

# Kuskokwim River Salmon Management Working Group

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

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

August 05, 2015

Meeting called to order at 10:00 a.m. on Wednesday August 05, 2015 and adjourned at 12:00 p.m. Total meeting time was just over 2 hours. Eleven full voting members were present and a quorum was established.

## AGENDA ITEMS:

**Continuing Business:** Run assessment and management actions.

**People to be Heard:**

**Old Business Discussion Topics:**

**New Business Discussion Topics:**

- Kuskokwim Subsistence Salmon Panel (KSSP) update- Glenn Haight, *Tabled to August 12*
- Placement of *People to be Heard* on the Working Group agenda, *Tabled to August 12*

**WORKING GROUP ACTION ITEMS:** *These items were not called "action items" at the time of meeting; however work was assigned or volunteered.*

1. For USFWS and ADF&G to provide projection figures to the Working Group, similar to 2014. (*ADF&G, 08/06/15.*)
2. To add discussion of the ocean's effects on salmon productivity to the inter-agency meeting agenda. (*ADF&G*)

## **WORKING GROUP MOTIONS:**

1. Approve the agenda as amended. *Passed (Unanimous)*
2. To support a commercial opening for 6 hours on August 10. *Failed (4 yeas, 5 nays)*
3. To meet on Saturday, August 8, at 10 a.m. to look at the coho salmon numbers and determine a commercial opening for next week. *Passed (7 yeas, 1 nay)*
4. Adjourn. *Passed (Unanimous)*

## **CONTINUING BUSINESS:**

1. **ADF&G Management Actions under consideration:** Aaron Poetter (ADF&G) reported that the department rescinded the 2015 subsistence fishery restrictions. ADF&G was considering a six hour coho salmon commercial opportunity for Subdistrict 1-B, with a two hour extension in the lower portion, on August 10. Mr. Poetter commented that, historically, the coho salmon run was 34% passed the BTF by August 5. The 2015 run was tracking near the 2005, 2010, 2012 and 2013 runs, which all met the escapement goals with commercial opportunity. Mr. Poetter reported that the amount of fish expected to pass BTF prior to an August 10 commercial opportunity would provide for the expressed subsistence needs in the middle and upper river.

**Discussion:** Lew Coggins (USFWS) commented that it was too early in the coho salmon run to determine its strength. He added that the department's strategy for opening a commercial period on August 10 appeared conservative.

2. **Overview of Kuskokwim River Salmon Run Assessment Projects:**

- **Bethel Test Fish:** Zach Liller (ADF&G) reported that the Chinook salmon run was effectively over in the lower river. The Chinook salmon cumulative CPUE was above the average but lower than 2014. He commented that run timing for 2015 was near average but considerably protracted; however the run size estimate was within the pre-season forecast range. Mr. Liller reported that the chum salmon run remained weak and the BTF continued to catch a few chum salmon daily. Historically, 99% of the chum salmon run had passed Bethel by this date. Mr. Liller commented that the BTF continued to catch small numbers of sockeye salmon; however the run had primarily passed through the lower river. He reported that coho salmon were the most abundant species in the lower river to date. Daily coho salmon CPUE in the BTF remained relatively low and stable, indicating that the run was either late or weaker than expected.

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Inseason projections of coho salmon run strength indicated a below average run size. (*For more information on the BTF, please see the August 5 Informational Packet*).

- **Weirs:** Zach Liller reported that the Chinook salmon escapement goals had been achieved at Kogruklu River and George River weirs and was exceeded at the Kwethluk River weir. Other Kuskokwim River escapement projects appeared similar to or better than 2014 for Chinook salmon. Mr. Liller reported that chum salmon escapement was weak compared to historical data and below average at all projects, except the Kwethluk River where it was near average. Kogruklu River weir had reached the lower bound of the established escapement goal for chum salmon. Sockeye salmon escapement for Telaquana Lake was three times the historical average. Sockeye salmon arrival to the Kogruklu weir was late, but achieved the lower bound of the escapement goal. Overall, the 2015 sockeye salmon run was one of the strongest on record. (*For more information on weirs, please see the August 5 Informational Packet*).
- **Aerial Surveys:** Zach Liller reported that Chinook salmon peak spawning abundance aerial surveys had been completed. A total of 10 tributaries were surveyed; four of which had escapement goals. Goals were exceeded in the Salmon River (Pitka Fork), achieved in the Kisaralik River, and not achieved at the Holitna River mainstem or the Gagarayah River. Overall, escapements had improved compared to recent years. (*For more information on aerial surveys, please see the August 5 Informational Packet*).
- 3. **Subsistence Reports:**
  - **Down River:** James Charles (Downriver Elder) reported that people in Kongiganak and Tuntutuliak were only harvesting salmon for fresh table fish. He added that the fish appeared to be milling around the mouth of the Kuskokwim.
  - **Lower River:** Bev Hoffman (Sport Fishing alternate) commented that some people continued to harvest coho salmon. She reported that her extended family wanted ~20 coho salmon per household. Ms. Hoffman commented that people were feeling satisfied going into the winter. John Andrew (Downriver Elder alternate) commented that people caught 2-5 silver salmon with whitefish nets. Mr. Andrew said he fished with a 12 ft. herring net for three days and caught 2-3 buckets of Bering cisco. He commented that commercial fishers reported that 60-70% of the silver salmon run had already passed through their area. Mary Sattler (Lower River Subsistence alternate) commented that her family's goal was to harvest 70 silver salmon. Greg Hoffman Jr. (Commercial Fishing alternate) commented that his family processed ~10 silver salmon and were almost finished fishing. Fritz Charles (Member at Large) commented that he wanted ~150 silver salmon for 5 families.
  - **Middle River:** Bob Aloysius (YK Delta RAC) commented that the river level continued to rise and was dirty making harvesting silver salmon easier. LaMont Albertson (Sport Fishing) commented that the Aniak Native Council had started the subsistence silver salmon tournament and a few people were catching silver salmon in the middle river. He added that people were not meeting their subsistence needs, though they were doing better than last year at this time. Dave Cannon (Middle River Subsistence) reported that a few people were totally done fishing, but many other families needed ~40-50 silver salmon. He commented that one family caught 17 silver salmon in 6 drifts on August 4, and on average people were catching 2-3 silver salmon within a couple hours of fishing. Lisa Feyereisen (Middle River Subsistence alternate) reported that Lower Kalskag had some successful drifters on Aug. 4, and that middle river residents needed 10-14 days of fishing to complete their subsistence needs. She commented that residents requested that commercial openings be delayed an additional week. Ms. Feyereisen reported that her family needed at least 100 silver salmon. Carl Morgan (Western Interior RAC alternate) reported that he spoke with a family that had just started to fish this season due to the restrictions and limited setnet sites. He commented that residents would be relying heavily on silver salmon to meet their needs. Mr. Morgan encouraged the department not to have a commercial opening anytime soon.
  - **Upriver:** Barb Carlson (Upriver Subsistence alternate) commented that they were starting to see the first silver salmon near Sleetmute, catching 1-2 fish per evening primarily with hook and line. She reported that the fishwheel was catching one silver salmon every 2-3 hours. Most people were hoping to harvest between 20-40 silver salmon and very few families to date had reached that goal. Dave Runfola (ADF&G)

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provided a report from Lime Village stating that the community had done “okay” with king salmon. He commented that Lime Village reported being below average with their chum salmon harvest and would continue to fish for coho salmon.

4. **Sport Fishing:** John Chythlook (ADF&G) reported that to date there were no plans for additional sport fishing restrictions. Bev Hoffman (Sport Fishing) commented that she received mixed reports on fishing success from rafters.
5. **Discussion of ADF&G Management consideration and discussion of possible alternatives:** Charlie Brown (Commercial Fishing) recommended that the department consider a commercial opportunity in the lower river. Some Working Group members expressed concern on the amount of subsistence pressure for coho salmon that was still needed in the lower river. ADF&G reported that the processors were only interested in purchasing fish from Subdistrict 1-B. Henry Mitchell (Processor) commented that a 6 hour opening would likely not have a significant impact on the overall coho salmon run. (*See Motion 2 below*).

## **PEOPLE TO BE HEARD:**

- James, from below Napaskiak, requested more information on commercial openings in the river.

## **OLD BUSINESS:**

- **Kuskokwim Subsistence Salmon Panel (KSSP)- Tabled**
- **Placement of People to be Heard on the Working Group agenda- Tabled**

**NEW BUSINESS:** N/A

## **WORKING GROUP MOTIONS:**

**Motion 1: To approve the agenda as amended. Passed (Unanimous)**

**Motion 2: To support a commercial opening for 6 hours on August 10. Failed (4 yeas, 5 nays)**

Some Working Group members were concerned about having a commercial opener due to the apparently weak coho salmon run and the subsistence needs in the middle and upper river.

**Motion 3: To meet on Saturday, August 8, at 10am to look at the coho salmon numbers and determine a commercial opening for next week. Passed (7 yeas, 1 nay)**

The majority of members wanted to review the numbers on Saturday to provide a recommendation to the department regarding a possible commercial opener.

**Motion 4: Adjourn. Passed (Unanimous)**

## **COMMENTS FROM THE WORKING GROUP:**

- Mary Sattler (Lower River Subsistence alternate) commented that although the Chinook salmon run strength appeared to have improved from recent years, she did not want ADF&G to give the impression to residents that it was good.
- Barb Carlson (Upriver Subsistence alternate) commented that the efforts made by local subsistence users had assisted in meeting escapement goals; however she added that these efforts should not be the only conservation attempts.

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## **WORKING GROUP ATTENDANCE:**

<b>MEMBER SEAT:</b>	<b>NAME:</b>
DOWNRIVER ELDER	James Charles
UPRIVER ELDER	<i>Absent</i>
LOWER RIVER SUBSISTENCE	Mary Sattler
MIDDLE RIVER SUBSISTENCE	Dave Cannon
UPRIVER SUBSISTENCE	Barbara Carlson
HEADWATERS SUBSISTENCE	Dan Esai
MEMBER AT LARGE	Fritz Charles
WESTERN INTERIOR RAC	Carl Morgan
YK DELTA RAC	Bob Aloysius
COMMERCIAL FISHING	Greg Hoffman Jr.
SPORT FISHING	LaMont Albertson
PROCESSOR	Henry Mitchell
ADF&G	Aaron Poetter
CHAIR	Fritz Charles

## **Other Participants:**

ADF&G Comm. Fish: Aaron Poetter, Zach Liller, Chris Shelden, John Linderman, Jen Peeks

Sport Fishing: John Chythlook

Subsistence Division: David Runfola

USFWS: Lew Coggins, RIT's

OSM: Don Rivard

John Andrew (Downriver Elder alternate)  
 Lisa Feyereisen (Middle River Subsistence alternate)  
 Bev Hoffman (Sport Fishing alternate)

## **GLOSSARY OF ABBREVIATIONS:**

Alaska Department of Fish and Game (**ADF&G**), Orutsararmiut Native Council (**ONC**), Kuskokwim Native Association (**KNA**), Association of Village Council Presidents (**AVCP**), Georgetown Traditional Council (**GTC**), 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**, **Working Group**, or **WG**), Sustainable Escapement Goal (**SEG**), Biological Escapement Goal (**BEG**), Management Objective (**MO**), Amounts Reasonably Necessary for Subsistence (**ANS**), Emergency Order (**EO**), Bering Sea Fishermen's Association (**BSFA**), Law Enforcement (**LE**), Inter-Tribal Fish Commission (**ITFC**)

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