

Kuskokwim River Salmon Management Working Group

1 (800) 315-6338 (MEET) Code: 58756# (KUSKO)

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

Meeting Summary

July 14, 2012

Called to order at 2:00 pm at ADF&G in Bethel and adjourned at 3:15 pm. Six of thirteen members were present (7 with ADF&G) and a quorum was not established. A work session was held.

AGENDA ITEMS:

- 1.) Continuing Business
- 2.) Old Business
- 3.) New Business

WORKING GROUP ACTION ITEMS: none

MEETING ACTION ANNOUNCEMENT:

The next KRSMWG meeting will be at the Call of the Chairs.

ADF&G RECOMMENDATIONS:

- 1.) ADF&G recommended opening Rolling Closure Section 5 on July 16 to subsistence fishing to a daily bag limit of 3 Chinook salmon with rod and reel, and no possession, season, or size limit.
- 2.) ADF&G recommended initiating Rolling Openings of unrestricted mesh sizes starting on July 16 for Section 1, July 19 for Section 2, and July 23 for Section 3. The objective of the Rolling Openings was to allow harvest opportunity on non-Chinook species.
- 3.) ADF&G recommended a commercial fishing period Subdistrict 1-A for a maximum of 4 hours on Monday, July 16. The Department also recommended a commercial period in Subdistrict 1-B for a maximum of 6 hours on Tuesday, July 17. The Department would work closely with both processors to determine the exact times of the opening in Subdistrict 1-B, and wait for Kuskokwim Seafood to confirm processing capability for Subdistrict 1-A.

WORKING GROUP MOTIONS: none

PEOPLE TO BE HEARD:

- 1.) As a follow up to the July 11 meeting, Travis Elison (ADF&G) reported that Aniak River Lodge was cited for subsistence fishing during closures and their nets were seized. Three people pled guilty to the offense.

2.) The Chair read comments for the KRSMWG from absent members:

- John Andrew (YK Delta RAC) from Kwethluk disagreed with commercial fishing at this time of the season. The City of Kwethluk and the tribe agreed that for the last 3 or 4 years, ADF&G has stressed that we haven't met escapement on the Kwethluk, Tuluksak, Kisaralik, and Kasigluk Rivers. This is very serious and the first concern should be the health of the salmon stock. They are comfortable with commercial fishing during Coho season:
 - When reds and chums are running there are still kings in the river. Chinook taper off at the end of July and early August on the tributaries.
 - Silver salmon are more profitable. There is a large volume of chum, but not profit.
 - Title 8 of ANILCA says that subsistence has priority over other uses. Every year fewer people use silver salmon for personal use. The weather is rainy by then and they are unable to dry them. Silvers have to be preserved by jarring, freezing, or canning.
- Evelyn Thomas (Upriver Subsistence) reported that Crooked Creek was very disappointed to hear that there was a commercial opening. She said that subsistence needs had not been met, and they don't have money to buy commercial permits. "With this and other commercial openings the resource will continue to be depleted, and it's not the subsistence fishermen doing it."
- Dan Esai (Headwaters Subsistence) from Nikolai agreed with another 4 or 6-hour commercial opener because he understands that commercial fishermen need to make money.

3.) The Chair said that someone asked him about the legality of fishing with rod and reel on the upper Kisaralik River. Travis Elison replied that rod and reel fishing was legal if species other than Chinook are targeted. If a Chinook is caught incidentally, it must be released immediately.

4.) Bev Hoffman (Sport Fish alternate) shared comments for the KRSMWG.

- Many people reported that 8-inch nets were still being used on the river.
- Nick Kameroff reported that upriver was meeting subsistence needs. A few women cut quite a few Chinook after the rolling closures were over.
- Some people felt that it was unfair that many commercial fishermen in the lower river were part of Coastal Villages Seafoods (CVS), because CVS has more money and resources to pay higher prices.

CONTINUING BUSINESS:

LOWER RIVER SUBSISTENCE REPORTS:

James Charles (Downriver Elder) reported that fishing slowed down in Tuntutuliak. The weather was too wet now and people were staying home even if they had not harvested enough fish. Last month there was much illegal fishing, but not this month (July).

Mike Williams (Lower River Subsistence) reported that people had not fished since he gave his last report because of poor drying weather. Everyone had finished fishing for Chinook, sockeye,

and chum in the brief drying time that they had. Referring to the abundance of species other than Chinook, Mike said, "Thanks to the gifts from the river we are going to survive."

Greg Roczicka (Lower River Subsistence alternate) said that people continued to monitor their drying fish and identify ones with maggots. He felt fortunate to have some good drying weather, but overall "was sad for my fish this year."

ONC IN-SEASON LOWER RIVER SUBSISTENCE REPORT:

Please see July 14 Information Packet for ONC's full report.

Alissa Joseph (ONC) reported that six families had to start over with fishing because of spoilage. Other families said they want mesh restrictions to be lifted. Fishermen reported that some chum and sockeye eggs were as large as Chinook eggs. Now Chinook were deep red and some had white noses.

Alissa also reported that ONC surveyors were confronted and forced off someone's property when they tried to survey.

MIDDLE RIVER SUBSISTENCE REPORT:

Gerald Simeon (Middle River Subsistence) reported that people were finished fishing in Aniak until Coho season. There were many logs and other debris in the river.

KNA INSEASON MIDDLE RIVER SUBSISTENCE REPORT:

Alexandra Waska (KNA) gave a verbal report for the KNA inseason surveys. In Chuathbaluk one fisherman had caught 60 Chinook, 350 chums, and 65 sockeye. In Crooked Creek one fisherman had caught 7 Chinook, 23 sockeye, and 65 chum. In Sleetmute one family had caught 7 chums and 2 sockeye.

UPPER RIVER SUBSISTENCE REPORT: none

HEADWATERS SUBSISTENCE REPORT:

Ray Collins (Western Interior RAC) had nothing to report for McGrath. No nets were in the water because of debris, and people hoped to harvest Coho once the water cleared up.

DISCUSSION OF RUN ASSESSMENT DATA:

Kevin Schaberg (ADF&G) reported that the water level was above average and rising, temperature was below average, and clarity was below average.

The Bethel Test Fish (BTF) cumulative Chinook CPUE was slightly below 2010. Kevin clarified that this number did not reflect conservation measures above BTF, so actually more salmon were making escapement than this.

The graph showing the relationship between cumulative CPUE indices for all species caught in the Bethel Test Fishy indicated that chum and sockeye abundance was higher than Chinook.

The Bethel Test Fish (BTF) cumulative CPUE index for chum salmon was average compared to the last few years. Cumulative CPUE indices for sockeye salmon were above 2002 and 2010.

WEIRS/MARK-RECAPTURE/AERIAL SURVEYS/OTHER:

Status of Salmon Assessment Projects as of July 14, 2012:

- Kogrukluk River weir had remained inoperable since July 8 at 5:00 pm due to extremely high water.
- Salmon River weir had not been operational since July 9 at 9:00 am due to extremely high water.
- Kwethluk River weir went out of operation July 10 at 12:00 pm due to extremely high water.

Chinook Salmon:

- Tuluksak River weir numbers were the highest in the range of years being used for comparison (2007-2012). Kevin Schaberg added that since Chinook were exhibiting late run timing, meeting escapement looked promising.
- George River weir numbers were higher than all years that did not meet escapement.

Sockeye Salmon:

- Telaquana Lake weir had seen its first pulse of fish (197 sockeye) on July 13.

COMMENTS:

Alissa Joseph (ONC) asked the effect of temporary periods of non-operation have on the consistency of weir counts.

- Kevin Schaberg replied that weir crews do everything possible to keep weirs in the water and operational. Water levels have been high all season, which has made the season a challenge. ADF&G uses fixed weirs and floating weirs because they are "the tried and true methods," and will not introduce new methods unless they have been thoroughly tested.
- *Note: as part of the methodology of using weirs to assess escapement, ADF&G biologists have a suite of methods for estimating missed passage. Certainly in years when large spans of passage have been missed, these are less useful, but for short periods, and some longer periods with sufficient overall data for the year, these methods are adequate and well tested for filling in the gaps.*

COMMERCIAL CATCH REPORT:

Travis Elison reported commercial catch numbers from the 4-hour opening in Subdistrict 1-B on Friday, July 13:

- 151 permit holders, 96 Chinook, 1,041 sockeye, 16,270 chum, and 20 Coho were harvested. The catch per unit effort (CPUE) 1.7 for sockeye, 26.9 for chum, and 0.03 for Coho. Travis commented that fewer Chinook had been harvested than expected.

COMMENTS:

James Charles commented that in the past the lower section of Subdistrict 1-B had a two-hour extension, making the commercial fishing period 6 hours instead of 4 hours. During the opening on July 13 Tuntutuliak was very windy and the water was rough, so many people did not commercial fish. James asked if the CPUE was less than average for this opening.

- Travis Elison replied that he did not have the exact CPUE number for that portion of the river, but he would investigate and call James after the meeting. Travis believed that the CPUE was lower than average.

PROCESSOR REPORT:

Stuart Currie (Processor) with Kuskokwim Seafoods reported large amounts of roe in fish. He was debating whether he could buy fish on Monday, July 16, because he was dealing with the following challenges:

- About half the fish harvested were too dark to be suitable for the fresh market, which he primarily serves.
- An over-supply of fish in the fresh market from Cook Inlet
- Lack of a custom processing facility to make frozen fillets
- A poor world market

Nick Souza (Processor) with Coastal Villages Seafoods reported that fishermen kept all Chinook harvested incidentally for subsistence use, and reiterated that only about 40 Chinook were caught upriver and 20 downriver (within subdistrict 1-B). Regarding the earlier discussion of CPUE, Nick gave the number of permit holders selling to CVS in Subdistrict 1-B: 14 in Eek, 27 in Tuntutuliak, 65 from Napaskiak, and 27 in the Johnson River area.

COMMENTS:

Greg Roczicka asked Nick Souza if he would consider buying fish above Bethel. Nick replied that he does not intend to become involved in the upriver fishery. He hoped for a downriver commercial fishery the next week.

SPORT FISH REPORT:

Lamont Albertson gave a sport fish report for the Aniak area: Out of 20 Chinook released by sport fishermen, only 1 had been female. Fishermen reported a high abundance of sheefish and pike, as well as chum and sockeye.

COMMENTS:

Ray Collins asked if more male Chinook were caught incidentally because they were more aggressive or because they were higher in abundance. Lamont clarified that his report was just anecdotal information. Travis Elison replied that scientific conclusions cannot be made on these types of reports.

WEATHER FORECAST:

Rain was forecasted for the next two days. The forecast for the following week was mostly cloudy with a chance of showers.

RECOMMENDATION:

1.) ADF&G recommended opening Rolling Closure Section 5 on July 16 to subsistence fishing with a daily bag limit of 3 Chinook salmon with rod and reel, and no possession, season, or size limit.

- The recommendation was made in response to the KRSWG request at the previous meeting.

COMMENTS:

The KRSWMG members did not object to Recommendation 1 (without a quorum, the Working Group was limited to individual comments/objections/or lack-there-of in response to recommendations).

Travis Elison asked for KRSWMG input regarding the bag limit. He had researched average subsistence Chinook salmon harvests for Section 5, and found that most households meet their subsistence needs with 12 Chinook salmon in that portion of the river.

- Ray Collins thought that a daily bag limit of 3 Chinook was sufficient. He pointed out that if a few people in a family fished together, they could easily meet subsistence harvest needs.

2.) ADF&G recommended initiating Rolling Openings of unrestricted gear (mesh sizes) starting on July 16 for Section 1, July 19 for Section 2, and July 23 for Section 3. The objective of the Rolling Openings was to allow harvest opportunity on non-Chinook species.

- More time was needed to assess the decision as to when Sections 4 and 5 would open.
- Travis Elison explained that based on ONC reports and calls from individual fishers, it was clear that some people had not fished at all for subsistence because they did not possess a net under 6" in mesh size. He hoped to provide them with the opportunity to use their larger mesh nets (6 ¼"+) now that the Chinook run was over.
- Mesh size restrictions for the commercial fishery would remain in effect.

COMMENTS:

At first, Bev Hoffman was still concerned that Kuskokwim Chinook were being intercepted in Kuskokwim Bay. She was also confused about the recommendation because she thought that ADF&G was lifting mesh size restrictions for the commercial fishery, not for subsistence.

- Travis Elison clarified that the liberalization of mesh size restrictions was intended for the subsistence fishery and not commercial.

Travis Elison explained that ADF&G has to find a balance because it is mandated to manage for all species and all uses. The Department cannot keep everything closed for the entire summer. Rather, decisions are based on the agreed-upon Management Objective of 127,000 fish. Travis asked Bev to review Chinook incidental harvest numbers in the commercial fishery, which were low. With that in consideration it was considered irresponsible to continue forgo opportunity on chum and sockeye salmon when the risk of harm to Chinook was low.

Tom Doolittle (USFWS) stated that USFWS supported the ADF&G recommendation. He said that the last three tides fished with the 8-inch net did not produce a single Chinook salmon, or last eight tides fished with the 5 ¾-inch net, indicating "minimal impact at this point in the run."

At first, Greg Roczicka thought that the recommendation sounded “like a mute point” and he did not see the benefit of Rolling Openings this late in the season.

- Stuart Currie explained that the goal was not to target Chinook. The point of the Rolling Openings was to give people who have not been able to use their nets an opportunity to go subsistence fishing.
- After Stuart’s explanation, Greg stated that he “stood corrected.”

3.) ADF&G recommended a commercial fishing period Subdistrict 1-A for a maximum of 4 hours on Monday, July 16. The Department also recommended a commercial period in Subdistrict 1-B for a maximum of 6 hours on Tuesday, July 17. The Department would work closely with both processors to determine the exact times of the opening in Subdistrict 1-B, and wait for Kuskokwim Seafood to confirm processing capability for Subdistrict 1-A.

- News releases would be issued Sunday, July 15.

COMMENTS:

The KRSMWG did not object to Recommendation 3. The group agreed that any Chinook headed for upriver had already passed the lower river and were essentially beyond reach.

Greg Roczicka asked Stuart Currie why he was concerned about his processing capability.

- Stuart replied that the problem was not quantity of fish, but the sellable quality of fish at this point in the run. He explained that we live with a commodity market, of which we don’t have control because it is governed by supply and demand. The Kuskokwim River remained fairly insignificant in the global market. Kwikpak has been trying to educate people about the value of chum salmon, but Kuskokwim Seafoods does not have the money to enact this type of outreach.

WORKING GROUP MOTIONS:

Since there was not a quorum, no official motions could be made.

OLD BUSINESS:

1.) Old business items were tabled until a future meeting.

NEW BUSINESS: none

GENERAL COMMENTS FROM WORKING GROUP MEMBERS:

Mike Williams commented that he had no problem with ADF&G making decisions until Coho season was underway.

WORKING GROUP ATTENDANCE:

MEMBER SEAT:	NAME:
UPRIVER ELDER	<i>vacant</i>
DOWNRIVER ELDER	James Charles
COMMERCIAL FISHER	<i>absent</i>
LOWER RIVER SUBSISTENCE	Mike Williams
MIDDLE RIVER SUBSTENCE	Gerald Simeon
UPPER RIVER SUBSISTENCE	<i>absent</i>
HEADWATERS SUBSISTENCE	<i>absent</i>
PROCESSOR	Stuart Currie
MEMBER AT LARGE	<i>absent</i>
SPORT FISHER	Lamont Albertson
WESTERN INTERIOR RAC	Ray Collins
Y-K DELTA RAC	Bob Aloysius
ADF&G	Travis Elison
CHAIR	Greg Roczicka

Other Participants:	
<p><u>ADF&G Comm. Fish:</u> John Lindermen, Travis Elison, Chris Shelden, Kevin Schaberg, Doug Bue, Alice Bailey, Jordan Palmer, Cara Lucas, Corrine Truesdale, Amy Brodersen, Scott Ayers, Heather Liller, Zach Liller</p> <p><u>Subsistence Division:</u> Hiroko Ikuta, Andrew Brenner, David Runfola</p>	
<p><u>USFWS:</u> Dan Gillikin, Tom Doolittle, Steve Miller, Jen Peaks, Rebecca Frye</p> <p><u>OSM:</u> Kevin Bartley</p>	
<p>Nick Souza (Processor member) Bev Hoffman (alternate member) Alexandra Waska (KNA) Casie Stockdale (AVCP) Alissa Joseph (ONC)</p>	<p>Doug Molyneaux Carl Berger (Lower Kuskokwim Economic Development Council)</p>

GLOSSARY OF ACRONYMS:

Alaska Department of Fish and Game (**ADF&G**), Orutsarmiut 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**)