

Bristol Bay bummer

Lines were out the door at King Salmon airport as laid off processing workers headed home from Bristol Bay two weeks sooner than expected.

The world's biggest sockeye fishery began with a bang in late June, stayed slow and steady for a week and then pretty much dropped off a cliff, said local managers.

There's a chance the final catch could reach 22 million, 20 percent below the forecast of more than 28 million sockeye.

As predicted, fish prices are higher – one major buyer, Yardarm Knot, posted a base of \$1/lb, plus a 15 cent bonus for chilled fish. That compares to average of 95 cents at Bristol Bay last year.

Other salmon highlights: Kodiak sockeye prices were reported at \$1.65 in town, the average last year was \$1.38. So far 1.5 million reds have crossed the Kodiak docks.

Sockeye runs are strong throughout Cook Inlet where more than 2 million should be taken.

Good chum catches were reported for Kodiak and northern Southeast, where the fleet doubled to 150 boats and produced a near record chum catch last week, and set a record for pinks.

Early Southeast pink prices were at 40 cents, with 85 cents for gillnet chums. At Prince William Sound, roughly 500 gillnetters were having a so-so chum fishery due to hatchery returns running lower and later than usual.

A good run of chums was making its way to the Yukon where the price was reported at 75 cents a pound, compared to 61 cents last year.

Fishermen at Norton Sound are having the best chum catch since the 1980s, at nearly 700,000 fish so far.

At Kotzebue, fishermen were corked by runway work that grounded planes at the peak of their chum fishery.

As of July 15, Alaska's salmon catch had topped 53 million fish, about one quarter of the forecast of 203 million salmon.