

FISH RAP



Change Service Requested

Highlighting releases, returns, policy and legislation affecting the Southeast Alaska salmon fisheries

Vol. 43 No.2
December 2025



Seine opener at Hidden Falls

Inside

General Manager Notes	2
Hatchery Reports	3-4
2026 Forecast	5
Board of Fish Review	6
LPW Facility Closes	7
Board Member Profile	8

Salmon return below forecast

NSRAA's salmon returns fell significantly short of forecasts this season, making it the third consecutive year it has been unable to raise the funds it needs to operate its various hatchery programs through cost recovery operations.

"The main driver on the shortfall was Hidden Falls, which came in at 40 percent of the forecast," NSRAA General Manager, Scott Wagner says.

This season's chum returns fell 2 million short of the 6.2 million forecast. The 6.2 million forecast was the target return in a range between 4-10 million.

"At the very least, we weren't so far off that we missed the range completely," says Ben Adams, NSRAA Research and Evaluation Manager. "But that was the extent of the good news."

NSRAA's cost recovery goal has grown substantially over the years, a combination of the organization's expanded programs and production, as well as the impact of inflation. This year's goal was the largest on record.

Upward trending prices "combined with our strong preseason forecast gave us confidence we could meet the cost recovery goal," Scott explains.

The cost recovery goal is set each spring, before the season opens. NSRAA accepts a predetermined price for the work. It is not possible to change that goal once the contract is finalized, even if the salmon come in significantly below forecast.

The organization's goal is to take no more than 23 percent of the available fish (after broodstock needs), leaving 77 percent for commercial

harvest. That portion jumped to 36 percent this season. Had NSRAA succeeded in reaching its cost recovery goal, its portion would have been close to 52 percent.

Though NSRAA has, on average, contributed more than 77 percent ratio for the fleets, this season illustrates how high operation costs, low fish numbers and weak prices can combine to make it difficult for the organization to get the funds it needs to produce the fish for the fleets.

"It's frustrating," Ben says.

"Overall, the upward trend in prices is encouraging, but it's still nowhere near prices for 2022," says Scott. "It's trending in the right direction, but it's discouraging how long it's taking."

Salmon are also trending younger and smaller at the time of return.

"Even if you see similar survival and numbers as you did years ago, it will be fewer pounds," he explains.

Those trends to younger and smaller salmon also make forecasting increasingly difficult. In the past, the ocean survival of three-year-old chum was typically an indication of the ocean survival of the four-year-olds, which comprised the largest age group. But as the ratio changes from more four-year-olds to more three-year-olds, forecasters have fewer indicators to predict returns. And when the three-year-olds ocean survivals range from record highs and record lows "it makes forecasting next to impossible," Scott says.

Ben works hard to make the most informed forecasts possible, but the low confidence in forecasting these days makes it even more difficult for NSRAA to plan its cost recovery operations.

Continued on page 6

General Manager's Notes



This past season, NSRAA saw a return of 4.2 million chum salmon. While this was the 13th largest return in our 46-year history, it fell substantially short of our preseason expectations and forecast of 6.2 million chum. All of our chum release sites on the east side of Baranof Island came in under forecast this season. The largest divergence, from forecast to return, was at Hidden Falls, with the chum returning at just over 1 million – 61percent or 1.6 million chum short of our forecast. Other sites saw poor forecast to return numbers, too. Southeast Cove came in at 96 percent of forecast, while Gunnuk Creek and Thomas Bay both came in at half the forecast. On the west side of Baranof Island, Deep Inlet slightly beat the forecast of 1.8 million chum salmon, while Crawfish Inlet returns came in at just 58 percent of the 454,000 forecast.

Our staff does its best to forecast as accurately as possible, yet it has become more difficult in recent years with a shift in chum age at return ratios, between three-, four- and five-year-olds. Last year, at Hidden Falls, we experienced a record number of three-year-old chum salmon return, which typically would indicate a very strong age-four component this year. What appeared to indicate a very strong return this season turned out to be a significant age shift for this brood year to a higher percentage of three-year-olds than we have historically seen.

Hidden Falls' chum marine survivals were improving steadily over the past four years, after the extremely weak return of 190,000 fish in 2020. The improved survivals were encouraging, and we anticipated a great return this season. In addition to a disappointing total return number, we saw very few three-year-old chum return this season, indicating a poor forecast – only 480,000 – for that brood year's four-year-olds, returning next season.

Having our overall chum return come in at 69 percent of forecast in 2025 was frustrating for you, the fishermen, and challenging for NSRAA.

For the third year in a row, NSRAA has fallen short of its annual cost recovery goal on chum salmon and the forecast for next year is not encouraging. The total chum forecast in 2026 is just over 3 million adults. The 3 million forecast is still higher than the poor salmon return experienced in 2020, but 60 percent of the forecast is for chum returning to Deep Inlet. The combination of a weak forecast and persistent lower salmon prices creates challenges to provide as much common property opportunity as possible, while also meeting our annual budgetary needs. Throw in recent uncertainty in our forecasting precision and things get even more challenging.

Although NSRAA has had to take a larger share of the returning salmon for cost recovery since the 2023 seafood market crash, our long-term 46-year average for the return to the fleet is more than 75 percent. NSRAA always strives to meet our core mission: to add value to the common property salmon fisheries in our region through our enhancement efforts. In 2026, NSRAA staff and board will continue to strive to maximize common property opportunity while maintaining NSRAA's financial stability.

New Hires and Promotions

NSRAA welcomed two to its full-time staff this year:

- Keegan Piton, Hidden Falls Fish Culturist
- Cody Back, Hidden Falls Fish Culturist

Congratulations to the following staff members for their promotions:

- Jon Arredondo, Hidden Falls Assistant Manager

Job postings available at WWW.NSRAA.ORG

Northern Southeast Regional Aquaculture Association

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Aerial of Hidden Falls hatchery

Hidden Falls works to improve chum survivals

NSRAA continues to review data from each brood year of chum fry released from its Hidden Falls Hatchery in hopes it will point to a release strategy that correlates with the best ocean survivals and strongest returns.

Salmon returns to Hidden Falls and much of the Chatham Strait area dropped dramatically about ten years ago. The staff at Hidden Falls believe whales and other predators became habituated to the hatchery and preyed on the fry shortly after they were released.

In an effort to avoid that habituated predation, NSRAA began moving the chum by tender to release them remotely. Initially, the fish were released on the other side of the strait, but after data indicated many were swimming back to the hatchery before beginning their migration north (essentially negating the efforts to avoid habituated predators at the hatchery), NSRAA was permitted to release north of the hatchery, instead.

The permit for the new location runs for three years, ending in 2026. The first fish from this new tender release site will return as three-year-olds next season.

In addition to releasing the chum fry remotely, the crew at Hidden Falls also experimented with different rearing strategies to see if any one might result in increased ocean survival. Most recently, the chum have been divided into two groups: one group which is reared to and released at approximately 4 grams, and a second group, which is reared to and released at 2 grams. Each of those groups are then divided into two groups: one which is released from the hatchery, and the other which is towed to a remote site for release.

In 2023, when NSRAA was unable to tow the fry for remote release, it began its early release chum (echum) experiment. The 2-gram group was divided into two groups – one which was scheduled for a normal release and the second, known as the echum, which was scheduled to be released a month earlier.

The hatchery staff used recirculation and warmer water to accelerate growth among the echum. They were transferred to ponds in December, three months earlier than usual, and released from the bay by the hatchery a month earlier than the others.

“The goal was to release them prior to whale activity,” explains Kevin Connell, Hidden Falls Hatchery Manager.

Initial data shows promise for the echum survivals, but Kevin stresses it is too soon to draw any conclusions.

“Any differences in marine survival to date could be the result of chance, but they would be worth pursuing again if next year’s return continues to follow this trend,” he says.

NSRAA has not discarded the option of using tender releases in the future, but will wait to review return data from this group for the next three to six years before making a decision.

Sawmill Creek faces coho broodstock shortage

NSRAA’s brood year 2025 coho reared at Sawmill Creek will be only half of what it could be, due to insufficient broodstock.

“We were hoping to take eggs from about 800 female coho for our program, but have eggs from only 250 females,” explains Rebecca Olson, Sawmill Creek Hatchery Manager.

Though initial coho runs looked promising this season, high interception rates – nearly 85 percent – impacted NSRAA’s ability to collect sufficient broodstock for Sawmill Creek’s coho program. This, combined with lowered marine survivals in recent years, has made broodstock collection increasingly difficult.

NSRAA requested closures for sport fish and commercial fleets for Deep Inlet and Medvejie this season, in an effort to meet its broodstock goals. The organization has been approved to utilize returns to Deep Inlet for broodstock since 2012. All available coho there were captured and transported to Sawmill Creek hatchery, but it still was not enough.

As it became clear that Sawmill Creek’s coho broodstock was drastically low, NSRAA sought permits from the Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ADF&G) to collect broodstock from Sawmill Creek and Salmon Lake.

While its request to collect broodstock from Sawmill Creek was partially approved, the ADF&G would not approve a permit for NSRAA to collect broodstock from Salmon Lake, the wild system where NSRAA’s coho broodstock originated, without escapement numbers.

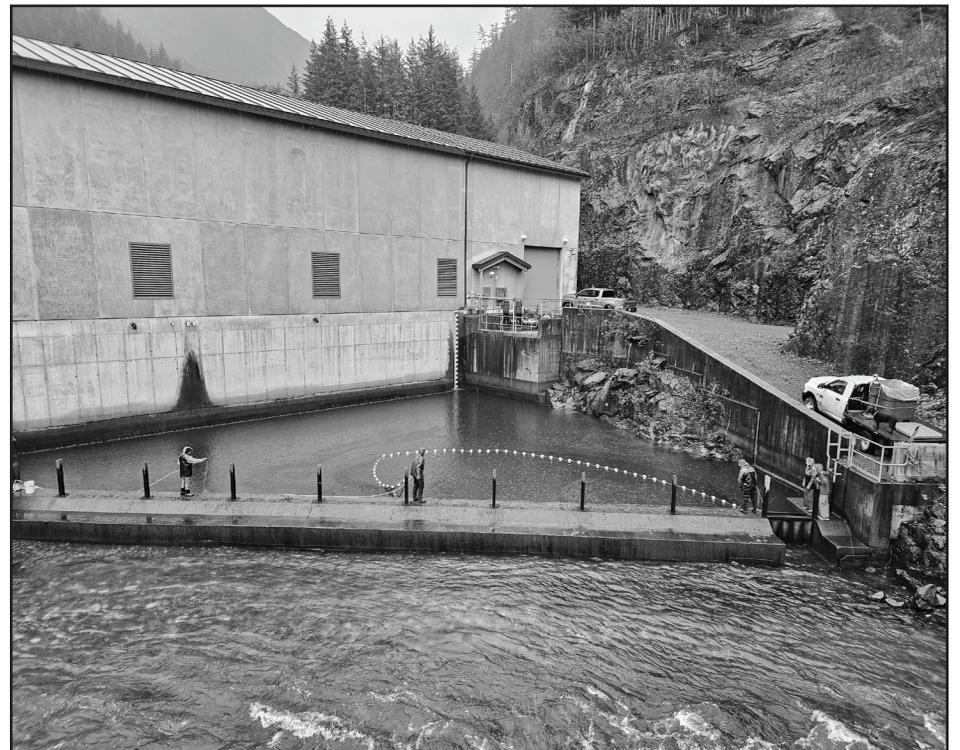
“The original request was for all of Sawmill Creek, as fish pool up in other spots in the creek,” Rebecca says. “We were only allowed into the Blue Lake tailrace (the area where the water comes out of the Blue Lake hydro turbines and spills into Sawmill Creek).”

The shortage in broodstock results in a brood year less than half the size it could be, which could lead to more broodstock shortages when those fish return.

Meanwhile, the hatchery staff is taking advantage of the lower number of fish to experiment with density levels. This will be the third year of its density trial, in which the staff raise the coho at different density levels to determine if a certain rearing density leads to better marine survivals.

“With less fish, we will try our hardest to keep the integrity of the density trial,” Rebecca says.

NSRAA will begin to collect and evaluate the results of the first year of the density trial as those coho return in 2026.



Blue Lake tailrace (afterbay) coho seining



Fertilizing summer chum eggs at Sawmill

Medvejie takes on 7.5 million chum

When the Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ADF&G) imposed a 25 percent cut in NSRAA's chum production at Crawfish Inlet earlier this year, the organization requested to move those fish for release at Bear Cove instead. That request was approved and those chum are now being reared at Medvejie Hatchery.

"It does take production away from Crawfish," admits Jared Nelson, Medvejie Hatchery Manager. "But it still gives the fleet an opportunity to catch them, instead of directly cutting production."

ADF&G imposed the cut at Crawfish when the number of NSRAA's hatchery fish affected the department's ability to estimate numbers of wild fish at an index stream in West Crawfish. The stream there is one of two index streams on Baranof Island the ADF&G used to monitor the health of its wild summer chum populations.

A large portion of NSRAA's chum returning to Crawfish Inlet first pass through West Crawfish. Though studies show this pattern hasn't impacted wild populations, the hatchery fish in the tidewaters there made aerial counts of the wild fish difficult, if not impossible. As a result, the ADF&G removed the stream from its index and imposed the 25 percent cut – approximately 7.5 million fish – from production.

Now that NSRAA has secured approval to reallocate those fish from Crawfish to Bear Cove, the hatcheries are playing a game of musical chairs, of sorts. The chum for Crawfish Inlet are raised at Sawmill Creek Hatchery, while those released from Bear Cove are reared at Medvejie. Though Medvejie is the larger facility, NSRAA cannot simply move an additional 7.5 million chum there.

"Space is limited," Jared says.

To make room for those extra 7.5 million chum from Sawmill Creek, NSRAA shifted 24 million of its summer stock chum for Deep Inlet from Medvejie to Sawmill Creek to replace 20 million of its fall stock that was previously incubated at Sawmill and shifted to Medvejie.

It's not exactly an equal swap; Medvejie is now rearing an additional 3.5 million, while Sawmill has 3.5 million less.

"It was the best scenario," Jared explains, adding that the fish reared at Sawmill Creek may now benefit from lower densities.

Though the cut in NSRAA's Crawfish production was unfortunate, Jared feels optimistic it may have some ancillary benefits in the long run.

"Marine survival varies year to year, but the general trend shows a pretty good decline at Crawfish in the last few years," he says. "By comparison, releases out of Medvejie and its sites have been relatively stable."

Additionally, NSRAA has struggled in recent years to reach its broodstock goals at Medvejie. Jared is optimistic the extra 7.5 million fish will help the hatchery reach its broodstock goals when those fish begin to return to Bear Cove.

Deer Lake works to increase coho numbers

The crew at NSRAA's remote Deer Lake project continues its work to improve coho survivals.

Salmon survivals can vary greatly, both in a hatchery environment, as well as in the ocean. While ocean survivals are dependent on Mother Nature, the organization's staff is dedicated to doing everything in its power to ensure the best outcome for the fish while under its care.

The coho released from Deer Lake are overwintered in the lake – initially in net pens and then, after six months, about half the smolts are released to swim freely in the lake until emigration. Initially, the free-swimming smolts seemed to fare better than those in the net pens. In the last few years, however, there's been a severe drop in their survival before emigration. In 2024, 35 percent the fish were lost over the winter. The previous year, that loss was 42 percent.

Sometimes hatchery fish survival is impacted by bacteria, viruses or even predators, but there's no indication these are causing the recent downtrend. Project manager, Travis Russell and his crew believe the fry are leaving the lake outlet during high-water events.

Deer Lake is situated several hundred feet above the mouth of the river and the terrain is too steep and rocky for salmon to make it to the ocean on their own. NSRAA staff uses a weir to funnel the coho to salt-water each spring, but any fish leaving the lake before the weir is installed would not survive.

The crew has developed a new, double-pronged strategy it hopes will minimize losses next year, which includes temporarily moving the location of those net pens to the back of the lake and timing the release of the fish into the lake when the water levels are receding and forecasted to remain low.

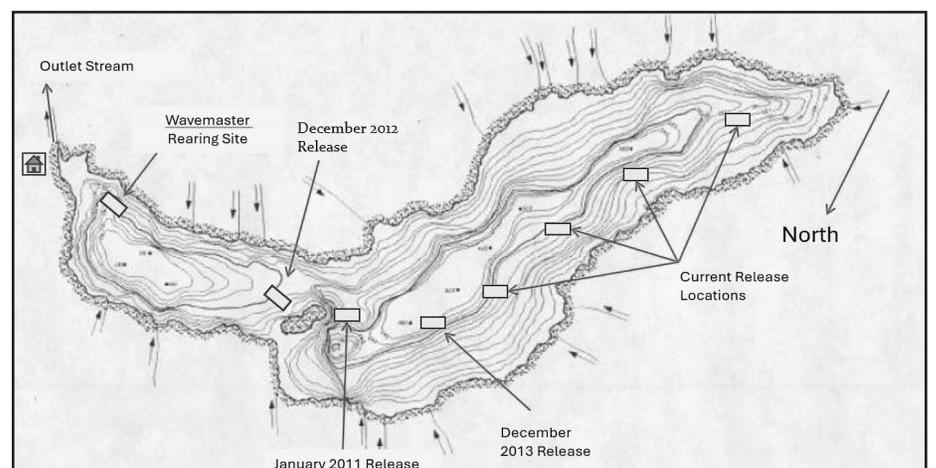
Deer Lake is about three miles long, with the staff camp and net pens situated toward the east end of the lake, near the outlet and weir. The hope is if the net pens of the fish slated for release into the lake are located toward the back of the lake, those fish would become habituated to that area and more likely to remain there once released into the lake, minimizing the chance for them to leave the lake during a high-water event.

Travis and his crew are still searching for the ideal location – one where the net pens will be sheltered from the wind and close enough to shore to secure cables to rock anchors.

The new location will require the staff to travel further by boat to feed and care for the smolts while they are in net pens – about 45 – 60 minutes added travel time per day, compared with caring for the fish at their current location. Though it wouldn't require more staff, it would require more staff time and increased fuel costs. Those extra costs would be mitigated, however, by timing the move of those net pens to later in the fall when the salmon require less food and care.

While this strategy would add complexity to the program's logistics, it would be worthwhile if in-lake survivals improve, Travis says. NSRAA overwinters almost 2.7 million coho at Deer Lake each winter. In 2025, a little under 2 million emigrated to the ocean.

"We're trying to close that gap as much as possible," Travis says. "We'd hope for at least 2.2 million. Ideally, closer to 2.4 million."



Deer Lake historical and current release locations.

Next season's forecast still uncertain

After a difficult season, when both NSRAA's salmon returns and its cost recovery fell significantly short, it would be comforting to look forward to a strong return for next season. Unfortunately, there is no indication next season's return will make up for the woes of the past several years.

"We're really hoping prices come up," says Ben Adams, NSRAA Research and Evaluation Manager. "They really have to for us to be able to generate any kind of revenue and still provide opportunities for the fleets."

Forecasting salmon returns is not easy. Not only do salmon survivals and returns vary dramatically from year to year, but in the past decade, salmon have been trending smaller and younger, skewing the formulas historically used to predict the next season's return.

Even so, about 50 percent of NSRAA's returns have come in at or above the forecast over the years. Only 12 percent of the time have they missed the lower range of the forecast completely. That nearly happened in 2025.

Ben is currently forecasting 3 million salmon returning to NSRAA next season, but stresses that number could change.

"I don't expect it to change a lot, but it could," he says. "There's a lot of unknown going into this year, with how volatile things have been.

At Hidden Falls, for example, forecasters could once count on an average of 22 four-year-olds to return for every three-year-old of the same brood year. Over the past four years, however, that ratio of four-year-olds has ranged anywhere from 15 down to only three.

"We've seen a near worst-case ratio for four-year-olds at Hidden Falls," Ben explains.

Forecasts are helpful for the fleets as they prepare for the coming season, but they are especially important for NSRAA's management and board. Forecasts are their primary tool to plan cost recovery operations for the following season. When returns fall short of forecast, so do cost recovery operations. This season was the third consecutive season that NSRAA was unable to meet its cost recovery goals and did not collect the funds it needs to meet its operations budget. (Poor returns are not always the cause of missing cost recovery goals, but it's nearly impossible to meet the goal with returns below forecast.)

If next season's salmon return at the forecasted 3 million, it would not be the worst return on record, but it certainly won't help NSRAA fill its coffers – unless fish prices go up substantially.

"That's a challenge for fishermen and our board and our organization," says NSRAA General Manager, Scott Wagner. "How do we, as an organization, provide for our revenue needs through cost recovery, while at the same time providing a significant opportunity to the commercial fleets? Those are competing goals, since we both depend on the same thing: the fish returning."

NSRAA's board will have the impossible task of both setting the budget for the coming fiscal year and planning how to fund the organization's operations. Typically, cost recovery operations generate the revenue needed to fund operations, but those efforts have fallen short for the past three years.

The organization has been able to avoid taking out loans, thanks to funds that were invested in 2018, after the record Crawfish Inlet return generated more than expected. Those funds were earmarked to be used when operating funds fell short. Now that those funds have been depleted, the board will be forced to consider alternative options for funding, including a tax assessment or a loan.

Last season's returns to Hidden Falls fell 40 percent short of forecasts. It was a disappointing surprise for NSRAA, after several years of climbing returns there. Unfortunately, the three-year-old return to that hatchery in 2025 was exceptionally poor, indicating poor ocean survivals for the incoming four-year-olds in 2026.

In just one year, three-year-old chum returning to Hidden Falls went from a record high to a record low.

"Specifically, for Hidden Falls, it's a very poor forecast for next season," Scott says. "If it comes in double the forecast, that would be great, but it would also have changed our cost recovery planning."

Unfortunately, there is no way to change cost recovery plans once they are in place, regardless of whether returns fall significantly short of the forecast or come in double what was predicted.

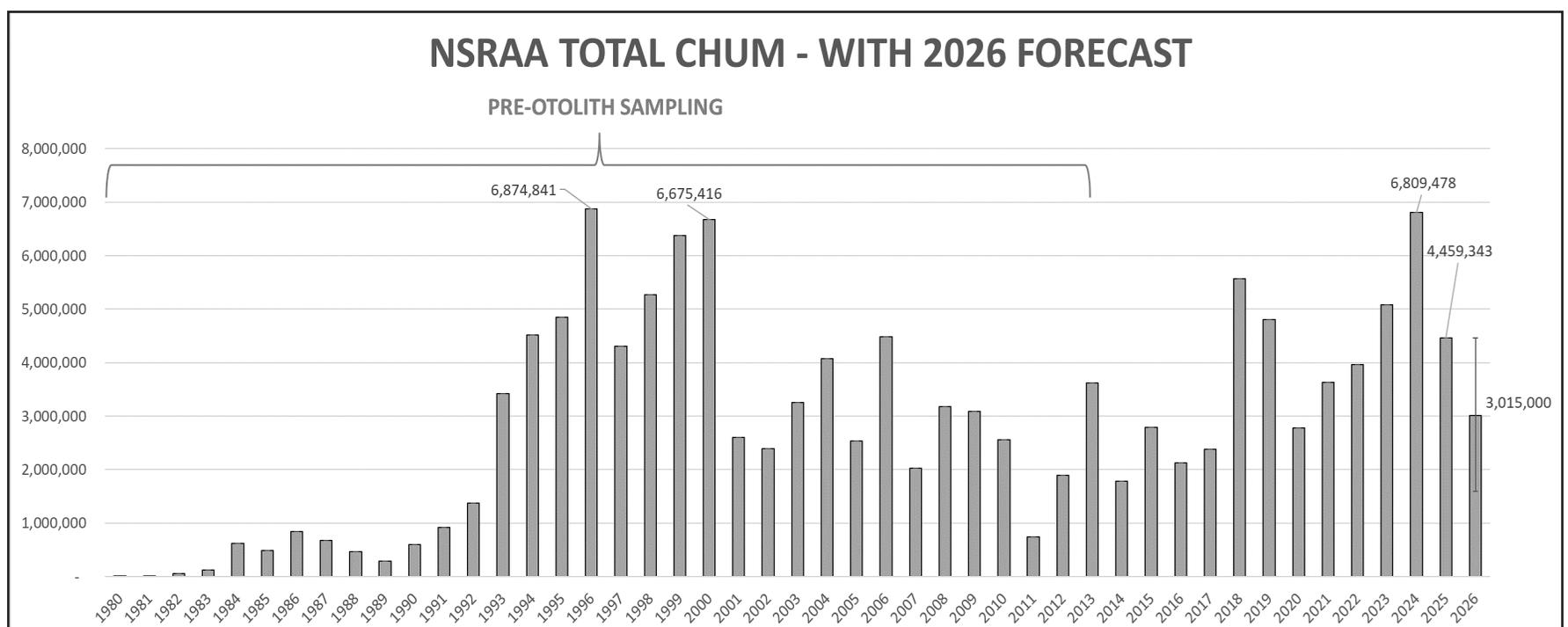
Chum returns to Crawfish Inlet have also been volatile.

After the project began with record returns, "a couple of years ago, it really fell off the map," Ben explains. "My forecast for Crawfish is 500,000, but it really depends what happens with the three-year-olds – which could be anything. We've seen 3 million three-year-olds there in the past and only 80,000 the past two seasons. It's a real challenge to forecast that site."

Ben isn't the only one faced with a formidable task as he attempts to forecast next season's salmon return accurately.

If the salmon come in as forecasted, a return of 3 million chum is a small number compared with recent years – the weakest return since 2020. In addition to the challenge of creating a dependable plan for revenue, that means NSRAA's board will also need to create a plan to ensure the organization can collect enough broodstock for the following brood year of salmon.

"When we're trying to balance a \$12 million budget with a return of 3 million chum with prices where they have been, it isn't a whole lot to work with," he says.



*Salmon return below forecast
(continued from page 1)*

Fortunately, NSRAA has not been forced to take out a loan, even after three years of missing its cost recovery goal. At this point, however, it has used the reserves it earmarked for such shortfalls. Now that cost recovery is not a dependable source of funds for operational costs, NSRAA management and board must come up with alternatives.

Scott acknowledges that NSRAA's financial struggles the past few years are similar to those among the fleets.

"Financially, a lot of them are struggling as well," he says. "The more fish we harvest, the fewer they harvest."

One option would be for NSRAA to use a common property fishery tax to collect funds to reduce its cost recovery needs. A tax assessment would place a predetermined tax on fish harvested from NSRAA's fisheries – allowing NSRAA to streamline revenue generation while providing more time and area to fishermen. NSRAA has used a tax assessment in the past at its Hidden Falls Hatchery.

The board is also considering taking out a loan to make up the gap in funds after this season's cost recovery shortfall. Each option has its pros and cons.

"Whatever way you break it down, the fishermen are going to get less of a chunk of the return until we see prices track with inflation or survivals climb or return to historic highs," Ben says.

He points out that while NSRAA is producing twice as many fish today as it was in the 1990s, the returns are similar. Meanwhile, once you calculate for inflation, fish prices haven't improved much.

"It's a difficult thing for the board to manage at this point – how to generate revenue," he explains.

Fortunately, NSRAA is still in a stable financial position and has not yet been forced to take out a loan, even after three years of falling short of cost recovery goals.

"It hasn't broken us," Ben says.



Board of Fish Southeast meeting, held in Ketchikan, February

Board of Fish to review proposals to reduce hatchery production

NSRAA encourages fishermen to speak up

Three proposals – each one arguing for a reduction or cap in hatchery pink and chum salmon production – have been submitted for review at the upcoming Board of Fish meeting.

Proposal 170 seeks a 25 percent reduction in the statewide eggtake number permitted by hatcheries producing pink and chum salmon, arguing that hatchery salmon negatively impacts wild salmon.

Proposal 171 also petitions to reduce the eggtake for pink salmon – this one in Prince William Sound – citing high rates of hatchery strays into Lower Cook Inlet streams.

The third proposal of concern to NSRAA, Proposal 172, asks the Board of Fish to place a moratorium to prevent an increase in pink and chum production, stating that hatchery salmon production has "a high potential of negative impacts... on wild salmon stocks and the marine ecosystem."

Since inception of the hatchery program, the Commissioner of the Alaska Department of Fish and Game has been the one to review and approve or deny any hatchery-related permits. If approved, this last proposal would supplant the Commissioner's authority.

These proposals are similar, if not the same, as those submitted in the past to reduce hatchery production, usually submitted by the same individuals or groups.

NSRAA General Manager, Scott Wagner, and a number of board members plan to attend the meeting in Anchorage to oppose the proposals.

"If fishermen are opposed to these proposals, they definitely should speak up," Scott says.

There will be a public comment period prior to the meeting, but he encourages anyone who can attend the meeting to do so. There is a tendency for a lot of local opposition to the work of hatcheries in Southeast Alaska when the meetings are in Anchorage.

"It's going to be important that we represent ourselves well," he says.

Over the years, proposals such as these have been reviewed annually, at both regional and statewide Board of Fish meetings. Thanks to a recent ruling, they are now relegated to review every three years, at statewide meetings only, like the upcoming meeting in Anchorage. The next statewide meeting will be held in 2029.

2026 Preliminary Chum Forecast

Early Runs		Late Runs	
Hidden Falls	479,000	Deep Inlet (Medvejie stock)	1,386,000
Southeast Cove	114,000	Crawfish Inlet	528,000
Gunnuk Creek	18,000		
Thomas Bay	115,000		
Deep Inlet (Hidden Falls stock)	376,000		
Early Run Total	1,102,000	Late Run Total	1,914,000
Grand Total			
3,016,000			

NOAA closes salmon research facility



Little Port Walter

Little Port Walter Research Station faces closure for the second time in five years – once again threatening more than a decade of research and work to develop the Keta River Chinook broodstock for NSRAA’s hatchery production.

The Keta Chinook research program began in 2013, when staff from Little Port Walter Research Station began collecting eggs from a wild stock of Chinook from the Keta River, near Ketchikan. Little Port Walter is Alaska’s oldest year-round biological research station, which operates under NOAA’s National Marine Fisheries Service and is located on Baranof Island. Research has focused on the wild stock’s natural tendency to go to sea after only one year.

In a hatchery, Chinook are traditionally reared for 18-24 months before being released. The zero-check strategy attempts to reduce production costs by shortening rearing time and releasing the fish between 9-12 months old instead. This can offer substantial savings – nearly 50 percent – but only if the marine survival isn’t substantially compromised in the process.

In 2021, after NOAA announced it would close Little Port Walter due to budget cuts, NSRAA scrambled to find a way to partner with NOAA staff at the research facility in order to continue work on the Keta River broodstock, with the goal of eventually transferring full operations to NSRAA’s Hidden Falls Hatchery.

Since then, NSRAA and staff at Little Port Walter have been working together with the Keta broodstock. The eggs are collected when the salmon return to the research facility, transferred to and reared at Hidden Falls and the Chinook are then transferred back to Little Port Walter for release.

By 2023, the Keta broodstock returns provided a surplus of eggs, allowing NSRAA staff to do some research of its own. Taylor Scott, NSRAA Assistant Research Manager, has headed up that research, in which the eggs are divided into groups and reared using different techniques. If one group shows consistently better ocean survivals than the others, NSRAA would focus its efforts on that program.

Each year, these surplus fish have been reared and released from Hidden Falls Hatchery for the fleets. But all this progress is in jeopardy without NOAA’s staff at Little Port Walter.

In the spring of 2025, facing congressional budget cuts once again, NOAA made the decision to decommission the research site. Despite NSRAA’s interest in the Keta broodstock, it is not financially feasible for the organization to take over operation of the hatchery solely for production of the Keta program – especially since NSRAA has recently fallen short of the funds it needs to operate its current programs.

Northwest Salmon Research, a nonprofit out of Washington that works to preserve and enhance salmon culture through education and research, has announced its intent to take over research at the facility.

In November, Taylor went to Little Port Walter to help with the transition as the last of NOAA’s staff left. The facility is now closed for the winter and NSRAA awaits word of whether or not Northwest Salmon Research will take over operations there.

“We’re all staying optimistic that this vision will become a reality,” Taylor says.

NSRAA is hopeful it will be able to continue its work on the Keta broodstock. This year was the first that the organization was able to release Keta fry from Hidden Falls – one of several recent milestones for the program.

“It’s a big deal,” Taylor explains. “That represents the second phase of developing this stock for the sole intent of common property harvest.”

This season also represents the second year in a row the eggtake for that stock broke records. In 2024, staff collected more than 1 million eggs and, in 2025, that number doubled, due to excellent marine survival.

The first Keta released under NSRAA’s research program will begin to return in 2026. Taylor is hopeful a collaboration with Northwest Salmon Research will allow NSRAA to continue its work with the Keta broodstock. It would also offer NSRAA a backup broodstock source at Little Port Walter and the opportunity to continue to experiment and analyze which rearing methods lead to the best survivals as NSRAA works to produce these Chinook for the fleets.

“Until we see the fish return to Hidden Falls, we won’t know if they’ll take to that location,” she says. “We need to continue our work until we’re certain the stock is successful adapting to the new location.”

A number of other organizations are interested in the future of Keta salmon research at Little Port Walter, including Armstrong-Keta, Inc., University of Alaska and Oregon State University, as well as some who hope to add research programs for other marine sciences and mariculture.

NSRAA Contributions to Fisheries 2024-2025

	Gillnet		Seine		Troll		All Gear	
	2024	2025	2024	2025	2024	2025	2024	2025
Chinook	3,156	83	1,397	3,757	4,950	6,772	9,503	10,612
Chum	389,769	213,203	3,388,739	1,806,099	679,515	252,440	4,458,023	2,271,743
Coho	741	2,194	2,664	5,977	13,222	55,211	16,627	63,382
All	393,666	215,480	3,392,800	1,815,833	697,687	314,424	4,484,153	2,345,737

Preliminary Data for 2025. Updated 10/13/2025

Board Member Profile: Jay Hendricks

NSRAA board member Jay Hendricks has been fishing salmon most of his life, yet only recently did he begin to understand what it takes to produce the salmon on which he and his fellow fishermen depend.

“Before, I was very naïve – I just went fishing,” says Jay, now 39. “I didn’t know what went into me being able to catch the fish.”

Born and raised in Juneau, Jay is a commercial fisherman, like his father. He was five when he began working on his father’s boat. Jay has always loved fishing and being outdoors, but he believes he may have followed in his father’s footsteps precisely because it wasn’t expected of him.

“My dad was hard on me, but he did a good job of not forcing the fishery on me,” says Jay.

Though he spent much of his young life as a deckhand on his father’s boat, it was up to Jay how much he wanted to work. As a teenager, he also worked on other boats, longlining and Dungeness crabbing.

As much as he loved fishing, Jay graduated high school not knowing what he wanted to do next. He knew he didn’t want to go to college, but it took another year before he decided to be a commercial fisherman - and he would be captain.

“It was kind of a gamble,” Jay says. “I loved to fish, but I’d never captained a boat. Just because I was raised commercial fishing, doesn’t mean I was paying attention how to do it.”

At 19 years old, it was an exciting, but scary, decision. He needed to take out a loan to buy a boat and permit. He had no experience captaining a boat and no idea how to run a business. Fortunately, Jay’s father guided him. He taught Jay how to build his business, to invest his profits back into the business and become financially responsible.

Jay works four to six months of the year on his boat. Salmon is his primary income, but he has crabbed and longlines on the off months. Even with the recent volatility of the salmon market, he has never regretted his decision to be a commercial fisherman.

“It’s been a blessing for me, and now my family,” he says.

Jay is often on his boat for several weeks at a time. He loves his work, but now that he’s married and the father of two young girls, it’s harder to be away so much of the summer.

“But on the flip side, in the winter, I really get to engage with my girls,” he says. “I believe it’s almost a healthy balance for me.”

For nearly two decades, Jay didn’t pay attention to fish politics. He focused on fishing. But a few years ago, Jay joined the NSRAA board to be a voice - not only for the gillnetters, but the fleets as a whole.

The more Jay learns about the behind-the-scenes, the more he wants to learn and the more he wishes his fellow fishermen would learn, too.

“Before joining the board, I was very disconnected with how these fish are managed and what goes into managing our fisheries,” he says. “It’s a lot. It’s vast.”



Jay with daughters, Dailee and Zella

Three years on the board has given Jay a better understanding of the work required to produce salmon for the fleets each year and how the board – with representatives from each of the gear groups – comes together to make difficult decisions to benefit the fleets. He’s constantly amazed by the work of the staff and biologists and the level of research conducted to improve salmon health, numbers and survival. He’s learned so much, but insists it’s just “the tip of the iceberg.”

Jay is running for a second term on the board now.

“It’s a lot for me, but if I can keep showing up and suiting up, maybe I can make a difference,” he says.

Between fishing and his family and the NSRAA board, Jay is busier than ever. But even as his free time dwindles, Jay tries to attend more meetings to continue learning and better understand the fisheries as a whole.

“I feel so fortunate to have this position in life, but I do depend heavily on NSRAA, DIPAC and SSRAA,” he says. “I have nothing but gratitude for what they do and what they’ve done. Now when people come to me with an issue, I say, ‘Attend meetings and speak up,’ It’s important to show up.”

