

2021 KDLG Year in Review: Salmon in Bristol Bay

As the Nushagak braced for another big run of sockeye this spring, [managers sought to preserve the fragile Chinook run](#). Managers [held off on opening the district](#) to allow as many kings as possible to escape to their spawning grounds. In the state's season summary, biologists say the Chinook run likely didn't reach its minimum escapement, but that the Nushagak sonar index could be underestimating it.

A report by the McKinley Research Group estimated that Bristol Bay's commercial salmon industry [generated \\$2 billion in economic benefit in 2019](#). It also [attempted to quantify the region's subsistence salmon](#) with a look at protein replacement.

Rapid erosion is threatening a unique set net fishery at Ekuk. Fishermen there [talked about how they fish](#), and what the erosion means for their site.

A man fishing in the Nushagak District [died](#) this summer after his boat capsized. Eric Lance Norby, 45, was the captain of the F/V Pneuma. Authorities credited Good Samaritans on the scene with helping in the rescue of two other people on board.

The largest sockeye run on record [returned](#) to Bristol Bay this summer. The run of more than 66 million fish surpassed the 2018 record of 62.9 million.

The Nushagak's catch of over 17 million sockeye is the second-largest on record for the district, only outpaced by the 2018 harvest of more than 24 million, and the Nushagak fleet broke its daily harvest record multiple days in a row this season. Escapement across the district came to almost 10 million fish -- the highest on record.

In the past decade, [Bristol Bay has seen consistently large sockeye runs](#) and continues to break records. But other Alaska fisheries are experiencing historically low runs, a trend that worries scientists, fishery managers and communities. Biologists can't say for sure why the sockeye returns to Bristol Bay are so large, but some think it may be because of climate change warming the waters.

Meanwhile, fish are shrinking, and processors and biologists [are now considering what those smaller fish mean for Bristol Bay](#).

Commercial interests

One of the largest seafood companies in the world [sold Peter Pan Seafoods to three buyers](#), vertically integrating the company and bringing it under American ownership.

Peter Pan shocked the industry in June when it [announced a base price of \\$1.10](#) ahead of the season – the [first time in decades](#) that a major Bristol Bay processor told the fleet its base price so early in the year.

As fishermen around the state geared up for the season, sky-high prices for salmon from early fisheries like Copper River [boosted market optimism ahead of Bristol Bay's fishery](#). OBI Seafoods set its base price at \$1.25 in July, and Peter Pan hiked its base up as well. This fall, processors boosted the prices again amid favorable markets. Overall, it's estimated that seafood processors paid fishermen working in Alaska more than double last year's total. Bristol Bay leads all areas with a value of \$248 million – about 40% of the statewide total.