

Kenai Current



YEAR IN REVIEW: 2014

Looking back on the 2014 fishing season evokes a myriad of special memories. While each and every season seems to take on a life all its own, this past season is particularly unique for a number of reasons. First and foremost was the fiery beginning to the summer season as the Funny River Horse Trail Fire took center stage in late May and early June. This 195,000 acre blaze transformed the Kenai Peninsula for a couple weeks as it burned very close to our local communities of Sterling, Soldotna and Kasilof before finally burning itself out deep within the Kenai National Wildlife Refuge. Gaining national attention, the Funny River wildfire was the largest in Alaska during 2014. Although it really had little or no effect on the fishing, it did cast an eerie backdrop to early season king and sockeye salmon fishing.

With the Kenai closed to king fishing during May and June, the Kasilof was the only viable option for early season anglers and it did not disappoint. Despite no-bait and single hook regulations, the fishing was very consistent with a mix of both hatchery and naturally produced king salmon being caught on a daily basis from late May well into late June. By mid-June, the fire was largely done and loads of chrome bright sockeye salmon were pouring into the Kenai and the Kasilof Rivers. We focused primarily on the upper Kasilof as the solitude and the steady pulses of ocean bright fish provided tons of action and limit after limit of the best eating salmon available. The Kenai also saw very good fishing for sockeye in mid-June as large waves of Russian River bound fish marched through the middle river.



YEAR IN REVIEW: 2014

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As we headed into early July, the Kasilof sockeye run continued to see great numbers of fish while the late run of sockeye on the Kenai was beginning to arrive in small but catchable numbers. It was not long into the month before the pulses became stronger and more numerous and limits became easier and easier. July also revealed some amazing middle river trout fishing. As more and more sockeye carcasses piled up in popular bank fishing holes, the trout seemed to practically double in girth. This flood of protein not only makes the trout bigger, it congregates them in certain areas of the river and makes them more aggressive.

July also marked the opening of the 2014 king salmon season on the Kenai and although participation was moderate, the success rates were extremely low. This was likely due to a dismal early run which ended with just 11 fish more than the minimal escapement goal of 5300 fish (despite a complete in-river closure during May and June). The late run seemed equally mediocre and rather than toil with low numbers and lack of action, we continued to pursue the abundant and very exciting sockeye salmon and also the excellent rainbow trout fishing. The late run of Kenai sockeye was very spread out this season with 10,000-40,000 fish days beginning around July 10 and extending all the way into the second week of August.

There was never really a particular peak, just a steady stream. It was enough to yield countless limits and many epic days on the river. We chased the sockeye into the second week of August before eventually transitioning over to newly arriving silver salmon.

The late run of Kenai King Salmon was a dud once again and the season closed early for the



third year in a row. The final return was 16,671 fish and after subtracting the harvest from an abbreviated season, this adds up to 15,000 fish and change. With the low end of the escapement goal at 15,000, once again we saw the bare minimum.

Late July, early August is also the time when we start to see big numbers of silver salmon arrive in more remote fly out locations on the West Side of Cook Inlet and these silver returns were all very strong this summer. Big River Lake,

Kustatan, Buchatna Creek and the Chuit all saw excellent fishing from the last week of July well into late August.

While the Kenai sockeye run lasted well into August this year they were eventually joined river wide by an invasion of pink salmon. They arrived by the millions and their sheer numbers were impossible to avoid while pursuing the final pulses of sockeye.



ALASKA FISHING WITH MARK GLASSMAKER
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Somewhere around August 10 is when we normally switch over to silver salmon and this year was no different. We began our pursuit of Kenai Coho in the waters just below Skilak Lake and the fishing just got better and better

well into late August. The run seemed a week or so late compared to most years and the best fishing was closer to the end of August rather than in the middle. Nevertheless it was a very strong silver return and there were many very good fishing days. While the water below Skilak Lake seemed to separate the species to a larger extent, the masses of pink salmon had also settled into many of their spawning areas and in many cases, this meant river wide occupation.



Trout fishing always becomes a challenge in the even numbered years when pink salmon and their sheer numbers make reaching the trout essentially impossible. Even when you can make it to the bottom, the trout are literally surrounded by real eggs and definitely not starving. Hence our perfectly matched single egg imitation becomes far less enticing. This abundance of spawning pink salmon prompted us to move lower on the river where we could get below the large masses of pinks and intercept newly arriving late-run silver salmon.

For the first two weeks of September we played the tides on the lower river and had great success with big, bright coho. The late run of Kenai Silver salmon was every bit as strong, if not stronger than the early run, and the fish were huge. They continued to arrive well into October. This remarkable return of Kenai silver salmon marks the third season in a row of better than average coho returns and even now as this newsletter arrives in your hands, thousands of these remarkable salmon

are still finning in the Kenai's low and frigid flows, depositing their prodigy into the gravel.

With the pinks finally fading away in late September and early October, trout fishing again became a viable pursuit. For most of October, the bead bite was "game on" and we saw some incredible fly fishing action for giant rainbows. Proof positive the massive numbers of pink salmon profit all in-river inhabitants, the trout this fall seemed incredibly well fed. This added girth only increases their incredible fighting power, making these resident rainbows one the Kenai's most prestigious and rewarding trophies.

I am always left in awe at the huge transfer of energy all the salmon bring to the river. We are truly blessed to have such an abundant resource and a river with so much life. While we keep a concerned eye on our stocks of king salmon, other species such as sockeye, silver and pinks have all flourished in recent years. We also happen to have one of the most prolific trophy rainbow trout fisheries in the world.



As we move forward into 2015, we want to thank everyone who helped make 2014 one of the most memorable and successful seasons we have had in 24 years of business. We greatly appreciate all who used our services and we look forward seeing you back on the water very soon.

Take Care and Great Fishing!
Mark, Cindy, Faith, Caleigh and Emma

Shift in focus from Kings to Sockeye and Silvers has changed "the best time" to visit.

As most are aware, our king salmon returns are just not what they once were. Recent years have seen low enough returns to warrant complete closures and seeing this writing on the wall had us looking in alternative directions many years back. It was time to give the kings a break and let them rebuild. For us, the most obvious and attractive alternative fishery to king salmon is sockeye. First, sockeye are more abundant overall, typically arriving in the hundreds of thousands and not tens of thousands like king salmon. Second, sockeye salmon limits are more liberal than king salmon. We do not have catch and release or slot limits for sockeye. Restrictions are unusual so they are very predictable for planning purposes. Thirdly, sockeye salmon are caught from shore. While kings are bigger, most of the time the fishing is done by back trolling from the boat with the rods in the holders. With sockeye, you actually get out of the boat and wade into the river. You are actually fishing and doing it all; the fishing, hooking and catching. As a guide I see first-hand the satisfaction this bestows upon my clients as they know they had a lot to do with a successful day. Sockeye typically have a far more forgiving learning curve as well because with kings, one missed opportunity is likely all you will get in a day. You can lose a few with sockeye and still expect to catch a limit and that's a nice cushion to have especially if you are totally new to sockeye fishing or even fishing in general. Finally rounding out the list of reasons sockeye have provided a great alternative to king salmon is they are amazing to eat. Their firm red meat holds its quality longer than any other salmon and with a daily limit of three, the amount of fish you can take home really adds up.



Silvers have long been a prominent segment of our fishing season with the run often overlapping with the end of the sockeye return in most years. Normally we will start catching decent numbers of silvers while we are still sockeye fishing and we know then it is time to get in the boat and start targeting the fresh silvers with lures. This transition normally occurs in the second week of August.

So back to the million dollar question, one I get asked a lot when people are inquiring about a fishing trip to Alaska. When is the best time to come? The truth: there really is no best time. Run timing, weather, river conditions, luck, all play a huge part in what makes each season unique. The best guidance I can offer is to steer toward typically good times, look back at historical averages.

Our salmon runs all seem to return within a somewhat predictable goal post each year so trying to time your trip during the historical peak of the run should serve you well. All that said, we do have several different runs of fish and their peaks, especially for sockeye and silvers, can be well distributed over the course of several days and even weeks. Here's a list of the most notable runs in our area and their peak times:

Early Run Kasilof Kings: June 5-15: PEAK
Early Run Kasilof Sockeye: June 5-25: PEAK
Early Run Kenai Kings: June 10-25: PEAK
Early Run Kenai Sockeye (Russian River Run):
June 5-20: PEAK
Late Run Kasilof Kings: July 15-31: PEAK
Late Run Kasilof Sockeye: July 5-25: PEAK
Late Run Kenai Kings: July 15-25: PEAK

Late Run Kenai Sockeye: July 15-25: PEAK
Early Run Kasilof Silvers: Aug 15-25: PEAK
Early Run Kenai Silvers: Aug 10-25: PEAK
Kenai Pink Salmon (even years only):
Aug 5-20: PEAK
Late Run Kenai Silvers: Sept 5-25: PEAK
Southern Kenai Peninsula Steelhead:
Sept 15-Oct. 10: PEAK



KASILOF SOCKEYE:

DRIFT BELOW TUSTAMENA OFFERS SOLITUDE AND GOOD NUMBERS OF SOCKEYE SALMON.

Changes in our king salmon fisheries have led us to further diversify and look for additional and exciting new fishing trips. One of these is the float from Tustamena Lake on the Kasilof River down to the Sterling Highway Bridge.

Sockeye salmon migration patterns on the Kasilof differ greatly than those of the king salmon. For one, they arrive in greater numbers and they move upriver at a far greater pace. Whereas the majority of the early run king salmon are only going as far as Crooked Creek (which is just above tide water), early run Kasilof Sockeye are headed for

Tustamena Lake, the largest lake on the Kenai Peninsula, and then onto one of several smaller tributaries beyond that. They move through the river in waves as tide after tide brings new packs of fish pulsing in from Cook Inlet.

This rhythmic succession is very consistent from mid-June through late July. The objective in a successful day of sockeye fishing is to position yourself in good shoreline drifting water and fish hard, hoping a strong push of tide bright fish pass by just in front of you. Hopefully it will be long enough for you to have a ton of fun, and also put a limit on the bank. If you pick the right spots and the right times, this is an almost daily occurrence on the upper Kasilof.

The float also offers a very remote feel as it departs the slackwater section of the river just below the lake. The slow current makes a small outboard motor a handy tool for pushing the drift boat for several miles through the frog water and on to the fishing locations. Once the current picks up, we can put the motor away and grab the oars as the river makes a nice drop in elevation. There are a few mild sections of white water, along with some huge rock infested riffles that cascade through large undeveloped swaths of boreal forest.

Soon the float will encounter a few remote cabins and then eventually civilization with upscale homes, ranches and lodges. We have a number of favorite stops to intercept the sockeye and most are shallow gravel bars on inside corners where the sockeye seek a break from the Kasilof's strong flows. While not quite as large on average as Kenai Sockeye, the Kasilof still produces some very beautiful sockeye salmon and they are awesome fighters.

I have many great memories from the past several seasons floating down this section of the Kasilof. It is simply a very peaceful and tranquil trip in the drift boat and typically a very successful fishing adventure. The incredible scenery coupled with fast and furious fishing action is easily becoming one of my favorite early season trips and one I highly recommend. Anytime between June 5 and July 10 is ideal for this float.



New and Old Faces

COMBINE TO HELP MAKE 2014 ONE OF OUR BUSIEST AND MOST SUCCESSFUL SEASONS

This past summer was a very different year for us as sadly we were without our longtime guide Brent Rinker. Brent proposed to his girlfriend Janelle and they were able to spend the summer together in California, Brent's first season away from the Kenai in 14 years! We wish Brent and Janelle all the best as they navigate the river of life together. Thank you Brent for many years of professional guiding and also your friendship.

Replacing Brent this season was another longtime Kenai River guide named Zack Larson and he too is a true pro. He stepped into a very busy boat and handled the task with the stability and grace that only a truly veteran guide can deliver. From his care for the equipment, his gentle manner with the customers, to his innate fishing skills and knowledge of the Kenai and Kasilof Rivers, Zack was an amazing addition to our team.

Also putting in a very busy and super successful season was long time guide Derek Gardner. Derek did it all as usual and we cannot thank him enough for always being there and always with a smile. From the Kasilof to the Kenai, Derek found lots of fish and always guaranteed his people a high quality experience. His patience and

fishing knowledge is admirable and we are blessed to have Derek as part of our guide family.

Another up and coming guide that we used a lot this last season was Nolan Davis. Nolan has been guiding on the Kenai and the Kasilof for several seasons and is young, very intuitive and born to fish. He is a lot of fun to guide with as when I look back now going on 25 years, I see myself in Nolan as a younger guide. It makes me proud to see some of the younger guides like Nolan establish themselves in the industry and display professionalism, amazing talent and respect for elder guides.

Of course some of the biggest help we got this summer was off the water and here at camp. Jim Rinker once again was here for the summer and his contribution is beyond words. His daily dedication to making sure our operation ran smoothly was invaluable. Jim is also a great mentor and friend and his presence in camp is a blessing. A huge thanks to you Jim for all the hard work you put in this past summer, you always have a home here.



FUNNY RIVER HORSE TRAIL FIRE

TRANSFORMED OUR EARLY SEASON AND OUR REGION



I was fishing the Kasilof in late May with friends and had just landed a really nice hatchery king salmon when my cell phone rang. It was a guide friend who wanted to know if I was interested in helping out with the fire by transporting firefighters by boat along the river. With the Kenai closed to king fishing and with only a handful of trips on the Kasilof in the next week or so, I figured spending a couple days on the fire would be interesting if nothing else. I said sure and five minutes later he called back and said "bring your boat in for an inspection, they need you ASAP" With that we reeled in our lines and headed for the take out.

For the next two weeks I helped deploy fire crews by river boat along the Kenai River just upriver from Kenai Keys or the confluence of the Kiley River. This was the area where the fire had jumped from the south to north side of the river and while most of the more serious flames had passed through there were a number of hot spots still burning up and down this section of river. We spent several days taking in fire crews to mop up these small spot fires.



Overall the fire ended up burning some 195,000 acres mostly contained to the Kenai National Wildlife Refuge between the Kenai and Kasilof River and the Kenai Mountain Range. It ended up being the largest fire in the entire United States for the summer of 2014 and miraculously no permanent structures (other than few recreational cabins) were lost and no one was killed or seriously injured.

The Kenai River is noticeably burned on both sides from the Kenai Keys area all the way up to a few miles below Skilak Lake. Stands of ironic fireweed were in full bloom this summer below miles of scorched spruce providing a beautiful contrast and an example of how fast the forest rebuilds.



KENAI RIVER CLEAN UP

NETS NEARLY ONE TON OF TRASH!

This spring I spearheaded a project that I have been wanting to pursue for quite a while. Every year I marvel at the amount of discarded monofilament and other terminal tackle that is discarded into the river. A quick survey through the near shore rocks during low water at any popular fishing area and one will find broken off mono, rusting hooks and a lot of lead. The primary culprit is the sockeye as they attract thousands of anglers annually to every open inch of Kenai River shoreline and this fishing frenzy lasts for 2-3 solid weeks. This massive amount

of pressure leaves behind a lot of broken off gear that is impossible to retrieve in high water. Only in late fall and spring is it even accessible and that also depends on how much snow we have.

With the Kenai being closed to king fishing this May and June, the guide association was looking for an event to replace their Take a Kid Fishing Day where guides would take school kids fishing for kings in May. I suggested the clean-up day and the idea received a great deal of support. I agreed to chair the event and with the help of co-chair and Soldotna city councilman Keith Baxter we were able to get the city of Soldotna to declare a Kenai River Clean Up week. All in all we were able to involve over 120 school kids, many parents, teachers, local business and individuals who in total collected 2,494 lbs. of trash.

For the first year we focused primarily on state and city parks such as Centennial, Swiftwater, Isaac Walton and Bings Landing but this year we hope to expand our clean up and involve even more schools in the event. What a great feeling to see all that garbage removed from the Kenai River!



Alaska Fishing



WITH MARK GLASSMAKER

2015 SPORTFISHING RATES

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.

2015 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 2015 or 2016 season,
now is the time to make your reservations.
Call or email today and we'll build a custom package just for you.*

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www.lamiglas.com

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Ever wonder what the Kenai River looks like right now?

Go streamside here: <http://www.mgfalaska.com/views-of-the-kenai-river/>

Check back for frequent updates.

Cast From The Past

