

Catterson, Matt – Alaska Department of Fish and Game

Presentation Title: Status of Steelhead in Alaska

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Steelhead *Oncorhynchus mykiss* are found in streams and rivers of coastal Alaska from Cape Muzon in Southeast (SE) Alaska to the Aleutian Peninsula of Southcentral (SC) Alaska at Port Moeller. Most of the known runs are small, containing fewer than 200 adults while the largest population in the Situk River of Southeast Alaska, averages 7 - 9,000 adult kelts. Kodiak Island and the Kenai Peninsula streams in southcentral Alaska also have runs from 200 to several thousand fish. Annual assessments of steelhead adult abundance are limited to 10 selected streams surveyed with snorkel counts in Southeast Alaska, and 6 other streams assessed with weirs. These assessments are done on streams in prominent sport fishery areas and are distributed throughout the known range of steelhead in Alaska. In 2019 and 2020, most streams in Southeast Alaska were at or slightly above average, while Southcentral Alaska streams had counts at or below average. Length attributes measured at the Situk River in 2019 returned to near the historical average after several years below average. Several steelhead research projects have occurred recently on Kodiak Island (mark recapture) and on the Situk River (scale growth analysis and satellite tagging).

Since 1995 steelhead sport fisheries in Alaska have been conservatively managed with bait restrictions, spawning closures, minimum size requirements, annual harvest limits of 2 fish, or as catch and release only. Sport fishery catch across the state rose to exceed 26,000 fish in 2018, then decreased to over 16,000 in 2019. Sport fishery harvest continues to be very low, with a harvest of 7 fish reported in 2019. Directed commercial fishing for steelhead in Alaska has not occurred since 1995. Incidental harvests in commercial salmon fisheries were reportedly greater than 300 soon after 1995 but have dropped to about 200 fish in 2019, with mandatory reporting requirements for incidental catch enacted in 2015. Reported subsistence use of steelhead is uncommon and has remained below 50 fish per year for both 2018 and 2019. Overall steelhead management in Alaska is very conservative and designed to provide sport fishing opportunity while maintaining the stable populations characteristics. Current stock monitoring programs and targeted intensive assessments spread broadly across the state provide managers with timely and consistent information each year to assess broad trends in steelhead productivity.