

# FISH RAP



Change Service Requested

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

Vol 43 No. 1  
May 2025



F/V Cloud Nine conducting cost recovery

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## New strategies for cost recovery

NSRAA is entering the season with its largest cost recovery goal on record and a new strategy it hopes will ensure it can avoid a shortfall.

At \$10.7 million, this year's goal is even higher than its 2024 record goal of \$8 million. NSRAA fell short of last year's cost recovery goal by \$3 million, largely due to an unexpected run failure among the chum returning to Crawfish Inlet and a combination of issues at Deep Inlet.

"When it came to Crawfish Inlet, it was only one age class – the 3-year-olds – that left us high and dry," explains Ben Adams, NSRAA Research and Evaluation Manager.

The size of this year's cost recovery goal is especially intimidating after last year's shortfall and the 2023 market crash.

"The last two years, we've fallen short of our cost recovery goal," says NSRAA General Manager, Scott Wagner. "So we have a slightly different plan going into this season... to assure ourselves the best opportunity to meet our goal."

In the past, the board would make a plan for cost recovery based on the forecasts for each site. Sometimes it would schedule 100 percent of its cost recovery operations at one site only, or it would plan to take 100 percent of the forecasted return at a particular site.

For a number of years, Crawfish Inlet was NSRAA's most successful site and the main site for cost recovery, but the returns there have varied dramatically in the past few years. That, combined with the market crash and low salmon prices, led to NSRAA's decision last year to schedule cost recovery at nearly all its sites. The hope was that by doing so it would protect itself from a large failure at one site.

Unfortunately, it wasn't enough.

NSRAA has again scheduled cost recovery operations at all of its sites, excluding Thomas Bay. This year, however, Ben studied the forecasts intently before the spring board meeting, taking into account possible brood year shortfalls and higher than expected interceptions, to come up with an upper limit recommendation or threshold for cost recovery at each site. This way, NSRAA would plan to take just a portion of the fish from each site, rather than perhaps counting on the full forecasted return, as it has done in the past.

"We have a very large forecast – basically the biggest ever – coming into this year," he says. But after last year's shortfall, "it felt pertinent to put in some sort of safeguard at each site and not rely on just the forecast at face value."

This year's cost recovery goal includes monies intended for forward funding future budgetary needs. NSRAA has always worked to keep funds available as a buffer for unexpected emergencies, to avoid having to take on debt, but depleted those emergency funds after the market crash and last year's shortfall.

"We've never had a full year's worth, but that would be ideal so we can weather future problems and not have to rely 100 percent on cost recovery to fund the following year," Ben explains.

This year, NSRAA plans to get 40 percent of its cost recovery goal from Hidden Falls and another 40 percent at Medvejie, split evenly between its summer and fall stocks. The remaining 20 percent will come from Crawfish Inlet and Southeast Cove.

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## General Manager's Notes



This year, NSRAA has forecasted a total return of 6.18 million chum salmon, the second largest in its history, just behind the 1996 forecast of 6.2 million. The 2025 forecast just nudges out the 2024 chum forecast of 6.15 million. In 2024, the total chum return beat our forecast by about half a million fish, coming in at 6.7 million. While time will tell how accurate our 2025 forecast is, one thing is clear: we will see a very strong chum return to our release sites this summer. Combine that with an improving market price, and 2025 should

be an excellent year for the commercial salmon fishermen of Southeast Alaska.

In 2024, we saw a very strong return of 3.2 million chum to our Deep Inlet release site, the third highest on record for that site. The 2025 forecast of 2 million for Deep Inlet is less than last year's return, but still strong, primarily driven by the later fall run chum stock (about 2/3 of the 2025 forecast). This should allow for common property opportunity, as well as provide a large portion of NSRAA's cost recovery for the season.

The most exciting part of our 2025 forecast is the 2.6 million chum return predicted for Hidden Falls. If the return materializes as forecasted, this would be the largest return in 25 years for the site. For the past decade or so, we have struggled with chum returns to Hidden Falls. Its recent 10-year average was just over 500,000 adults annually. In the last two years, we have seen improving marine survivals reflected in the returns and I am hopeful we will see a return to more historical fishing opportunity at Hidden Falls this season. As with Deep Inlet, a large portion of NSRAA's cost recovery will come from Hidden Falls, but there should be ample common property opportunity with the large return forecasted.

Most concerning this season is our poor forecast of 454,000 adult chum for Crawfish Inlet. This is the lowest chum forecast for the site since multiple age class returns began to the project in 2018. Since 2018, Crawfish Inlet made up most, and in some years, all of our annual cost recovery revenue. That isn't going to be the case this season, which is why Deep Inlet and Hidden Falls must bear a larger burden of the cost recovery goal. In addition to Crawfish Inlet, Deep Inlet and Hidden Falls, cost recovery will also occur at Southeast Cove this year.

Overall, I am optimistic for the 2025 season. Improving prices, combined with our strong forecast, should make for an outstanding season for the commercial fishermen of Southeast Alaska. Best of luck this year and good fishing.

*Scott Wagner*

### 2025 SCHOLARSHIP RECIPIENTS

*Hunter Conn  
Kelcey Simic  
Willa Stuart*

## Sawmill Creek begins coho density trial

The coho reared at NSRAA's Sawmill Creek Hatchery and released at Deep Inlet this spring were the first brood year in a three-year density trial – and the biggest in the history of the program.

"They were about 31 grams at the time of release," says Rebecca Olson, Hatchery Manager. "We're really hoping that will help to improve their marine survival and give the fish a better chance. We're pretty proud about that."

The marine survival of the coho reared at Sawmill Creek Hatchery and released from Deep Inlet has averaged only 0.84 percent for the past five years – far below expectations. Conversely, the coho released from Medvejie have averaged 5 percent over the same time period.

NSRAA began a three-year density trial in an effort to optimize the coho production at Sawmill Creek and turn the program around. The goal of the trial is to see if there is a significant difference in marine survival and/or size between the groups upon their return.

The first round of eggs was collected in October 2023 and were reared normally until July 2024, when the staff divided them into three groups, each with a different targeted density.

The fish in the low-density group were reared with a maximum density of about 22 kilograms per cubic meters. The middle density group's maximum density was 35 kg/cubic meters and the high-density group's maximum density was about 50 kg/cubic meters.

NSRAA's programs typically rear coho at a maximum density of 35 kg/cubic meters.

*cont. on page 7*

### Northern Southeast Regional Aquaculture Association

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William Bergmann	Subsistence
John Blankenship	Municipality
Kord Christianson	Seine
Joe Cisney	Troll
Jacqueline Foss	Interested Person
Bill Davidson	Gillnet
Eric Daugherty	Seine
Matt Giambrone	Gillnet
Dave Gibson	Gillnet
Jay Hendricks	Interested Person
John Jensen	Seine
Hollis Jennings	Troll
Schuyler Mace	Native Org
Henrich Kadake, Sr.	Sport
Brian Massey	Troll
James Moore	Troll
Zachary Olson	Troll
Caleb Robbins	Troll
Don Spigelmyre	Processor
Max Worhatch	Gillnet
Karl Wolfe	Interested Person
Chris Ystad	Seine
Scott Lesh	Gillnet

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**For a change of address notify:**  
Commercial Fisheries Entry Commission  
8800-109 Glacier Highway  
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## Deer Lake coho survivals drop

After three years of substantially lower numbers than expected at spring emigration, NSRAA is adjusting its overwinter rearing protocols to improve the survival of its coho at Deer Lake.

“Last year, we had a 59 percent lake survival,” says Travis Russell, assistant project leader.

It was the third year in a row that Deer Lake coho survivals dropped near or below 50 percent – and that’s before the fish even entered the ocean.

Varying survival rates is not uncommon for hatchery projects. NSRAA has struggled with both lake and ocean survival of its Deer Lake coho over the years, but after nearly a decade of survival rates consistently over 70 percent (and as high as 92 percent) this recent downtrend is troubling.

“Up to 50 percent of the fish are disappearing,” explains NSRAA Operations Manager, Adam Olson. “Losing fish is not a new thing, but the magnitude we are seeing now is concerning. That’s outweighing any ocean survival benefits. We’re trying to hone in on what’s happening and what can we do as a response.”

Roughly 2.8 million coho fry are overwintered in the remote lake, where there is no staff on hand to tend to them during the winter months. A portion of the fry are overwintered in net pens, while the rest are released to swim freely in the lake.

Initially, a larger portion of the fry were kept in net pens. When the free swimming coho showed higher ocean survival rates, NSRAA gradually increased the ratio until there were 75 percent were free swimming and only 25 percent in the net pens.

After only a year, though, the survival rates took a dramatic turn. Adam and his staff aren’t sure why.

Deer Lake is situated several hundred feet above the mouth of the river. The terrain is too steep and rocky for salmon to make it to the ocean on their own; NSRAA staff uses a weir to help funnel the coho to saltwater each spring.

“We’re targeting to release over 2 million for release – roughly 80 percent,” Adam says. An average of only 1.5 million coho have emigrated from the lake each spring for the past three years.

There have been no carcasses or clues to indicate a specific cause for the high mortality. The leading theory is that the fish are leaving the lake when the water levels rise during high rain events after the coho have been released into the lake.

The organization purchased and installed game cameras at the lake’s outflow in hopes of collecting information when there is no staff on site. One of the cameras recorded an increase in birds that could have indicated a feeding frenzy downstream after a high rain event, but there has been no other evidence to support or point to a cause.

Though the recent trend is discouraging, both Adam and Travis are hopeful they will be able to reverse the trend with some changes. As a precaution, NSRAA has shifted back to a balanced rearing strategy with a 50/50 ratio between those fish overwintered in the net pens and those swimming freely in the lake.

“The Deer Lake project is very unique... so it inherently comes with a number of challenges,” Adam explains. Those challenges have shifted in the 30-plus years since the project began and have ranged from primitive means of getting the fish to the remote lake to massive rainbow trout predation. “Now, I think we’re fighting this shift in climate – very mild winters, low snowpack and highly volatile lake levels. We’re attempting to evaluate and adapt to all those challenges.”



*Coho smolt enumeration at Mist Cove during outmigration*



*Deer Lake outlet prior to weir installation*

## Medvejie battles chum parasite

Every year, NSRAA faces a multitude of new challenges, from big to small. Over the past few years alone, the staff at Medvejie Hatchery has faced flooding and black cod predation. This year, it struggled with costia, a protozoan so small, it can be difficult to detect with a microscope.

Costia is a parasite found in freshwater, including Medvejie Lake. It's not new to NSRAA, but this is the first time it has affected its chum.

"We've had it on our freshwater Chinook and coho in the past, but never too severe," says Jared Nelson, Hatchery Manager. "We've never seen it in our chum production."

Because of its size, costia can be very difficult to identify. Diagnosis requires dissecting and sampling fish under a microscope and, even then, it can be easy to miss.

"We try to do the best lab work, but it takes a skilled eye to find these bugs, especially in low numbers," Jared explains.

He and his staff began investigating when the fry exhibited "flashing" behavior, more than a month earlier than normal. Flashing occurs when the fish roll sideways to rub their gills against the nets, and their light underbellies are seen from above.

"Generally flashing in chum comes from chaetoceros, which is a phytoplankton that affects their gills," Jared says. But it was too early for a phytoplankton bloom large enough to affect the fish, so the staff began to investigate further.

The staff now believes the fry were likely mildly infected at the incubation stage, but it became particularly noticeable when the fry were transferred to the saltwater pens in Bear Cove. Though costia is found in freshwater, it can thrive in saltwater.

Medvejie staff administered two treatments of formalin, which is used to control parasitic infections. The treatments were only partially effective and when the mortality neared 35 percent, the staff decided the best response was to release most of the fish into the ocean several weeks early.

Typically, 50 percent of the salmon would have been released at an average weight of 2 grams, while the other half would have been released about one month later, at 4 grams.

The fish were about 1.5 grams at the time of release. Their small size could negatively impact their ocean survival, but it seemed like the best

option for the fry to potentially evade the parasite, which can multiply quickly in an enclosed space such as a net pen.

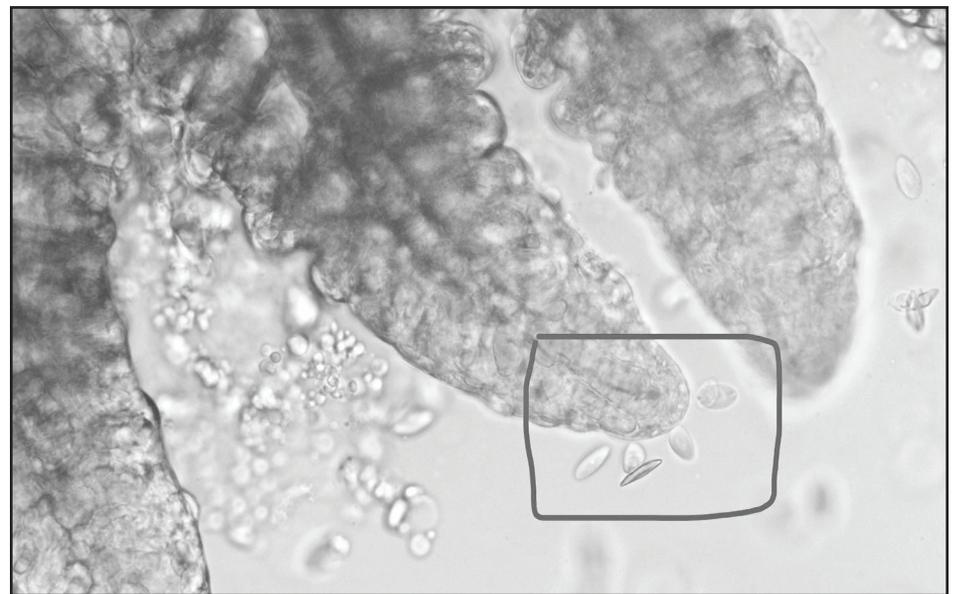
"The consequences of a parasite overtaking the fish is much higher in the net pen, where you have high density of fish and less moving water," Jared says.

The chum reared in Deep Inlet were also diagnosed with the parasite, but the staff chose not to treat them because the mortality rate was only 7 percent.

Looking back, Jared believes the Bear Cove chum were probably infected last year as well, but the mortality was not severe, so the staff didn't recognize the symptoms. That may have contributed to this year's loss of more than 13 million fish before release.

"We're trying to learn as much as we can and apply that to next season," Jared says.

The staff has updated the hatchery's incubation protocol to include a fish health check before the chum are transferred to saltwater in future seasons.



*Costia under microscope (see annotated square)*

## Hidden Falls releases Keta Chinook

NSRAA released its first brood year of Keta Chinook from its Hidden Falls Hatchery this year – a major step toward its goal to create a new Chinook opportunity for the commercial fleets.

The Keta Chinook were initially raised as part of a salmon research project at Little Port Walter. The broodstock, originally from the Keta River, east of Ketchikan, was of particular interest because of its natural propensity to emigrate to the ocean after only one winter.

In hatcheries, "zero-check" Chinook are released to the ocean after six months. It is a strategy to cut the costs of rearing Chinook, which are traditionally reared for 18 months before release and, thus, the most expensive species to raise.

NSRAA has experimented with zero-check Chinook in the past, but with little success. While the zero-check strategy can translate to lower costs, that savings is only worthwhile if marine survivals aren't dramatically impacted. There is always a risk of lower marine survival when releasing fish into the ocean earlier than normal, which is why the organization has been interested in the Keta Chinook research project from the beginning.

In the past five years, NSRAA has worked cooperatively with the staff at Little Port Walter to increase available broodstock and gradually transition the stock to the Hidden Falls Hatchery. During this transition, the broodstock have returned to Little Port Walter, NSRAA has transported the fertilized eggs to Hidden Falls for incubation and rearing, and then returned them to Little Port Walter for release.

This year, approximately 200,000 Keta were released from the research center for broodstock and about 425,000 were released from Hidden Falls. It's well short of the 3.5 million Chinook NSRAA is permitted to release at Hidden Falls, but it marks the first brood year of Keta Chinook released directly from the facility.

Hidden Falls has not released its Andrews Creek Chinook stock at Hidden Falls since 2020, so there should be no overlap between the two stocks when the Keta Chinook begin to return. NSRAA continues to raise the Andrews Creek stock for release at Gunnuk Creek and Southeast Cove.

Meanwhile, NSRAA is pursuing a permit to collect milt from the wild Keta stock for the next five years, in an effort to diversify its hatchery stock.

"They released so few (Keta) chinook at Little Port Walter and so few returned... after a few generations, it bottlenecks the genetics," explains Kevin Connell, Hatchery Manager. "This would bring more genetic diversity into the population and (improve) the stock."

This summer's release of the Keta stock is the first big step toward a new Chinook opportunity for the fleets.

"It's exciting," Kevin says. "We haven't had good Chinook returns here in a long time. Hopefully with this stock (our returns) will turn around and the fish will be bigger."

## ADF&G cuts Crawfish Inlet production

The Commissioner of the Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ADF&G) implemented a 25 percent reduction – approximately 7.5 million chum – from NSRAA’s Crawfish Inlet releases after the hatchery fish in the tidewaters of a nearby index stream created challenges for the department to obtain an accurate aerial count of wild fish there.

NSRAA has requested to reallocate those chum to Bear Cove instead of eliminating them from production completely.

A stream in West Crawfish Inlet was among the index streams the ADF&G uses to monitor the health of its wild chum populations. It is one of two index streams on Baranof Island and one of nine used to measure the Northern Southeast Outside (NSEO) wild summer chum salmon populations.

The ADF&G conducts annual aerial counts at the time of spawn to estimate wild salmon populations. When hatchery fish in the tidewaters of this index stream made it difficult to estimate the wild population there, the ADF&G decided to remove it as an index stream and adjust its annual escapement goal.

“When ADF&G are doing their counts for this index stream, they are, in theory, counting wild fish,” explains Scott Wagner, NSRAA General Manager. “They count what they see and if that is influenced by our fish in the tidewaters, they could be coming up with an artificially high number.”

There has been some confusion since the Commissioner’s decision that the reason for the removal of the stream is that NSRAA’s Crawfish Inlet are the cause of the wild stock’s decline.

“All nine of the NSEO index streams, from West Crawfish to those on Chichigof Island, are showing the same rate of decline,” Scott says. “It was not implied by ADF&G that our fish are impacting the wild stocks and the data that’s available shows that our releases and our project in Crawfish Inlet are not influencing the decline.”

Still, ADF&G chose to cut NSRAA’s chum production at Crawfish Inlet by 25 percent.

“We’re working with ADF&G to continually monitor for the presence of hatchery fish in that West Crawfish stream, even though it’s no longer part of the index, so we can give them a number of wild versus hatchery fish, so they can measure the health of the wild population there over time,” he says.

Crawfish Inlet is one of NSRAA’s newer projects. The first brood year of hatchery chum were released from the remote site, about 40 miles south of Sitka, in 2015, with the first commercial harvest in 2018. An abnormal number of those chum have been returning through West Crawfish Inlet, which sits parallel to and northwest of Crawfish Inlet. A small, narrow pass about halfway to the ocean connects the two inlets, creating what looks like a capital letter H.

The fish that return through West Crawfish get caught in a geographical trap of sorts, as they must go to the end of the bay and make a nearly 180 degree turn to take the narrow pass to Crawfish Inlet.

Taylor Scott, NSRAA Assistant Research Manager, is among the staff that have been researching the outmigration routes of the hatchery chum and their homing tendencies. This is the third year of the studies, which include conducting beach seine surveys along the juvenile chum outmigration routes each May; sampling the fish to determine if they are hatchery or wild; as well as spawner surveys for adult chum, each August, in the West Crawfish stream that was removed from the index streams.

“We do five surveys, one per week, where we walk the stream to look for spawned-out, expired fish and then collect the otolith to determine if they are hatchery or wild, and, with that information, we extrapolate what proportion of the fish spawning in that stream are hatchery strays,” Taylor explains.

“We are working closely with ADF&G,” she adds. “We’re hoping with the data we’re collecting that there’s a way to reincorporate it as an index stream. It was one of only two index streams on Baranof. We don’t want to see it removed.”

Last year, NSRAA counted approximately 500 of its hatchery chum that had strayed up the West Crawfish stream to spawn. That was with a total return of about 1 million chum.

“Our research shows that very, very few of the hatchery fish – about 0.06 percent – actually stray up the index stream, which is well within typical salmon homing biology norms,” Taylor said. Most seem to congregate in the tidal waters before finally making the difficult journey through the pass to Crawfish Inlet. “The vast majority are behaving like they’re supposed to.”

The West Crawfish chum are a summer stock while NSRAA’s Crawfish Inlet chum are a fall stock. There is little overlap, except at the tail end of the summer run, as the fall run begins.

“If all the summer stock have spawned and died, of course you’re going to see a higher portion of hatchery fish,” says Ben Adams, NSRAA Research and Evaluation Manager.

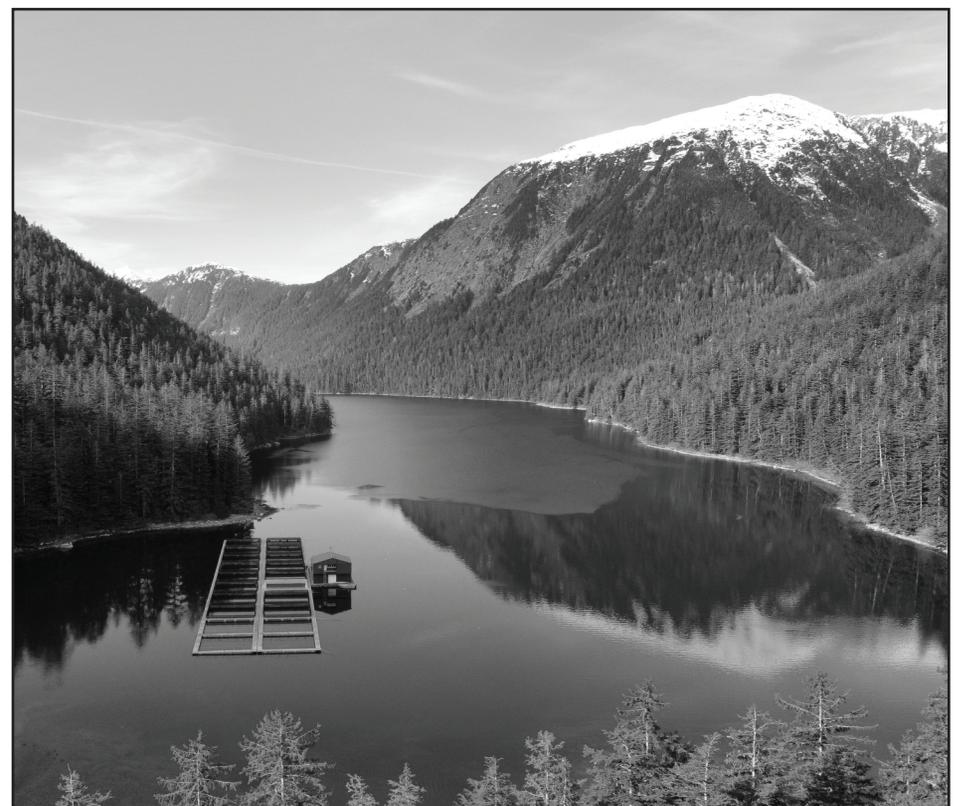
So far, the research conducted by NSRAA shows more than 99 percent of the Crawfish Inlet chum are eventually homing to their natal rearing site.

“The success of the homing is high, but we’re still trying to improve that because (some of the chum) are going through West Crawfish,” Ben explains.

While NSRAA management was disappointed with the Commissioner’s decision to cut the production at Crawfish Inlet, it didn’t object to it. Ultimately though, that cut would result in a cut to the commercial fleets’ allocation, which is why NSRAA submitted a request to transfer the 25 percent cut from Crawfish Inlet to be released instead from Bear Cove or Deep Inlet, where it has been documented there is very minimal straying into the NSEO summer chum index streams.

“Out of 5,000 historic samples from wild streams near Bear Cove, only about two have been hatchery fish from Bear Cove,” Scott says. If NSRAA is approved to release that 25 percent from Bear Cove, it is highly unlikely it would impact the wild populations significantly.

Scott and his team at NSRAA are hopeful the Commissioner will approve the organization’s request to move that portion of chum to its Bear Cove production to mitigate the negative impact to the fleets. They expect a decision by August, when they will begin collecting eggs for next year’s release.



*Crawfish Inlet release site*

NSRAA THA SCHEDULES - 2025							
<b>Deep Inlet</b>	Sun Seine	Mon Gillnet	Tue Gillnet	Wed Gillnet	Thu Seine	Fri Seine	Sat Troll
<b>Begin:</b> Sunday, June 1 (full rotation) <b>Reopen:</b> Sunday August 3 (1 Week opening)				<b>1st Closure:</b> Sunday, June 29 for summer stock cost recovery <b>2nd Closure:</b> Sunday, August 10 for fall stock cost recovery			
<b>2025 chum forecast</b> = 621,000 early run, 1,438,000 late run (both Deep Inlet and Bear Cove)							
<b>Crawfish Inlet</b>	Sun Seine	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu Seine	Fri	Sat
<b>Begin:</b> Sunday, July 6		<b>Close:</b> Sunday, July 27 for cost recovery					
<b>2025 chum forecast</b> - 454,000							
<b>Hidden Falls</b>	Sun Seine	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu Seine	Fri	Sat
<b>Begin:</b> Sunday, June 15		<b>Close:</b> Monday, July 7 for cost recovery					
<b>2025 chum forecast</b> - 2,666,000							
<b>Southeast Cove</b>	Sun Seine	Mon Troll	Tue Troll	Wed Troll	Thu Seine	Fri Gillnet	Sat Troll
<b>Begin:</b> Sunday, June 1 (Troll only), June 15 (full rotation)				<b>Close:</b> Sunday, July 6 for cost recovery			
<b>2025 chum forecast</b> - 587,000 (Southeast Cove), 32,000 (Gunnuk Creek)							
<b>Thomas Bay</b>	Sun Seine	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu Seine	Fri	Sat
<b>Begin:</b> Sunday, June 15							
<b>2025 chum forecast</b> - 379,000							

## Board of Fish Recap

Every year, individuals and groups attempt to decrease Alaska’s salmon hatchery production. Most recently, the Board of Fish reviewed a proposal submitted to cut Southeast Alaska hatchery-produced pink and chum production by 25 percent. It failed.

NSRAA General Manager, Scott Wagner, is relieved the Board of Fish did not approve the proposal, but still feels discouraged. In this case, the same individual has submitted proposals almost every year, for 20 years or more, in an attempt to cut hatchery salmon production. The latest proposals argued that hatchery-produced chum are driving the decline in wild salmon in the Interior, without offering any scientific support or evidence.

“It’s another example of those opposed to hatcheries trying to affect change through this process,” Scott says, adding that the proposals submitted to the Board of Fish aren’t required to include any scientific evidence.

Typically, the Board of Fish holds one regional meeting annually and a statewide meeting every three years. At its meeting in December 2024, it updated its policy to prevent having to review the same or similar proposal every year. Now, those proposals will only be reviewed at the statewide meeting every three years.

This will save significant time for NSRAA and other organizations, who, to date, have had someone prepare for, travel to and attend the meeting (which often last two weeks) annually, to defend their work.

While the latest proposal failed, it was not a unanimous decision. One board member voted to amend the proposal language to reduce the production of chum salmon from 25 to 7 percent and pink from 25 to 20 percent. While the proposed amended language did not pass, Scott worries it shows the proposals have garnered public support even without any supporting evidence.

To date, there is no evidence supporting the argument that Southeast Alaska hatchery salmon are affecting the decline in other areas of the state, Scott says. “Research has shown there is little overlap in the Gulf of Alaska among salmon from the Yukon and salmon from the Southeast. Their rearing habitat does not overlap in the ocean to any significant degree.”

There is no research supporting the argument that Southeast salmon are affecting wild salmon populations in the Interior, nor that an overabundance of salmon is affecting the ocean carrying capacity.

“The notion that salmon is a big biomass in the Gulf of Alaska just isn’t accurate,” Scott explains. “Salmon make up roughly 5 percent of the biomass and hatchery salmon make up less than 1 percent. There’s no science there.”

## Cost Recovery (cont'd from front page)

This is the smallest cost recovery goal on record for Crawfish Inlet. Last year’s run failure of 3-year-olds indicates that brood year was likely impacted as a whole, so few 4-year-olds are expected to return this year.

“Unlike other sites, at Crawfish Inlet, there is an extremely strong relationship between 3- and 4-year-olds,” Ben explains. “So, when you don’t see any 3-year-olds, you know you’re not going to get any 4-year-olds.”

While the market has improved since 2023, there are always the uncertainties: Will the salmon return near forecasts? What will their size be? What will the prices be?

Add to that a cost recovery goal just shy of \$11 million – can NSRAA meet that number this year?

“It depends on prices and average weight, but we are estimating we’ll need about 2.5 million of the 6.2 million chum forecasted to return,” Ben says.

For the first time ever, NSRAA published its cost recovery schedules months ahead of time. The schedule, which attempts to predict the peak of a run based on historical run timings, was created to give fleets some early season opportunity, while also giving NSRAA the best chance of meeting its cost recovery goals.

“We are trying to put more certainty into the schedule by giving (commercial fleets) plenty of notice on when an area will be closing for cost recovery,” Scott explains. “In theory, if (an area) is closed during the peak of the returns, it should minimize the amount of time for the closure.”

There are, of course, downsides to the new plan. If a run comes in earlier or later than expected, it could affect the length of a closure. Still, it’s unlikely NSRAA will veer from the plan.

“We worked with the board to come up with dates that would allow early season opportunity, yet still give us the best chance of meeting our cost recovery goals,” he says. “We will stick with the dates unless there is a crisis or unanticipated reason that would force us to alter from that plan – but it would have to be a pretty unique situation.”

Ben is optimistic about the new strategy.

“I have a lot of confidence in our plan,” he says. “Probably the biggest hurdle we would have is prices going lower than expected. There’s only so many fish you can pull out of the water, (but) I think the board recognized the situation we’re in and the fact that if we want to achieve this goal and have the revenue we need for the upcoming budget cycle, everybody is going to have to give up fishing time and area. There’s not many other ways we can approach it.”

**Sawmill Creek experiments (cont'd from page 2)**

The staff worked to control the feeding and growth rates of the fish in order to control all variables except the density. NSRAA recently installed supplemental lighting at the hatchery, which has helped with fish growth.

“Early on, size seemed like it would be the most challenging variable to control, as each group was growing at different rates,” Rebecca says. But the fish entered the winter at similar sizes with minimal adjustments to feeding.

The goal was to get the coho to 24 grams before transferring them to saltwater net pens this spring, but the fish were 25 grams at the time of transfer – already the largest in history.

“They were in really good condition when they went to saltwater and they just took off out there, too,” she says. “They ate really well and it was a series of really good things coming together to help them do really well.”

The coho were released at an average – and historic – weight of 31 grams. That brood year will begin to return in 2026. NSRAA will continue the density trial for brood years 2024 and 2025.

Once all three brood years have returned, staff will review the data for any significant differences in marine survivals between the groups. Depending on the data, NSRAA staff and board would decide whether those results merit changing rearing densities, which could impact the number of the coho produced at the facility.

**Board Member Update**

NSRAA welcomed Schuyler Mace to its board this spring. Schuyler was elected to an at-large troll seat.

Originally from Maine, Schuyler went to school to become a fisheries biologist. He worked for Maine Fish and Wildlife, and the Fish and Game department in both Idaho and Washington, before moving to Sitka to work with NSRAA. During his time at NSRAA, Schuyler worked at Southeast Cove and Deer Lake projects, Hidden Falls and Medvejie hatcheries, as well as the Salmon Lake weir project.

Schuyler now works for the Sitka Tribe of Alaska, where he runs the traditional food program, harvesting salmon, halibut and deer and other foods for low income families and tribal elders.

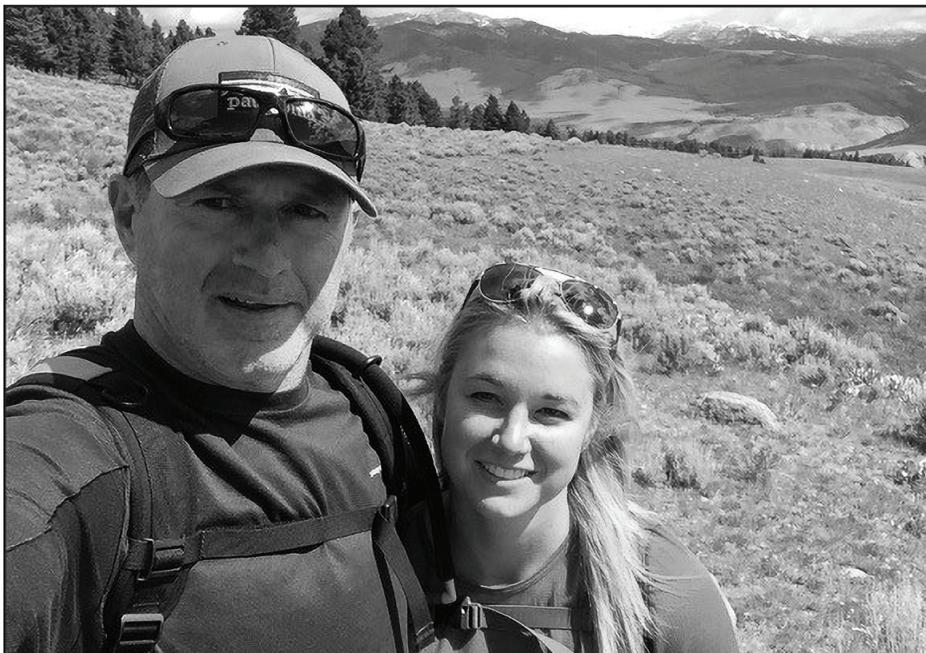
As a troll fisherman, Schuyler is dependent primarily on NSRAA’s chum fisheries at Medvejie and Deep Inlet and its spring king troll opportunities around Sitka Sound. He understands how critical the organization’s work is to the fleets.

“The opportunities NSRAA creates is mostly how I can make my money,” he says.

NSRAA 2025 Return Projections						
Site	Projected Return	Range		2024 Return	2024 Forecast	
		Low	High			
<b>Chum</b>						
Hidden Falls	2,892,000	1,923,000	4,769,000	1,468,288	1,553,000	
Medvejie/Deep Inlet*	2,059,000	1,172,000	3,161,000	3,244,017	2,454,000	
Crawfish Inlet	559,000	235,000	897,000	1,016,257	1,336,000	
Southeast Cove	906,000	294,000	1,282,000	398,672	215,000	
Gunnuk Creek	32,000	13,000	55,000	58,904	211,000	
Thomas Bay	379,000	212,000	568,000	480,359	381,000	
	6,827,000	3,849,000	10,732,000	6,666,497	6,150,000	
<b>Chinook</b>						
Hidden Falls	-	-	50	1,708	900	
Gunnuk Creek	600	400	1,200	821	900	
Medvejie	22,000	12,000	31,000	13,615	10,000	
Crawfish Inlet	300	100	600	1,923	400	
Crescent Bay	2,000	1,400	3,000	1,154	1,800	
	24,900	13,900	35,850	19,221	14,000	
<b>0-ck Chinook</b>						
Medvejie	-	-	200	-	300	
Crawfish Inlet	250	-	400	206	100	
	250	-	600	206	400	
<b>Coho</b>						
Hidden Falls	51,000	26,000	59,000	53,727	36,000	
Deer Lake	48,000	15,000	116,000	11,505	82,000	
Lake Stocking				-	-	
Medvejie	9,000	5,000	12,000	4,815	11,000	
Deep Inlet	22,000	12,000	23,000	13,246	17,000	
	130,000	58,000	210,000	83,293	146,000	
<b>ALL SPECIES TOTALS:</b>	<b>6,982,150</b>	<b>3,920,900</b>	<b>10,978,450</b>	<b>6,769,217</b>	<b>6,310,400</b>	

\* Cooperative Project with SJH: Projections for Medvejie/Deep Inlet are for total returns (NSRAA + SJH fish)

## Staff Profile: Taylor Scott



Taylor and husband, Robert, hiking Yellowstone National Park

Taylor Scott knew she wanted to work in fisheries before she'd even graduated high school.

She was contemplating a career in forestry or natural resources when her science teacher set her up with an internship at a nearby salmon hatchery on the Columbia River. The hatchery was one of three in a complex that worked cooperatively and reared steelhead trout, and Chinook and coho salmon.

"I really enjoyed taking care of fish," she says. "It didn't feel like work."

Taylor learned how to handle and feed fish, how to sample the fish and review data, how the different hatcheries ran, and their day-to-day procedures. "I thought: 'Wow, this is really cool. I think this is what I want to do.'"

After graduating high school, Taylor immediately began working toward a fisheries degree. She knew she wanted to work with salmon.

"They are an iconic species in the Northwest where I grew up," she explains. "It was a fun job... but it was also rewarding to be a steward of a culturally important resource."

After earning her fisheries degree, Taylor moved to Sitka to work for NSRAA.

"I'd never been to Alaska, but I knew it was the place to be if you're interested in salmon and the mountains," she said.

After two years as a fish culturist at Hidden Falls, Taylor left NSRAA to work at Little Port Walter, NOAA's salmon research facility, which was just beginning the Keta Chinook research project. She was part of the team that went to the Keta River to spawn wild fish and bring the fertilized eggs back to the facility for research.

In 2015, she returned to Washington for other work opportunities. She worked as a research assistant with a USGS fish disease ecology lab, an assistant manager at a newly-built \$50 million tribal Chinook hatchery, and a fish pathology assistant for an aquatic veterinarian with the US Fish and Wildlife service.

In 2020, Taylor decided to return to NSRAA as a fish culturist at Medveje Hatchery.

"Alaska is the place to be if you're passionate about salmon biology," she explains. "We're fortunate to have really pristine habitat and wild runs."

But it wasn't just Alaska's salmon that drew Taylor back to NSRAA – it was also the people.

"The people at NSRAA are incredibly hardworking, like no other place I've been," she says. "I felt like Alaska hatchery people were my

people. I felt a sense of kinship. Having worked here in my twenties, it was definitely impactful and shaped who I am. I knew in my heart it was the right decision to come back. It was really like coming back to friends."

In the five years since Taylor returned to NSRAA, she's moved from fish culturist to assistant manager at Medveje and now works as NSRAA's Assistant Research Manager. Her current position is a mix of data research and hatchery support – with a good amount of office time in the winter and field work in the summer – where she's able to apply the experience she's gained in all the previous positions of her career to date.

Perhaps the most rewarding part of her position is to work with the Keta Chinook from Little Port Walter again, as NSRAA transitions the broodstock to Hidden Falls.

"It was hard to leave Little Port Walter knowing I was walking away from that project," Taylor says. "It's so awesome to be involved with it again and to see it starting to bear fruit and actually following through on what the vision was when that project started. It's hugely rewarding."

Taylor admits that because she is so passionate about her job, her job is a large part of her life, but when she's not working, she and her husband, Robert, enjoy camping, boating and living the subsistence lifestyle.

"I have a hard time shutting (work) off, because hatchery work is a lifestyle," she says. "When you live at work and your job is to take care of live animals... you're always kind of (working), but I enjoy that."

### NSRAA FY26 Budget

Projected Income - FY26		
Year	Income Source	Amount
2024	Enhancement tax	\$1,327,482
Revenue - Fish sales / Assessment tax:		
2025	- Amount required from Chum	\$9,664,771
Cost Recovery		
2024	- Chum	\$0
2024	- Chinook	\$167,561
2024	- Coho	\$301,100
2024	- Incidental species	\$15,965
2024	- Roe	\$13,286
2024	- Carcass	\$0
Other Revenue / Funds from Reserves		
2024	Rental Income	\$33,160
2024	Investment Earnings (net of fees)	\$942,178
2024	From unrestricted Reserves	\$0
<b>Total</b>		<b>\$12,465,503</b>
Projected Expenses - FY26		
Expense Source	Amount	
Operational Budget	\$11,472,303	
Capital Budget	\$993,200	
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$12,465,503</b>	