

Kenai Current



2015: THE YEAR IN REVIEW

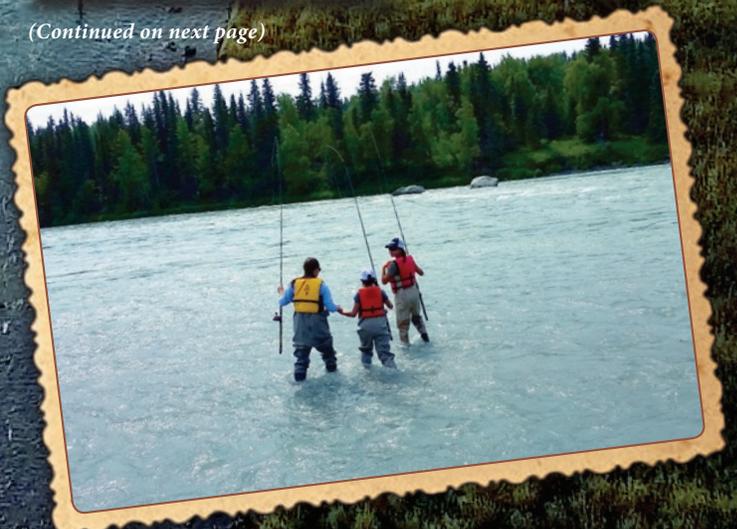
2015 came and went like a wildfire and in reality, this is exactly how our season began... again! In a repeat of the previous spring, very little snow and warm temperatures made the Kenai Peninsula ripe for a fire and sure enough in early June, a 10,000 acre blaze once again burned in the refuge below Skilak Lake. This fire again got very close to the Kenai Keys subdivision and actually burned a number of structures before eventually heading out towards Skilak Lake. It was another ominous beginning to our season but compared to the 200,000 acre fire in 2014, it was much less of a distraction.

We began our 2015 fishing season in Yakutat this year and we did some guiding for spring steelhead via Glacier Bear Lodge. This was a great experience and after fishing the Situk River for the past 16 years it was a lot of fun to show that beautiful river to some great people that had never caught a steelhead before. Hooking wild steelhead in the crystal clear Situk River is very rewarding and always a challenge. This is a special trip and I look forward to seeing everyone there again this coming spring. If you think you might like to join us, just let me know. If you have ever dreamed about catching wild Alaska steelhead, the Situk is the place.

All in all it was a great beginning to the 2015 season and upon returning to the Kenai Peninsula, it was time to shift focus to the Kasilof River. With the pre-season closure

on the Kenai, the Kasilof was the only option in late May and early June and it definitely did not disappoint. Good numbers of king salmon were available from late May and well into late June. Many kings could be seen rolling in regular holes like the People's Hole and the Traps and the numbers of fish definitely helped the fishing success. Given we are fishing with a single hook and no bait, we did manage to land 1-5 fish per trip for a solid couple of weeks and I was impressed with the consistency of the action. Most of the fish were tide water, sea-lice chromers and they fought really well in the early season flows of the Kasilof. After enjoying the king salmon action it was time in mid-June to head upriver and chase the now abundant sockeye salmon. These silver bullets were arriving in the tens of thousands daily and the upper Kasilof is our favorite place to intercept them. We launched the drift boats just below Tustumena Lake and rowed down several miles...

(Continued on next page)



YEAR IN REVIEW: 2015

CONTINUED...

before deciding on a strategic gravel bar. Many mornings we were able to literally land right on top of the traveling masses and the ensuing melee was a blast. We saw regular limits on these great trips and this has become one of our more regular and enjoyable trips from mid-June into the first week to ten days of July.

July 1st marked the opening day of king season on the Kenai River and the fishery began with no bait, single hook. Fishing in the first week to ten days was fair with boats seeing 1-3 fish per trip. Although sonar numbers were not excessively high, they were a definite improvement over the past several seasons where we saw near record low returns. Although we did take a small handful of king salmon trips this season, the overwhelming majority of our July anglers chose to fish for the far more consistent and abundant sockeye salmon.

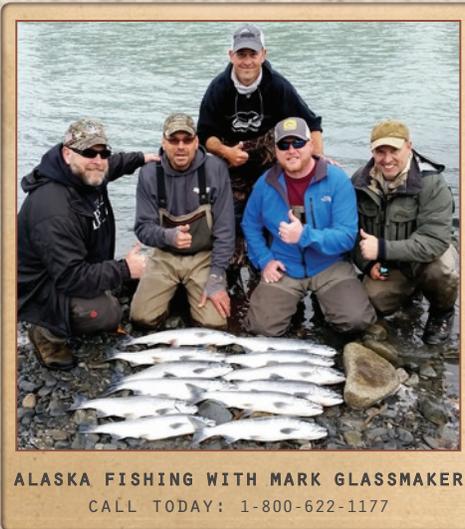
As we entered the second week of July, sockeye fishing on the Kenai was very good. Even though the number of fish were moderate, compared to peak times there were very few people fishing so a lot of fish were making it through. It seemed like we had the river to ourselves for over a week before sonar numbers began to reveal larger pulses of fish and the crowds began to swell. Overall the late run Kenai sockeye run was a good one although the way the fish arrived was unusual. Normally we see a series of days or a week where a very large percentage of the return arrives all at once. This season the fish came in very steady waves with few large spikes and the run seemed to continue much later into August than normal. This year one could find newly arriving sockeye salmon as late as the third week of August. Needless to say we appreciated the large and consistent return of sockeye this season and missing a limit was very rare.

Eventually the positive king salmon numbers allowed the department to project meeting the escapement goals for kings and thus the use of bait was allowed in the fishery on July 24. Of course this resulted in very



good fishing for a couple of days before returning to more normal king fishing for the remainder of the season. Allowing bait also changed the management plan for sockeye and allowed set gill nets more fishing time. In the end, the king salmon return, which was expected to meet the middle to upper end of the escapement goal, only barely met the lower end.

We stayed with the sockeye run well into August as our early run of Kenai Silvers were late to show. They finally arrived with a vengeance in the third week of August and this ended a very successful and lengthy sockeye season.



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The silvers may have been late but once they arrived, the action was incredible. The early run fish were super aggressive on the tides and the high numbers of fish lasted for several weeks. As we entered the first week to ten days of September, no discernable pause seemed to occur between early and late runs as the steady stream of fish on the tides just kept coming. The onslaught of silvers continued until it again hit a peak in October. With the river super low and fish

everywhere we saw some of the most epic silver salmon fishing ever, with literally hundreds of fish in all of the holes. Ironically, with the season largely passed, very few people were on the water to see this incredible late season silver run.

No seasonal Kenai recap would be complete without mention of the incredible Kenai Rainbows. These resident species and monarchs of the river continue to amaze me as I have the privilege of seeing just how prolific and varied their population really is. Every season it seems more and more are discovering just how fun targeting big rainbows can be for the day. It presents a challenging and very hands on experience with the potential for huge rewards. Even among Alaska destinations, few places hold as many large wild trout as the Kenai and any hook up could be a double digit fish. We saw a number of really big trout come to the net this year and each one was completely unique.



Fly out fishing this year was very productive although typically dependable Wolverine Creek did not see as many fish in June like it normally has in the past. The run finally arrived but it was later than the normal mid-June time period and more like mid-July before the run completely materialized. By this time we were beginning to see very good numbers of silver salmon on the Kustatan River and this fishery just got better, better and better! We fished the Kustatan well into late August and were still seeing ocean bright sea-lice silver salmon. We also flew into Bachatna Creek a lot this season and it was its usual outstanding self. The ability to sight fish so many silvers is always a lot of fun for people, and this small river provided outstanding fishing every time we came to visit. The Chuit was also very good for silvers this year and like Bachatna Creek, the Chuit is always one of our favorite rivers for fly fishing.

Halibut fishing in Cook Inlet was productive as always and our guests landed a number of very good sized fish this season. We also saw great fishing from both Homer and Seward, and overall it was a very successful season on the salt water. Now we look forward to winter kings in Homer and then more halibut again this spring as we gear up to do it all over again!

As always the season went by very fast, but it definitely stood out in a number of ways. The run timing, especially for the sockeye and silvers was later than I remember and also notable was the improved numbers of king salmon. Both the Kenai and the Kasilof saw considerably more kings this year compared with more recent seasons and their record low returns. Hopefully this resurgence in king numbers points toward positive things to come in the next several seasons...only time will tell.

It is so very hard to remember each and every day, but it sure is fun to look back at the great pictures and all of the very genuine people I get to meet over the course of a season. I know I speak for all my guides, my wife and family when I say thank you to everyone that has supported our guide business through the years. It has been very rewarding to see our business grow and we are very much looking forward to many more seasons on the water. Hopefully we will see you next year and if there is ever anything we can do for you up here in Alaska, please contact us anytime.



Tight Lines and Great Fishing!

Mark, Cindy, Faith, Caleigh and Emma

Now Booking: **SPRING STEEL**

With the myriad of rivers and lakes that Alaska has to explore, few hold the same anadromous rewards contained in the massive Tongass rainforest in southeast Alaska. It is here in the crystal clear flows of the legendary Situk River that one of the most mystical and alluring fish in the world lives. The steelhead trout, the Holy Grail of the Pacific Northwest, the pinnacle of piscatorial prestige, is not widespread like the various pacific salmon species found throughout much of the state. Adding to their mystique, steelhead are only found in a mere handful of Alaska Rivers and even among those only a few have enough fish to predictably target with any semblance of consistency. By far the largest and most popular steelhead stream in the Greatland is the Situk, located near Yakutat...and it is a very special place. For one, Yakutat is serviced daily by two regular Alaska Airlines flights. This means what would normally be an out of the way, relatively challenging place to get to is now easily accessible via Seattle or Anchorage. Once you arrive in Yakutat you will experience time standing still as the town has changed very little through the years and is a nice portal to the river, a place to dry out, find a hot meal, a cold beer and a dry bed. There are a couple of lodges in Yakutat, a post office and a liquor store. There are also a few car rental businesses and a really nice fly shop. There is everything a steelheader needs to recharge between river missions.



Entering the Situk River corridor is almost like being in a staged Hollywood set attempting to depict the most prolific, wild and mesmerizing steelhead environment imaginable. For one, the water is crystal, thin-air CLEAR. At the proper level, one can literally see 90% of the fish and at peak times this means multiple thousands of steelhead all within a 14 mile stretch of river. Just seeing this many wild steelhead in such a pristine and natural watershed is an amazing experience and then you make your first cast. The river does not give up its treasure lightly and most soon learn seeing the fish does not always equate to catching the fish. Approaching steelhead in the gin clear water is very difficult, especially if the water is low. More often than not, the fish see you before you see them. You need to use stealth in your approaches and presentation and even then it takes great persistence to find the correct offering or to make the perfect cast. Sooner or later it will all come together and the result will often be enough to hook you for life. Steelhead offer such a great challenge and display such brute strength and vitality in their battles that their pursuit becomes very addictive.



In April and May we will be arranging a limited number of small group adventures to the Situk River via Glacier Bear Lodge. These are all inclusive packages that include everything from airport pick-up, all lodging and meals for five nights and three full days of guided steelhead fishing. Halibut fishing or transport to the river for bank fishing is available on the off day(s). The guided fishing days will be two anglers per drift boat and are 14 mile floats and 10-12 hour days. Both fly fishing and conventional fishing works well and although anglers are encouraged to bring their own rod, all gear will be provided for you. You will need a good pair of chest waders and also a good wading jacket and rain gear. Ideal dates are anytime between early April and mid May. This all-inclusive, 5night/3day trip is \$2800 per person.



Again, dates are limited so if you think you may want to join us on this incredible adventure, give us a call or send us an email and we will be happy to help you make all of the arrangements.

KINGS REBOUND IN 2015...

After nearly three full seasons of very low king salmon returns and countless restrictions, king salmon numbers in 2015 were a welcome relief. For the first time in several seasons, the late run of Kenai King salmon season stayed open right up to its annual closure date of August 1. While it was by no means a huge return, it did at least meet minimum escapement goals which was certainly a step in the right direction. For the most part we did not spend a whole lot of time pursuing kings in July as with the overly abundant sockeye, the "hit and miss" king fishing just did not have the same appeal as the "near guarantee" of sockeye fishing. We did get down to the Kasilof River on a few July days and it did provide some good action for some very nice kings from the drift boat.

May and June were closed on the Kenai for kings but the neighboring Kasilof did provide some very good early season king salmon action. We started fishing the Kasilof in late May and it seemed like on every trip up until we transitioned to sockeye in mid-June, we saw multiple chances at nice kings and we brought several fish to the net on each trip. This was all with no bait and single hook restrictions which all says the return was relatively strong. Again it was really encouraging to see this resurgence in king salmon abundance as the early run of the Kenai king also showed improved numbers as did several other Cook Inlet king salmon rivers.

Seeing the king rebound (hopefully) is, for lack of a better word, conflicting for me as we have been very conservative with our participation in the fishery over the past several seasons. We shifted more toward the dependability and sustainability of sockeye trips and that move has proved immensely successful. That said, the art and allure of king fishing is an entirely different animal and we do look forward to revisiting this legendary fishery the Kenai made its name with. The future of king fishing on the Kenai will have a different feel after the recently poor seasons and hopefully more will choose to release rather than harvest these incredible fish. We will continue to highly encourage catch and release particularly in seasons where adequate escapement is less than certain.



Early Run Kasilof Kings!

**LOW WATER AND FRESH FISH MAKE FOR SOME GREAT ACTION.
IF YOU ARE LOOKING FOR THAT FIRST FRESH SALMON OF THE SEASON,
LOOK NO FURTHER THAN THE KASILOF IN LATE MAY AND EARLY JUNE.**

After a long winter in Alaska, there is just something special about the first salmon returning to nearby streams. They rarely arrive in great numbers early, but they are often the most beautiful of the entire run. Particularly on the Kasilof River, it's tough to find a prettier sight than that of an ocean bright king, minutes from salt, and just glowing with an iridescent purple sheen. Perhaps it's the several months of not seeing fish on a regular basis, the long winters spent preparing for just that moment when the first rod of the season flattens out and line starts pouring off the reel...ahhh

yes, fish on! Indeed the early season king fishing on the Kasilof is a great experience. It offers relatively uncrowded conditions and a very scenic drift. It offers a glimpse at Alaska as a whole awakening from its slumber. It is common to see moose and fledgling calves, arctic terns diving in the riffles, seagulls of

every variety mulling about and of course, newly arriving kings that at the right time and place will just about pull your rod out of the boat! The drift boat experience in early season low water makes for a very stealthy approach to the fish but make no mistake, this is not one after another type fishing. There are definitely days when our paths just do not meet, but then again there are lots of days when they do. Of all the fishing action I get to witness over the course of a summer and fall season, I am not sure anything is as exhilarating as an early season king salmon bite in a drift boat. Again, maybe it is the winter respite, or the added effort of rowing the boat to produce the strike, but that rod violently pinning itself down in the rod holder and the eruption of glacial water several yards in front of the boat is just incredible to be a part of. With the low water and less current, early season Kasilof kings fight really well and each one you put in the net is well earned. This run seems to fish best beginning around May 25 but peaks in mid-June. The 2015 run was relatively large and success rates were high for those that put their time in. This is a combined return of both hatchery and naturally produced king salmon. The Kasilof is a very unique river and the 8 mile float is loaded with great scenery and ample time to sit back, relax and just soak in Alaska! Just make sure you keep one eye on that rod.



SOCKEYE 101



Sockeye salmon have always had their annual place in our seasonal salmon season but recent king salmon woes have changed the amount of time we spend targeting these intriguing fish. In recent years, we have started regularly fishing for sockeye on the Kasilof River which sees a great push of fish in early June and this run just keeps building well into July when we have turned our attention to the Kenai. One thing I really enjoy about the Kasilof is the addition of the drift boat and the scenic float involved. I also like the feeling of the Kasilof in the early season as it transforms itself before your very eyes. It starts off in early June as a very descript and easy flowing glacial river and by the end of July it looks like a fire hydrant at full bore. This transformation is something you can track on a daily basis as you watch the bank you were standing on the day before, become the traveling lane you hook fish in a few days later.



Swinging for sockeye takes practice and it takes patience but more than anything it takes fish. Sockeye salmon return to the river in pulses and they tend to stay together for the most part as they make their way upriver. With a tide book and successive days on the water, one can begin to predict with reasonable accuracy where the bulk of the fish will be at a certain time and place. Once you find the fish, and get into position, your technique becomes paramount. If you have never fished for sockeye before, the technique is definitely going to be different than most fishing you are used to. The biggest difference is sockeye salmon, for the most part, just do not bite. There are times and places where they will occasionally strike a lure but overall as a species they are not wired to chase and kill things. They spend their juvenile lives feeding on krill and plankton and therefore depend on food that is not trying to get away from them. All of this means catching them in the mouth takes a certain degree of ingenuity. One saving grace with sockeye is their migration pattern. As they travel up the river they

almost always seek out the near shore waters or the path of least resistance and this means you must access them from shore. With a long leader, a sharp hook and the right amount of weight, a skilled sockeye angler just needs fish to complete the equation. With the proper technique one can easily put your hook right in the corner of the sockeye's jaw, even without the fish actually biting the hook. Seem fishy? It's not and it works really well. It just takes good numbers of fish and the right traveling lane or gravel bar and success is high. Fortunately our sockeye returns on the Kenai and the neighboring Kasilof number in the hundreds of thousands so thousands of fish are traveling upriver daily for weeks at a time. This means we have a sockeye season that lasts from mid-June all the way until mid-August! That's an amazing resource and we have explored its bounty more in recent seasons with king salmon runs being down. Through it all we have made some great discoveries and have developed several new and very popular fishing adventures. If you have never fished for sockeye before, you owe it to yourself to see why they are one of the most popular and fascinating salmon in all of Alaska.



Alaska Fishing



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\$250 per night for four (May, Sept.)
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