

# Kuskokwim River Salmon Management Working Group

1 (800) 315-6338 (MEET) Code: 58756# (KUSKO)-*this meeting was not teleconferenced*

ADF&G Bethel toll free: 1 (855) 933-2433

## Meeting Summary Part 2: Run assessment information/discussion

**August 21 and 22, 2012-** This meeting was not teleconferenced because the main purpose of the meeting was 1) to facilitate an After Action Review of Chinook salmon management and the Working Group process (Mtg. Summary Part 1); and 2) to provide in depth presentations describing the science behind population dynamics and the direction of management on the Kuskokwim River (Mtg. Summary Part 3). The complexity of the discussion and presentations required that participants attend in person, and members were asked to attend in person at the Department's expense.

*Meetings were held at The Long House Bed and Breakfast in Bethel.*

### AGENDA ITEMS:

- 1) Chinook Management After Action Review
- 2) Continuing Business (Mtg. summary Part 2)**

#### **August 22**

- 3) Presentations: Kuskokwim River Chinook salmon run reconstruction, brood table, and spawner recruit concepts. (Kevin Schaberg; August 22 Mtg. summary Part 3)
- 4) Old business: housekeeping discussions on old action items, attendance, etc. (Tabled, Mtg. Summary Part 2)**
- 5) New Business: Board of Fish proposals (Tabled, Mtg. Summary Part 2)**

### WORKING GROUP ACTION ITEMS:

- 1.) ADF&G to provide After Action Review notes.
- 2.) ADF&G to provide Chinook productivity presentation handouts

### MEETING ACTION ANNOUNCEMENT:

The next KRSMWG meeting will be the third week in September.

### ADF&G RECOMMENDATION:

None.

### WORKING GROUP MOTIONS:

- 1.) Motion to approve the agenda. Motion passed (see below).

**August 21** - Following the After Action Review, the Working Group meeting continued at the Long House in Bethel from 1:00pm -3:00pm. Roll was called at 1:00pm and the Working Group proceeded with Continuing Business.

### PEOPLE TO BE HEARD:

No one came forward. People to be heard was again offered on the afternoon of August 22 (see below).

### CONTINUING BUSINESS:

#### LOWER RIVER SUBSISTENCE REPORTS:

James Charles of Tuntatuliak reported that with the chum, sockeye, and Chinook runs passed the Lower River, most families were finished fishing. At this time of year, people in that area usually catch a few coho for canning or to eat fresh. Recent storms had somewhat discouraged this activity.

Bev Hoffman of Bethel commented on earlier reports that the poor weather in June and July had resulted in salmon spoiling. Bev stated that she had talked to a number of people that had reported harvesting "...a lot of chum and reds and I see people trying to hang silvers." She reported that many people felt they had put away good freezer supplies of chum, sockeye, and coho, and despite discouragement over the Chinook restrictions in 2012 "...they were satisfied with those other species."

#### ONC IN-SEASON LOWER RIVER SUBSISTENCE REPORT:

*This project had been completed for the year and there were no further reports available.*

#### MIDDLE RIVER SUBSISTENCE REPORT:

Bob Aloysius of Kalskag reported that because of the poor weather and fishing restrictions, people had gone back to fishing "...just like they did a long time ago: any fish that comes up is welcome." He said that people had gone to great effort to care for their catch, using smoke houses, and applying a little extra heat to prepare the catch. He said that people were currently using this method to prepare coho salmon. "They harvest the fish, not specific species; and a lot of people are happy with what they got." Bob went on to state that many of the people that grumbled about the difficulties this season are people that don't fish, don't put effort into fishing, or don't take good care for their harvest. Bob finished up by saying that many people were returning to the method of jarring.

Gerald Simeon of Aniak commented that most people freeze or jar coho but that not much of that had been done so far this year.

LaMont Albertson of Aniak stated that his family had harvested a number of sheefish in the 6 to 10 pound range. "More than we've had in past years."

#### [KNA INSEASON MIDDLE RIVER SUBSISTENCE REPORT:](#)

*This project had been completed for the year and there were no further reports available.*

#### [UPPER RIVER SUBSISTENCE REPORT:](#)

Mark Leary of Napaimute commented on the ingenuity of subsistence users, saying that "people can find ways of adapting." He described using dry cottonwood to fire his smokehouse: "...good smoke, good heat."

#### [HEADWATERS SUBSISTENCE REPORT:](#)

Dan Esai of Nikolai reported that headwaters fishers were satisfied that what they had received turned out well. He reported that fishers in the Salmon River, Pitka Fork area had seen more Chinook salmon than had been usual in recent years: "...they said there [were] a lot of fish, like back in the early eighties..." Dan said that fish were mostly medium sized "hardly any large." Dan went on to describe the difference between fishing in the Headwaters and the Lower River: "before the closure my brother-in-law got about 38 salmon in about 5 days...when some people talk about how they make a drift and get 50 ... think about this: us people at headwaters, we're happy to get 38 in 6 days." Dan wasn't sure that the rolling closures section 5 should exist.

Ray Collins of McGrath said that people had not been able to fish with nets because of high water and debris but fishing had improved recently. Ray added that he had heard about some individuals releasing larger Chinook as a way of contributing to salmon conservation.

#### [DISCUSSION OF RUN ASSESSMENT DATA:](#)

##### [Bethel Test Fishery \(BTF\):](#)

Kevin Schaberg reported that water levels at the Crooked Creek gauging station were below average, that the water temperature at the BTF site was near average, and that the water clarity at the BTF site was above average for this time of year.

Kevin described the CPUE of the BTF for each salmon species:

**Chinook:** overall CPUE was below 2010, however this cannot account for any conservation that occurred above the BTF site in 2012 due to harvest restrictions.

**Chum:** CPUE was near average and the run was coming to a close at the BTF site.

**Sockeye:** 2012 demonstrated the second lowest CPUE in BTF history and the run was over at the BTF site. He said this might or might not have been affected by increased subsistence harvest of sockeye in 2012 as people sought to replace their normal Chinook harvest with other species.

**Coho:** the coho run appeared to be about 5-10 days late, but catches had recently improved. Peak catches to date had occurred approximately one week prior. In average years, 75% of the run would have passed Bethel by this date. Considering late run timing, it was possible that the run was at an earlier stage.

Lamont Albertson commented that he appreciated the graph showing relative daily CPUE for each species by date. He appreciated the ability to see just how numbers of one species compared with others at any given time. LaMont suggested that this graph, which was new in 2012, continue to be used and appear earlier next season in Working Group Informational Packets.

*There was some additional discussion about distribution of catch from the Bethel Test Fish to community members:*

Bev Hoffman commented that it seemed that there were often people waiting for BTF crews to return to the boat harbor in hopes of receiving fish. She asked whether BTF ever had any trouble disposing of the catch.

Doug Bue responded that the BTF crew were having no trouble distributing coho. In fact there were still people expressing a need for these fish and BTF was unable to meet all requests. He said that most people interested in chum salmon already had enough and BTF was having some problems distributing the chum catch at this late date. Chum salmon represents the largest overall component of the BTF catch annually. Doug clarified that otherwise unwanted chum are sometimes given to dog mushers or the local farm (for fertilizer).

Bob Aloysius commented that one of the distribution sites, a fish tote filled with ice near the Tundra Center, receives a lot of attention from people that might not have as great a need for fish as some in the community. This stimulated some discussion about how to identify people that were truly in need of fish and how people need to police themselves and each other in this regard. It was pointed out that the Tundra Center distribution site receives only after others in need have either met the test fish crew at the harbor or had fish delivered to them by BTF crew or other cooperating agencies.

Greg Roczicka of ONC described how ADF&G and ONC cooperate to distribute test fish resources. He said that ONC will take fish to the senior center first, and after those needs are met, they distribute fish to a list of elders (living at home) and single parent households. Often ONC will call the test fish crew and request that they hold aside certain numbers of fish for people on ONC's list. BTF crew will give away the remaining fish to other elders that have

made requests, to people waiting at the harbor, and if any fish are left, leave them at the Tundra Center distribution tote for anyone interested.

#### [WEIRS/MARK-RECAPTURE/AERIAL SURVEYS/OTHER:](#)

##### **Weirs:**

Brittany Blain provided a synopsis of various weir operations in 2012 (see the August 21-22 Info Packet). Most of the projects had finished counting Chinook, chum, and sockeye salmon for the season.

Bev Hoffman noted that the Kogrukluk River weir had been inoperable for 18 days and asked whether there was any way to estimate for the missed passage.

Brittany Blain stated that there were estimation methods that would be applied to the data post season, once the data was complete and had been reviewed.

Ray Collins asked whether it was yet possible to assess whether management actions had any effect on escapements. Kevin Schaberg answered that the full Chinook salmon run assessment was not yet possible. When asked when such assessments could be made, Kevin explained that some of estimates would proceed immediately, but some data was yet to be gathered. For example a full abundance estimate for Chinook salmon requires an accounting of harvest, and subsistence surveys had not yet begun.

John Andrews of Kwethluk noted that the Kwethluk weir had also suffered from inoperable periods in 2012. He said that such operational difficulties were a major concern to the people of Kwethluk since this weir gathers the data by which management concerns are raised. He asked how staff would know whether the Kwethluk River escapement goal had been met. Kevin Schaberg explained that unfortunately, weather related problems are a reality in escapement assessment, but that USF&WS would be doing their best to estimate Kwethluk River escapements. He noted an encouraging trend on the Kisaralik River that would be discussed shortly.

Brittany Blain had the following comments on coho salmon run indices (see August 21 – 22 Info Packet):

**Kwethluk** (*Escapement goal: >19,000*) - Tracking above years in which the escapement threshold was not made.

**Tuluksak** (*no goal*) - Tracking above the poor years of 2010 and 2011 and well within years in which good abundances were seen.

**George** (*no goal*) - Similar or above passage for six of the last twelve years for this date. A little less than last year.

**Kogrukluk** (*Escapement goal: 13,000-28,000*)-Below average but above 2002, 2010, and 2011, all years in which the escapement goal was reached at this location.

**Tatlawiksuk** (*no goal*)-Near average for this time of year tracking better than 2010 and 2011.

**Takotna** (*no goal*) - Appeared late and had been tracking low but had seen a recent push in passage on the 19th of August.

Comments:

LaMont Albertson commented that coho seemed smaller on the Aniak this year and asked whether others had observed this as well.

Travis Elison confirmed that commercially caught coho were about a pound below average in 2012 in the Kuskokwim River, Kuskokwim Bay, Norton Sound and the Yukon River.

### **Aerial survey:**

Travis Elison reported the following results:

In 2012 ADF&G successfully surveyed four streams with established goals:

**Salmon River (Pitka fork)** –Goal achieved.

**Gagaryah**- Goal not achieved.

**Cheeneetnuk**- Goal not achieved.

**Holitna**- Survey not successful due to poor conditions.

**Holokuk and Oskawalik** - No goals; higher than 2011 but generally low compared to other years.

**Salmon River (Aniak)** – Goal not achieved.

**Kipchuk** - no goal, higher than 2011 but lower than all other successful years.

**Aniak**- Survey not successful due to poor conditions.

**Kisaralik**- Goal achieved.

Travis went on to explain that the timing of aerial surveys is designed to correspond with peak spawn of Chinook salmon. In 2012 the start date was delayed because of the late run timing of Chinook salmon. Travis also explained that the purpose of the survey is to count Chinook salmon (primarily) and that Chinook are generally easy to tell apart from chum salmon. He went on to explain that sockeye salmon can sometimes look like small Chinook, but the size of aggregates and the locations of spawning redds was very different, making it easy for seasoned surveyors to tell the difference.

## COMMERCIAL CATCH REPORT:

Travis Elison delivered the commercial catch report; harvest to date:

**Chinook:** 459 – incidental, all retained for subsistence

**Chum:** 64,770

**Sockeye:** 2,847

**Coho:** 71,897

Travis noted that the commercial catch of coho salmon is showing the same pattern as the BTF has shown: starting low, apparently late, recently picking up.

Up until the most recent opening, all commercial periods for coho have been 4 hours. Historically the average period has been 6 hours, but because catch rates had been a little below average, managers have been conservative. The opening on the 18<sup>th</sup> of August had been 6 hours, which explains in part the higher yield that day.

James Charles commented that the last opening had not been scheduled with 24hours notice. He commented that in past years, 48 hour notice had been the norm. Travis responded that 24 hour notice is the goal but he had been late. The reason for the late announcement (23 hours in advance) was a need for data. Travis had been waiting for escapement numbers from Kwethluk and Tuluksak River weirs to confirm that escapements were continuing to improve before scheduling an opening. Travis apologized for the late notice.

Stuart Currie of Kuskokwim Seafoods wanted to point out that the number of reported permits fished each period actually represented a higher number of participating fishermen than it might appear. He said that there is a rotating group of fishermen; some fish every opening while others might take openings off.

Greg Roczicka asked about the end date for BTF. Travis Elison responded that the project usually concludes on the 24<sup>th</sup> of August and this is the latest date that will be included in datasets for comparison with other years. However, in very late run timing years like this, the manager might decide to extend the project to help assess whether the coho run was still building, and whether more opportunity might reasonably be provided to commercial fishermen.

## PROCESSOR REPORT:

Stuart Currie of Kuskokwim Seafoods reported that it had been a tough season because of 1) Markets and 2) a generally poor season for commercial harvest. To date, Kuskokwim Seafoods total 2012 purchases amounted to 382,000lbs of fish, or one third of purchases hoped for this year. Stuart said that he was hoping to be able to keep going for a little while longer because

the market for coho at that moment was relatively good. Stuart hoped Kuskokwim Seafoods would break-even this year for the first time.

Nick Souza of Coastal Villages Seafoods said that this was a "strained year for us too." Nick pointed out that the coho were smaller and that smaller fish are harder to process. Nick suggested that the late ice pack on the Bering Sea and persistent cold temperatures may have affected all runs this season. He also pointed out that the inconsistency of openings in District 1 had an adverse effect on processing: "...a crew of 250 people waiting for work and you have 2 hours of work for them." Too much time off for crews was neither good for employees or employers. "It's optimal if everybody is working on a good schedule."

LaMont Albertson asked whether CVS had any trouble selling product. Nick responded that they generally did not have such trouble. Nick explained that that CVS, unlike Kuskokwim Seafoods, does not seek a fresh market for salmon, concentrating more on supplying salmon smoking processors who love sockeye and much of the chum.

LaMont Albertson asked whether processors were able to use a regional identification in marketing. Nick Souza replied that the name "Kuskokwim Kings" had not caught on, perhaps due to difficulty in saying the word. He did say that some European markets find wild Alaskan "arctic" run salmon very appealing.

Stuart Currie pointed out that many markets find farmed fish appealing because of the industry's ability to supply consistent product on a regular basis. Restaurants represent a market particularly drawn to this consistency.

Bev Hoffman stated that with visible west coast marketing celebrating wild Alaskan salmon, she thought the market was changing. Stuart replied that there are some very good steady markets that do favor Alaskan salmon, but that Alaska now only supplies about 50% of the market (farmed salmon has increased in availability in recent years) and that farmed fish tend to be cheaper. For example it costs 40 cents per pound to transport fish from the Kuskokwim to Anchorage. It might cost an additional \$1 per pound to transport to a market in Miami; a total of \$1.40 per pound to transport before price is considered/added. Therefore, Alaskan salmon will have difficulty competing with Chilean farmed fish, available for \$2.35 per pound full price, in the same markets. Targeting markets where customers have discerning pallets is key to success, but that leaves many markets inaccessible.

Bob Aloysius expressed distaste for the term "wild" salmon, preferring the term "natural." Stuart pointed out that the Alaska Seafood Marketing Institute (ASFMI), an institute funded by taxes from processors and fishermen, had done market studies to find the best way to attract attention to Alaskan salmon; and that "wild" was the term to which people responded best. Dave Cannon added that the term "wild" is also used in the hatchery industry to differentiate "natural" salmon from hatchery produced salmon.

### SPORT FISH REPORT:

Bev Hoffman reported that she had recently returned from 3 weeks at her Kisaralik camp. The water had been higher than usual and she noticed that coho salmon had arrived higher in the drainage earlier than in other years. When she returned to Bethel she was surprised to learn that the coho run was considered late. In talking with her clients and of both her guide camp and water taxi service, Bev learned that people had generally maintained a good attitude toward their experiences on Kuskokwim tributaries despite weather and salmon abundance issues in 2012.

John Chythlook, the ADF&G sport fisheries manager for the area, added that anglers had reported inconsistent catches and had echoed other reports that coho salmon were small in 2012.

Mark Leary asked who had won the Silver Salmon Derby put on by KNA in Aniak this year. LaMont Albertson answered that he didn't know but he had heard the winning fish had been only 8 pounds, compared to 16 pound winners from past years.

Dan Gilikin of USF&WS asked how the sport closure and enforcement had been received in Aniak. LaMont Albertson responded that area residents would probably support extending the sport closed area from the mouth of the Aniak to a buffer zone around the village of Aniak in future years (if restrictions were still found to be necessary). He pointed out that this is the area that was abused in 2012. Otherwise, the sport fishing community understood the closures and felt they were fair in light of subsistence closures. There had been some fines and some egregious abuses of subsistence by commercial guides, but these had been dealt with appropriately.

Dan Esai wanted to know whether sport guiding operations hired locally, and when told that most do not, said "that don't set well with me."

### WEATHER FORECAST:

None.

### RECOMMENDATION:

None.

*Meeting suspended at 3PM until the following day.*

**August 22**- Following Kevin Schaberg's presentations 1) and 2), the meeting reconvened from 1:30pm -3:30pm. Roll was called at 1:30pm and the Working Group proceeded with Old Business.

**Roll Call:** With the exception of representatives to the Commercial Fisher and Processor seats, all seats were filled and several alternates were present for this portion of the meeting. All seats except the Commercial Fisher were filled for the majority of both meeting days.

#### **OLD BUSINESS:**

1.) Action items from previous meetings. *Tabled until future meetings.*

#### **NEW BUSINESS:**

1.) Board of Fisheries Proposals. *Tabled until future meetings.*

#### **WORKING GROUP MOTIONS:**

**MOTION 1:** To approve the Agenda. The agenda was amended in discussion. Amendments were accepted without a formal vote.

#### **COMMENTS FOR MOTION 1:**

Bob Aloysius suggested that the Iyana Gusty award should be added to the agenda. This amendment was generally accepted.

Bev Hoffman recalled having added discussion of amending the By-laws to the agenda. Bev suggested that these could be tabled until the first meeting of the Working Group in 2013. She also suggested housekeeping updates to the list of seats could be discussed at that time. There was no disagreement and the agenda was so changed.

#### **PEOPLE TO BE HEARD:**

Casey Stockdale expressed disappointment that Kevin Schaberg's third presentation, originally scheduled for the morning had not been given. The level of question and answer that occurred during the first two presentations had left no time for the third.

Greg Roczicka echoed these sentiments and pointed out that the work session of the Board of Fish was scheduled to occur in October and that it would be best for the Working Group to see the presentation now rather than wait and perhaps miss an opportunity to comment on the upcoming escapement goal recommendation for the Kuskokwim River Chinook Salmon.

Kevin Schaberg clarified that the third presentation was the next part in a series of informational presentations designed to give Working Group members an understanding of the concepts behind the productivity analysis that would lead to the escapement goal

recommendation. He strongly stressed the point that this presentation would not include a reference to an actual escapement goal, but help people understand how it would be derived so that they could participate more fully in discussions in the future.

Bev Hoffman asked whether this third presentation could be delivered at a later date and be effective via teleconference. Kevin Schaberg responded that this presentation could not be effectively delivered via teleconference.

Several others made similar comments regarding the fact that Working Group members were all present and this was the prime opportunity to deliver this information. It was also considered important to receive this information well in advance of the coming board cycle to help the Working Group prepare. With the public sentiment obviously so strongly in favor of witnessing the presentation, the Working Group Meeting was unofficially adjourned and the presentation was given.

*For details on all three presentations given on August 22, please see Part 3 of the August 21-22 Meeting*

*summary: <http://www.adfg.alaska.gov/index.cfm?adfg=commercialbyareakuskokwim.salmon#/management>*

**WORKING GROUP ATTENDANCE:**

<b>MEMBER SEAT:</b>	<b>NAME:</b>
UPRIVER ELDER	<i>vacant</i>
DOWNRIVER ELDER	James Charles
COMMERCIAL FISHER	<i>absent</i>
LOWER RIVER SUBSISTENCE	Greg Roczicka ( <i>August 21</i> ); Mike Williams ( <i>August 22</i> )
MIDDLE RIVER SUBSTENCE	Gerald Simeon
UPPER RIVER SUBSISTENCE	Mark Leary
HEADWATERS SUBSISTENCE	Dan Esai
PROCESSOR	Nick Souza
MEMBER AT LARGE	Fritz Charles
SPORT FISHER	Beverly Hoffman
WESTERN INTERIOR RAC	Ray Collins
Y-K DELTA RAC	Bob Aloysius
ADF&G	Travis Elison
CHAIR	LaMont Albertson

<b>Other Participants:</b>	
<u>ADF&amp;G Comm. Fish :</u> John Linderman, Jan Conitz, Kevin Schaberg, Janet Bavilla, Scott Ayers, Doug Bue, Brittany Blain, Amy Brodersen, Carinne Truesdale, Chris Shelden <u>Sport Fish :</u> Tom Taube, John Chythlook <u>Subsistence Division:</u> Hiroko Ikuta, Dave Runfola <u>Rep. to the Fed. Subsistence Board:</u> Jennifer Yuhas	
<u>USFWS:</u> Dan Gilikin, Tom Doolittle <u>OSM:</u>	
Dave Cannon (Napaimute) Casey Stockdale (AVCP) Mike Thalhauser (KNA) Joe Spaeder (AYK SSI) Stuart Currie (alternate member) Timothy Andrew (AVCP) John Andrew (alternate member)	

**GLOSSARY OF ACRONYMS:**

Alaska Department of Fish and Game (**ADF&G**), Orutsararmiut Native Council (**ONC**), Kuskokwim Native Association (**KNA**), Association of Village Council Presidents (**AVCP**), U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (**USFWS**), Bethel Test Fishery project (**BTF**), Catch Per Unit Effort (**CPUE**), Coastal Village Seafoods (**CVS**), ADF&G Commercial Fisheries Division (**CF**), ADF&G Sport Fisheries Division (**SF**), Regional Advisory Council (**RAC**), Kuskokwim River Salmon Management Working Group (**KRSMWG or Working Group, WG**), Sustainable Escapement Goal (**SEG**), Biological Escapement Goal (**BEG**), Management Objective (**MO**), Amounts Reasonably Necessary for Subsistence (**ANS**), Emergency Order (**EO**)