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FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

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Although many of the war created problems of the Alaska salmon industry are well on the way to solution, nature is expected to take a hand in reducing the quantity of salmon that will be available to packers this year and in all probability the 1944 pack will be about 200,000 cases less than last year, Dr. Ira N. Gabrielson, Director of the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service, reported to Secretary of the Interior, Harold L. Ickes, today.

The average Alaska pack, made up of five species of salmon taken all the way from British Columbia border to distant Bristol Bay, is slightly more than six million cases. The pack in 1943 was 5,412,000 cases and a decline to about 5,200,000 is predicted for the coming season.

The size of the runs that will be available to commercial fishermen this year depends upon several factors, Dr. Gabrielson said. The most important of these are the number of fish in the parent runs several years ago and weather conditions at that time which largely determined how many of the salmon survived the first months of life. Mortality of young salmon from the egg stage until the time they migrate to the ocean--several months to a year or more, depending on the species--may be as high as 99 percent, scientists have found.

In southeastern Alaska, where the greatest decline is expected this year, the pink salmon runs will probably be small because an unusually severe winter in 1942-43 is believed to have killed a large percentage of the fish that would normally mature and return to the streams as spawners in 1944. Since the pink salmon is by far the most important species in southeastern Alaska, the total pack in this area will probably show a decline.

In central Alaska, however, the outlook is more favorable and the pack may be at least as large as last year. This area ranks second only to southeastern Alaska among the most important pink salmon producing areas of the world and average runs of this species are anticipated in this section. In western Alaska, which produces more red salmon than any other fishing grounds, runs of nearly normal size are expected.

As a basis for predicting the abundance of salmon, the Fish and Wildlife Service makes aerial and other surveys of the relative number of fish on the spawning grounds and collects data on the climatic conditions which affect survival of

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the young. This information is combined with biological data on the age at which the different species mature. The Service also maintains a laboratory in southeastern Alaska where extensive studies of conditions affecting survival are under way.

The predictions are used in drawing up the Federal regulations for salmon fishing in Alaska and are also helpful to the industry in planning its operations.