

# Kenai Current

FALL/WINTER 2013-2014



## YEAR IN REVIEW: 2013

Looking back on a fishing season and attempting to recap the many memories that accumulate in a summer of guiding is never easy. After taking people fishing on the Kenai River and surrounding waters for the past 23 years straight, you can just imagine how people, fish and experiences have a tendency to flood the memory bank. That said, there are always a number of seasonally specific occurrences that stand out and serve to characterize one year from another. No summer is ever quite the same in Alaska and 2013 was very special for a number of reasons. Unlike so many other seasons where it seems to rain constantly, 2013 will be best remembered for incredible blue bird weather. We also saw the largest return of eulachon (hooligan) smelt anyone has ever seen. From mid-April to early June, there was a three foot black line of these 6 inch silver-sided fish up and down the river for miles. 2013 also revealed some remarkable returns of salmon, too many trophy trout to count and incredible halibut fishing. It was a perfect example of Alaska at its finest and we can only hope next season will continue the trend. Meanwhile let's take a look back at the fishing highlights of 2013!



The most memorable picture of the beginning of the 2013 fishing season was the view looking down the Kasilof boat launch. It was essentially a six foot ice berm with a crevasse large enough to squeeze a drift boat through. It was a cold slow start to the season as our winter lingered longer than normal. Yet finally in late May, the weather turned and so did the fishing. The first good catches of kings were starting to be seen on the Kasilof and the fish were a good mix of both hatchery and naturally produced fish. On the Kenai, things were not starting as well with low counts and slow fishing.

We remained on the Kasilof for most of the early season and enjoyed many days with great action for a mix of king salmon and steelhead.



As we moved into mid-June, it was evident a good number of sockeye salmon were beginning to enter the Kasilof, so this provided an additional option for those looking to get out of the boat and fish from shore. Those that did experienced some explosive action as these hard fishing fish were mere hours from the salt water. The abundance of early run sockeye salmon was not isolated to the Kasilof. The Kenai was also seeing a healthy push of Russian River sockeye swimming up its shorelines and persistent anglers were finding limit catches throughout the first two weeks of June.

**June rolled along** at a very consistent pace with more beautiful weather, good king fishing on the Kasilof and building sockeye runs on both rivers. Trout also opened on the Kenai and with these choices plus salt water fishing and great fly out sockeye and bear viewing, the options this June seemed endless! Many of these options stayed strong well into late June and into July. Unfortunately as June closed, so did any possibility of achieving the lower end of the escapement goal for Early Run Kenai River King Salmon. The river closed to all king fishing on June 18 yet still struggled to make the lower end of the goal.

Fortunately, the alternatives to king fishing were not only alluring but they were many and we turned the corner into July with great fishing all around us. The weather remained beautiful and both sockeye and trout fishing contin-

ued to improve with each passing day. King fishing had re-opened on the lower Kenai but was still very hit and miss. By far the most productive trip for us at the time was a float from Tustamena Lake to the Sterling highway bridge on the Kasilof in search of big, chrome bright sockeye. This has become one of our favorite and most enjoyable mid-summer adventures. The scenery in the Kenai National Wildlife

Refuge below Tustamena Lake along with the serenity afforded by the drift boat makes this a very peaceful experience. This remote float also allows you to separate yourself from the busier fishing areas and more often than not we will have an entire bank to ourselves (something not always the case on the more popular Kenai.)

As usual, the Kasilof fish were a few weeks earlier than the bulk of the Kenai sockeye so their timing was ideal for those here in late June and early July. There were days when we worked harder than others but very few of these trips failed to yield limits. As we moved into

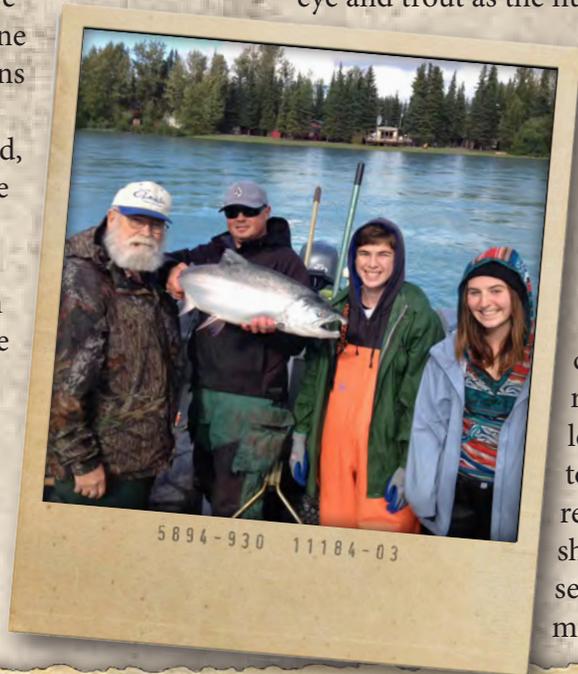
mid July, we shifted our focus back on the Kenai where the first big waves of late run sockeye arriving with each high tide. While king fishing remained open on the lower Kenai, most of our effort remained on sockeye and trout as the numbers of fish, the action and the variety were all very tough to beat. Some did opt to put in their time for king salmon with limited success yet in the end, not enough late run kings were making it back to the river and the season closed early on July 26.

Many questioned why it was not closed sooner given the bleak return in the early run. Nonetheless fisheries politics always seem to rule the day and the fishery remained open longer than it should have to allow commercial set-netters a chance to catch as many sockeye (and king) salmon as

possible before the closure to king fishing in the river mandated they too stop fishing with nets in the ocean. Faced with a nearly identical return in 2012, Alaska Department of Fish and Game took a totally different management path in 2013 opting to keep the sport fishery open and thus giving commercial set-netters both regular and “emergency” openers for most of the month. The irony of the differing management approaches given practically

identical fish numbers is testament to fisheries politics at its finest and how one user group complaining about lost income can outweigh legitimate resource concerns.

With kings closed we continued our pursuit of both sockeye and rainbows. The sockeye run while very large this year, all seemed to arrive in a relatively short window. Instead of limit sockeye catches and fresh pulses of fish entering well into August, the 2013 run ended sooner than normal. Fortunately, there was an unexpected surprise waiting right behind the sockeye as hoards of nickel bright silver salmon began flooding the lower



Kenai. Soon their masses were spread throughout the river and excellent fishing was the rule for the majority of the month. High water opened up a variety of fishing spots for the aggressive coho and we enjoyed world class silver salmon action on a variety of offerings. Kwik-Fish both trolled and casted, along with Vibrax spinners, jigs, flies, bobbers and eggs, all worked really well and after weeks of this great fishing many agreed this was one of the strongest early run Kenai River silver salmon returns in recent history.

The blockbuster silver return was not only isolated to the Kenai River. On the West Side of Cook Inlet, particularly on the Kustatan, wave after wave of bright coho began arriving in mid July and they continued to show up even as late as early September. Buchatna Creek, The Chuit, Big River Lake all saw strong coho runs and this was a welcome sight after a number of years with middle of the road returns.

In addition to the better than average silver fishing, rainbow trout fishing in 2013 was equally outstanding. There are a number of factors that helped make this season so productive for big trout and this included a literal perfect storm of meat for them to feast on. Starting with the fall of 2012, millions upon millions of pink salmon blanketed the Kenai and their deceased bodies along with the countless loose eggs served a protein banquet for several months prior to winter. Then in the early spring of 2013, perhaps the largest return of eulachon (hooligan) smelt invaded the river and their fleshy soft-meated bodies were deposited in the billions throughout the watershed. Again the trout were surrounded by an abundant and rich food source and summer had just begun! Fast forward to July and hundreds of thousands of filleted sockeye salmon carcasses rolling down the river and piling up by the truck loads behind eddies and below rock piles. The already girthy rainbow have a fresh feast to devour and this mid-season frenzy yields some of the largest trout of the season. This amazing fishing action for truly world class trout continues well into August in the middle sections of the river until the majority of the sockeye carnage has subsided and the fish eventually move upriver to position themselves for the pending spawn.



We too migrated upriver in mid-August and it is here we stayed until the conclusion of our fishing season. The robust run of silvers combined with several high water events in August pushed most of the fish upriver at a fast pace and action just below Skilak Lake was incredible. The ideal conditions and high densities of salmon spanned the entire month of August and just when things finally started to slow down below the lake, lower sections of the middle river were starting to fill up with new, late run silvers fresh from the ocean! These second run fish are noticeably larger than their first run cousins and with the limit increasing to three fish in September, the fish box was full on many days this fall.

While we were blessed with awesome trout fishing in August, the typical peak trout fishing we normally experience in late September and October never really happened. There were a few flashes in the pan but for the most part high water and lots of natural food for the trout spread throughout the system kept the trout bite slow as the season closed. As they say, all good

things must eventually come to an end and after what seemed like one of the best seasons we have seen in many years, this one certainly ended with a lot of very special memories.

So many great friends, family and special experiences combine to make-up a full season here on Alaska's Kenai Peninsula. Thanks to each and everyone of you that helped make 2013 such a great season. After 23 years I am continually amazed at how captivating and different each individual summer ends up being. 2013 was humbling once again in regard to our king salmon but encouraging also as there were a number of highlights to the 2013 returns, namely silver salmon and lots and lots of monster trout! As always we are eager to see what the coming season has in store for us and one can only hope that it will bring more fish to our rivers and smiles to the faces of all that will visit us in 2014.

*Take Care and Great Fishing!*

*Mark, Cindy, Faith, Caleigh and Emma*

# JIM RINKER: HANDYMAN EXTRAORDINAIRE



If you visited our fishing camp this summer, chances are you saw a new face managing the property. His name is Jim Rinker and he is the father of long time Kenai guide Brent Rinker. Jim is retired and has long looked forward to spending summers in Alaska, helping out here at camp and basically just hanging with the guides. Sitting around every night and hearing harrowing Alaska fish tales might seem like a great job but in reality there's a lot more to it than that. Every evening we have gear to sort, rigs to make, flies

to tie, bait to cure, rods to assemble, reels to spool, boats to wash, coolers to pack and coffee to make. With all these chores, it's a wonder we find time to relax at all. Jim handled every aspect of his job with diligence, professionalism and pride. In addition to helping us with our daily fishing tasks, Jim also did an amazing job taking care of our property here on the Kenai River. Virtually every inch was patrolled by Jim and from the river bank to the rustic boardwalk to the manicured grass and the vibrant flowers, Jim's work was everywhere. Thank you very much Jim Rinker for all your hard work and companionship and we all look forward to seeing you back in Alaska very soon!

## King Salmon

After two successive years of the lowest returns ever recorded, the future of Kenai King fishing is anything but certain. Some are pointing fingers at a variety of causes while others simply blame cyclical factors such as ocean conditions, and other environmental influences for the low abundance period we have seen. I tend to fall more in the middle, seeing the problems as a myriad of forces all coming together in a literal perfect storm. Whatever the reason, it is not isolated to just the Kenai and indeed it warrants a step back as we look deeper into the causes and solutions to the problem. For me and my business it means exploring alternatives to king fishing and providing a quality trip for our guests while having a minimal impact on king salmon returns that are struggling to meet minimum escapement goals. Introducing people to more remote sections of our rivers and fishing for more abundant species such as sockeye, silvers and trout has opened up a wide variety of new experiences



**Are recent returns the new "norm" or is this monarch of the salmon family poised for a comeback?**

for us. We are finding when it comes down to it, people just want to have fun and catch fish! Indeed landing the big king is always going to have its certain allure, but more and more people are beginning to understand that the king salmon resource is a fragile one. They are not as abundant or stable as the other salmon populations and thus must be treated differently in the eye of the everyday angler.

We have long advocated that catch and release is the best practice for king salmon yet we have also been responsible for many kings getting the wood shampoo. Times have changed. Except for hatchery king salmon on the Kasilof, we have released more kings on both rivers than we have kept in the last few seasons. Even when it is not required by regulation, we will continue to strongly encourage our guests to release kings and focus on more abundant species for harvest purposes. If your primary goal when fishing the Kenai is to kill a Kenai King, we are definitely not the guide service for you.



Through the many years I have guided on the Kenai River, I have seen ups and downs in all the salmon returns. This cyclical boom and bust is all part of the salmon's natural existence, there are good years and there are bad years. This years return of silver salmon was not just good, it was off the charts great!



# Silver Salmon Spectacular!

*2013 return one of the best ever!*



Silver salmon are likely one of our more predictable returns each year when even an average return can yield periods of very good fishing. This seasons return was noticeably different as the fish were not just here and there, for a period of time, they were EVERYWHERE. In most years the fish seem to prefer a handful of strategic holes and this is where most of the fishing pressure eventually occurs. Given the higher number of silvers this year, almost every spot that would normally hold silvers was loaded.



The hot fishing allowed us to expand the methods we normally use and we did a lot of experimenting with not only different lures but also bobbers and eggs as well. Everything seemed to work at some point and the bottom line is more fish definitely makes a huge difference on success rates overall. We are very hopeful that this coho abundance will carry over into next seasons returns! Normally one good year will foster another so we are optimistic this will be the case.



Remember next season is also a pink salmon year and their presence is always a game changer on how and where we fish silvers, especially when the pink numbers hit full strength. Nevertheless, they only add to the fabric of the day and then ensure non-stop action between aggressive and hopefully numerous packs of silvers.



# Kenai River Property Management, LLC

This past summer my wife and I started a new business called Kenai River Property Management. After handing seasonal rentals via our fishing business for many years we were approached by several local homeowners about handling seasonal vacation rentals for them. As we do this on a daily basis with our properties and a few others anyway, managing additional properties seemed a natural fit. For more details on all the lodging we offer, please visit the Alaska Lodging page on our website:

<http://www.mgfalaska.com/alaska-fishing-lodge/>

Here you will not only find our cabins but also a number of other quality lodging options. Two new properties in particular which we are very proud to introduce include:

*The Kenai Peninsula is a great place to plan a vacation and no matter what the size of your group, we look forward to helping you find the perfect accommodation for your stay. Oh, and did I also mention we offer guided fishing?*



Mackey Lake Cottage



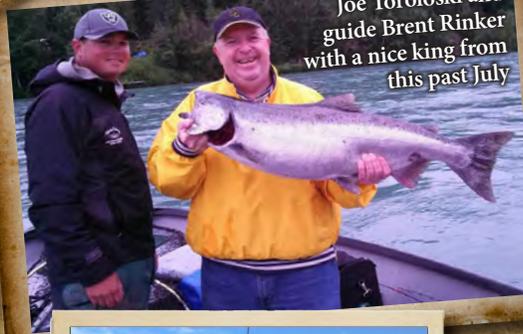
Riverview and Moose Landing Estates

## Cast From The Past

Team Alabama with a nice limit of Kenai Sockeye



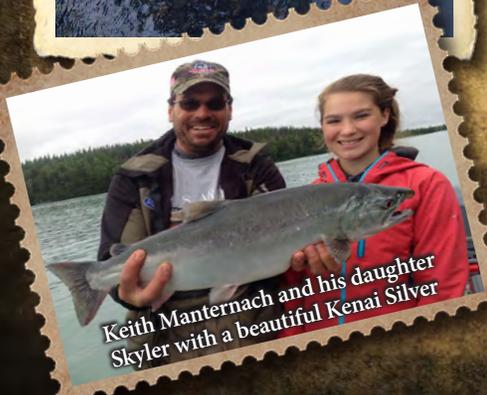
Joe Toroloski and guide Brent Rinker with a nice king from this past July



5894-930 11184-03  
Scott Kelly and his crew show off a great limit of sockeye from the Kasilof



Keith Manternach and his daughter Skyler with a beautiful Kenai Silver



5894-930 11184-03  
David Burk with a Kenai Sockeye that crushed a K9 Kwik-Fish!



Leonard and Brian Lee with a Kenai Rainbow double!

# Alaska Fishing



WITH MARK GLASSMAKER

## 2014 SPORTFISHING RATES

For reservations or more information,  
please call us toll free: 1-800-622-1177  
or email us at [mgfish@gci.net](mailto:mgfish@gci.net)  
[www.mgfalaska.com](http://www.mgfalaska.com)

### Kings:

Kenai Half Day ..... \$225  
(5.5 hours)  
Kenai Full Day ..... \$275  
(8 hour minimum)  
Kasilof Full Day ..... \$275  
(8 hour minimum)

### Sockeye:

Kenai Full Day ..... \$275

### Silvers:

Kenai Half Day ..... \$200  
Kenai Full Day ..... \$250

### Trout:

Kenai Full Day ..... \$250  
Upper Kenai Full Day ..... \$295

### Halibut:

Full Day Cook Inlet ..... \$295  
Full Day Homer ..... \$295  
Full Day Seward ..... \$295  
(Multi-species)

### Fly-Out Fishing\*:

Full Day Westside Cook Inlet:  
Sockeye, Silvers, Trout ..... \$395  
Chuit, Crescent Lake: ..... \$550  
Full Day Nushagak:  
King Salmon ..... \$750

\*All prices are per person, price may vary depending on location. Please call or visit our website for the many additional fly out options available.

**All Fishing Trips Include:** All fishing gear while guided (rods, reels, bait, etc.) and experienced guide with boat. Snacks and refreshments will be provided on both half and full day river trips. Your fish will be cleaned and prepared for freezing. Additional processing including vacuum sealing, smoking and shipping services are available for an additional fee. We recommend having your catch vacuum sealed and boxed for the flight home. You will be responsible for purchasing an Alaska Sportfishing License, including king stamp (if fishing for king salmon). River trips depart daily from one of several boat launches on the Kenai River.

**For Reservations:** Once you have decided on lodging and fishing dates, we will send you an invoice detailing the cost(s) for your trip and required non-refundable deposit. Once we receive your deposit, we will mail you a confirmation receipt, a detailed itinerary and directions to your accommodations. Final payment is due thirty (30) days prior to arrival. We accept Visa/Mastercard/American Express/Discover, personal checks and money orders.

**Cancellation Policy:** Deposits are non-refundable with limited exceptions in cases of extreme hardship.

**Limits of Responsibility:** "Alaska Fishing with Mark Glassmaker" reserves the right to alter any package or itinerary as existing conditions may require. All rates quoted are based on current rates at the time of this printing and are subject to availability and/or change without notice.

**Not included with your trip:** Gratuities, air fare, car rental, meals, Alaska state fishing license, fish processing and air freight charges for fish.

## 2014 LODGING RATES

We have four individual cabins for you to choose from. Edgewater One and Two cabins are located on our riverside property and Moose Horn One and Two are on their own private 2 acre lot across the street. All cabin guests enjoy private fishing access to the Kenai River.

Cabins include all cooking and eating utensils, bed and bath linens, full-size gas range with oven, full-size refrigerator, microwave oven and outdoor gas barbecue. Cabins are additionally equipped with satellite television, WiFi and telephone.



EDGEWATER ONE



\$200 per night for four (May, Sept.)  
\$250 per night for four (July)  
\$225 per night for four (June, Aug.)



MOOSEHORN ONE and TWO

\$175 per night for four (May, Sept.)  
\$225 per night for four (July)  
\$200 per night for four (June, Aug.)



EDGEWATER TWO

\$250 per night for four (May, Sept.)  
\$300 per night for four (July)  
\$275 per night for four (June, Aug.)





*If you're planning to visit during the 2014 or 2015 season,  
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INCORPORATED

Pro Guide

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quality Lamiglas rods at their website:

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Check back for frequent updates.

