

Kuskokwim River Salmon Management Working Group

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

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

July 06, 2016

Meeting called to order at 12:03 p.m. on Wednesday July 06, 2016 and adjourned at 2:20 p.m. Meeting time was approximately 2 hours and 20 minutes. Eight full voting members were present and a quorum was established.

AGENDA ITEMS:

Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ADF&G) Management Actions Under Consideration:

US Fish and Wildlife Service Update:

People to be Heard:

Continuing Business: Run assessment and management actions.

Old Business Discussion Topics:

- Fisheries Disaster Relief Fund discussion

New Business Discussion Topics:

WORKING GROUP ACTION ITEMS: *No Action Items at the time of this meeting.*

WORKING GROUP MOTIONS:

1. Approve the agenda as amended. *Passed (Unanimous)*
2. To support the recommendation by USFWS and ADF&G for there to be a 24/7 subsistence opener for 6" mesh until further notice starting on Friday July 8. *Passed (7 yeas, 0 nays)*
3. For the Federal government to hand over management to the State beginning on Friday July 8. *(Motion died due to lack of a second)*
4. To extend the Working Group meeting until 2:15 p.m. *Passed (Unanimous)*
5. To extend the Working Group meeting until 2:30 p.m. *Passed (Unanimous)*
6. That whenever a Working Group member uses the word "stool," they use the term "4-legged stool." *Passed (Unanimous)*
7. To adjourn. *Passed (Unanimous)*

ADF&G MANAGEMENT ACTIONS UNDER CONSIDERATION: Aaron Poetter (ADF&G Area Management Biologist) reported that ADF&G had no management actions under consideration for upstream of Aniak in State waters. Mr. Poetter recommended to the federal inseason manager that the subsistence fishery in federal waters be open 24/7 for 6" or less mesh gillnets while maintaining tributary closures. Mr. Poetter noted that this management action could have been implemented a week prior based on assessment data that had indicated a harvestable surplus. Mr. Poetter commented that the chum salmon run was below average but expected to meet the escapement goal.

US FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE UPDATE: Ray Born (USFWS) reported that USFWS was considering opening the river to subsistence fishing until further notice using 6" or less mesh, 50 fathom gillnets with an expected announcement on July 8. Mr. Born commented that, to date, the river would remain under the federal special action. Lew Coggins (USFWS) reported on the aerial harvest surveys conducted during the 72-hour opener from June 29–July 2. A decline in fishing effort was observed compared to the previous opening. The total salmon harvest for the recent opener was estimated between 21,600–29,600 fish; 12,000–16,000 sockeye salmon; 7,500–11,200 chum salmon; and 1,950–2,670 Chinook salmon. Of 125 usable interviews conducted, nine were from fishcamps.

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PEOPLE TO BE HEARD:

- Bill Bechtol (KRITFC) commented that chum salmon had exceeded the escapement goals at the Kogruklu River weir during several of the past 10 years. Mr. Bechtol's comment was in response to Working Group concerns that chum salmon numbers appeared low at the BTF.

SUBSISTENCE REPORTS:

- **Lowest River:** James Charles (Downriver Elder) reported that on July 4 a fisher caught three sockeye salmon, one king salmon and one trout at the mouth of the Tuntutuliak River. He commented that during the recent 72-hour opportunity harvest effort had declined. Mr. Charles reported that the tundra villages generally waited to harvest fish until the peak of the run for cost effectiveness. Charlie Brown (Commercial Fishing) reported that the majority of people in his area were done fishing.
- **ONC Subsistence Report:** Alissa Joseph (ONC) summarized the ONC subsistence report. She commented that more than half of the fishers surveyed reported being done fishing until coho salmon arrived. *(For more information on the ONC report, please see the July 06 Informational Packet).*
- **Lower River:** Bev Hoffman (Sport Fishing) thanked her tribe for their efforts in conserving salmon and commented that the majority of families were happy with their harvest. She commended the Bethel Test Fish crew for providing fish to the community. Mike Williams Sr. (Lower River Subsistence) commented that most of the families were finished fishing in his area.
- **Middle River:** Dave Cannon (Middle River Subsistence) commented that people appeared content with their harvest; some people continued to fish for sockeye salmon while others were waiting for silver salmon. Mr. Cannon reported that the fish wheels had started to catch sockeye salmon. Lisa Feyereisen (Middle River Subsistence alternate) commented that the Kalskag fish wheel had caught 40 sockeye salmon one day and 30 the following day. The fish wheel operated only when fish were needed. Ms. Feyereisen reported that people had stopped fishing in Sleetmute due to high water and heavy debris loads in the river.
- **Upriver:** Mark Leary (Upriver Subsistence) reported that the Napaimiut fish wheel had averaged 20 sockeye salmon per day from July 1–3. He noted that half of the sockeye salmon caught were small in size.
- **Headwaters:** Dan Esai (Headwaters Subsistence) commented that during July 2–3, one setnet caught 32 salmon, many of which were large. High water had caused flooding in the area. Mr. Esai commented that only 1–2 boats were fishing at a time. Ray Collins (Western Interior RAC) commented that fishing was not productive in McGrath and that people had to remove their nets due to high water. Mr. Collins reported that people were waiting for silver salmon.

CONTINUING BUSINESS:

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

- **Bethel Test Fish:** Zach Liller (ADF&G) reported that water temperature was warmer than average, water clarity was muddy with debris, and the water level was at the upper end of the historical range. Mr. Liller reviewed the daily CPUE for Chinook, chum, and sockeye salmon at the BTF. Chinook salmon catch had declined with a daily CPUE averaging ~13. The cumulative CPUE for Chinook salmon was above the 5 and 10-year averages and similar to the 2014 and 2015 seasons. Mr. Liller reported that Chinook salmon run timing appeared average but possibly protracted. On average ~91% of the Chinook salmon run had passed Bethel by this date. The CPUE for chum salmon was within the bottom 20% of the historical observations for this date and ~48% of the run, historically, had passed Bethel by July 5. BTF indicated that the 2016 chum salmon run may be below average. Sockeye salmon had increased at the BTF within

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the last week. On average ~85% of the sockeye run had passed Bethel by July 6. (*For more information on the BTF, please see the July 06 Informational Packet*).

- **Aniak Test Fish:** Mr. Liller reported that daily catches of Chinook salmon had started to decline in the ATF. Chum salmon continued to pass through the middle river. The first sockeye salmon was caught on June 25. (*For more information on the ATF, please see the July 06 Informational Packet*).
 - **Weirs:** Mr. Liller reported that Chinook salmon had been counted passed the upriver weirs. Several weirs had recently been partially or completely out of operation due to high water, and fish were likely undercounted at these locations. Based on operations when high water had not been a factor, Mr. Liller reported that passage of Chinook salmon had been comparable to recent years. Despite high water, both the Tatlawiksuk and Salmon River (Pitka Fork) weirs reported passing more Chinook salmon to date this year than in the most recent years. Chum salmon escapement was below average at all monitoring sites. The Telaquana Lake weir was installed on July 4 as scheduled. The Kogrukuk and Kwethluk weirs were the only projects that had passed sockeye salmon to date.
 - **Radio Tagging Project:** Mr. Liller reported that the tagging crew continued to catch Chinook salmon. The crew indicated that it was increasingly difficult to find fish and catches were sporadic. To date 1,318 Chinook salmon had been tagged and 221 tagged fish had been harvested. The telemetry data indicated that swim speed for Chinook salmon was ~21 miles per day.
 - **Subsistence Division:** Dave Runfola (ADF&G) reported on the subsistence feasibility project. During the June 29–July 2 subsistence opener, nine fishers were surveyed with a total of 57 drifts primarily below Bethel. A total of 28 Chinook salmon and 382 other salmon species had been caught. Fishers indicated that more chum and sockeye salmon were caught per drift compared to Chinook salmon.
2. **Commercial:** To date there was no identified market for buying fish on the Kuskokwim River.
 3. **Intercept Fishery Report:** Bill Bechtol (KRITFC) provided data from the NOAA–National Marine Fisheries Service website regarding the intercept fisheries in the Bering Sea and Area M.
 4. **Discussion of ADF&G Management Consideration and Discussion of Possible Alternatives:** Management was considering a 24/7 subsistence opportunity for 6" or less mesh gillnets beginning on July 8. (*See Motion 2*)

A few Working Group members commented that not all Kuskokwim River stakeholders were represented at the KRITFC management meetings. Mike Williams Sr. responded that the KRITFC had three inseason managers representing the entire Kuskokwim River and concerns could be brought to their attention. Mr. Born (USFWS) commented that the MOU between USFWS and the KRITFC was based on tribal consultation requirements, which limited USFWS's scope on who they could communicate with regarding the process.

OLD BUSINESS:

- **Fisheries Disaster Relief Fund discussion:** Bev Hoffman reported that \$1.1 million remained available from the Fisheries Disaster Relief Fund for the Kuskokwim region. Ms. Hoffman requested that tribes consider additional proposals for funding use and send them to BSFA. Mike Williams Sr. suggested purchasing 25 fathom, 6" mesh gillnets for community use and using funds for additional capacity building meetings.

NEW BUSINESS: N/A

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WORKING GROUP MOTIONS:

1. **Approve the agenda as amended. Passed (Unanimous)**
2. **To support the recommendation by USFWS and ADF&G for there to be a 24/7 subsistence opener for 6" mesh until further notice starting on Friday July 8. Passed (7 yeas, 0 nays)**

The Working Group discussed whether salmon conservation remained a concern at this time. Some members commented that the recommended 6" mesh gillnet opportunity supported a continued Chinook salmon conservation effort.
3. **For the Federal government to hand over management to the State beginning on Friday July 8. (Motion died due to lack of a second)**

The Working Group discussed current conservation needs for Chinook and chum salmon. Dave Cannon commented that although the chum salmon numbers remained low, there was limited fishing pressure at this time. Some members felt that if managers supported a 24/7 opener it would suggest that the federal special action to address conservation concerns was no longer needed since the State had tools to limit gear size. Motion 3 was made, but not seconded by voting members.
4. **To extend the Working Group meeting until 2:15 p.m. Passed (Unanimous)**
5. **To extend the Working Group meeting until 2:30 p.m. Passed (Unanimous)**
6. **That whenever a Working Group member uses the word "stool," they use the term "4-legged stool." Passed (Unanimous)**

The term "3-legged stool" had been used during prior meetings in reference to the management relationship between USFWS, ADF&G and the KRITFC. Some Working Group members wanted the KRSMWG to be included when discussing Kuskokwim River management and be viewed as the fourth leg of the management "stool."
7. **To adjourn. Passed (Unanimous)**

COMMENTS FROM THE WORKING GROUP:

- Lisa Feyereisen requested an update from USFWS on a special action for fishing restrictions at the mouth of the Aniak River. Mr. Born commented that he would publish a special action by July 8.
- Greg Roczicka encouraged each community to collect subsistence harvest data to better inform the inseason managers.

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WORKING GROUP ATTENDANCE:

MEMBER SEAT:	NAME:
DOWNRIVER ELDER	James Charles
UPRIVER ELDER	<i>Absent</i>
LOWER RIVER SUBSISTENCE	Mike Williams Sr.
MIDDLE RIVER SUBSISTENCE	Dave Cannon
UPRIVER SUBSISTENCE	Mark Leary
HEADWATERS SUBSISTENCE	Daniel Esai
MEMBER AT LARGE	<i>Absent</i>
WESTERN INTERIOR RAC	Ray Collins
YK DELTA RAC	Greg Roczicka
COMMERCIAL FISHING	Charlie Brown
SPORT FISHING	LaMont Albertson
PROCESSOR	<i>Absent</i>
ADF&G	Aaron Poetter
CHAIR	LaMont Albertson

Other Participants:

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

Sport Fishing: John Chythlook

Subsistence Division: Dave Runfola, Lisa Olson

Commissioner's Office:

USFWS: Ken Stahlnecker, Ray Born, Lew Coggins, Ben Staton

OSM: Karl Lindberg

Janessa Esquible (ONC)
 Bill Bechtol (KRITFC)
 Alissa Joseph (ONC)
 Lynne Olick (ONC)
 Will Voinot-Baron
 Paula Schiefer

WG Alternates:

Lisa Feyereisen
 Greg Hoffman Jr.
 Bev Hoffman

Media: Lisa Demer (ADN)

GLOSSARY OF ABBREVIATIONS:

Alaska Department of Fish and Game (**ADF&G, department, State**), Orutsararmiut Native Council (**ONC**), 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**), Kuskokwim River Inter-Tribal Fish Commission (**KRITFC**)

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