	3.2	2.92	3.10
1995	GOA	3.14	3.12	2.97	3.02
1996	GOA	3.1	2.42	2.5	2.61
1997	GOA	5.28	4.09	3.94	4.37
1998	GOA	3.84	3.77	3.75	3.80
1999	GOA	4.33	5.45	3.84	4.87
2000	GOA	4.16	4.26	4.17	4.20
2001	GOA	2.83	2.9	3.16	2.91
2002	GOA	3.61	3.53	3.39	3.51
2003 <sup>s</sup>	GOA	--	--	--	3.18
2004	GOA	--	--	--	3.68
2005	GOA	--	--	--	4.61
2006	GOA	--	--	--	3.77
2007	GOA	3.26	2.99	3.01	3.10
2008	GOA	3.58	2.70	1.24	2.58
2009	GOA	3.34	3.55	3.26	3.41
2010	GOA	3.05	3.96	2.43	3.31
2011	GOA	2.96	2.97	3.44	3.04
2012	GOA	2.89	3.57	4.67	3.50
2013	GOA	3.28	2.90	2.44	3.02
2014	GOA	3.99	3.91	3.44	3.02
2015	GOA	3.01	2.43	2.93	2.76
2016	GOA	3.46	3.07	2.93	3.08
2017	GOA	3.60	2.42	3.35	3.14
2018	GOA	2.68	3.09	3.05	2.92
2019	GOA	2.46	1.50	3.23	2.86
2020	GOA	1.82	2.27	1.25	1.95

**Table 6.** Estimated incidental catches of Pacific salmonids in the Bering Sea/Aleutian Islands and the Gulf of Alaska.

Year	Region	Catch Groundfish (mt)	Estimated numbers of salmon bycatch					Total
			Chinook	Chum	Coho	Sockeye	Pink Joint Venture	
1990	BSAI	133,438	147	2	3	0	0	152
1990	GOA	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

**Table 7.** Estimated incidental catches of Pacific salmonids previously reported to the International North Pacific Fisheries Commission, 1977–1989.

Year	Bering Sea/ Aleutian Islands <sup>9</sup>	Gulf of Alaska <sup>10</sup>
1977	47,840	5,222
1978	44,548	45,603
1979	107,706	21,460
1980	122,002	36,069
1981	43,191	30,860
1982	23,623	6,967
1983	42,666	13,874
1984	84,138	75,846
1985	20,423	14,102
1986	20,983	20,820
1987	14,234	1,221
1988	9,380	147
1989	14,153	0

<sup>9</sup> Reported in INPFC Doc. 3588, October 1990

<sup>10</sup> Reported in INPFC Doc. 3417, September 1989