

Kuskokwim River Salmon Management Working Group

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

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

June 7, 2018

Meeting called to order at 10:04 a.m. on Thursday June 7, 2018 and adjourned at 12:55 p.m. Meeting time was approximately 2 hours and 50 minutes. Nine full voting members were present and a quorum was established. Alissa Rogers chaired the meeting.

AGENDA ITEMS:

Elections:

USFWS/KRITFC Update:

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

People to be Heard:

Continuing Business: Run assessment and management actions.

Old Business Discussion Topics: N/A

New Business Discussion Topics: N/A

WORKING GROUP ACTION ITEMS:

- Request for ADF&G to redistribute the Kuskokwim Area Age-Sex-Length (ASL) summary to Working Group participants. (*Redistributed 06/07/2018*)

WORKING GROUP MOTIONS:

1. Approve the agenda as amended. *Passed (Unanimous)*
2. To extend the June 7, 2018 Working Group meeting an additional 30 minutes [12:40 p.m.]. *Passed (Unanimous)*
3. Support the Alaska Dept. of Fish and Game's (ADF&G) recommendation for a 6" mesh, 25 fathoms in length and 45 meshes in depth, or less, gillnet opening on June 12, 2018 from the refuge boundary at Aniak upstream to the Holitna River mouth for 12-hours and from the Holitna River mouth to the headwaters until further notice. *Passed (Unanimous)*
4. For the next Working Group meeting to be scheduled for Thursday June 14, 2018 beginning at 10:00 a.m. *Passed (Unanimous)*
5. Adjourn at 12:55 p.m. *Passed (Unanimous)*

ELECTIONS: Elections were held for the Middle River Subsistence seat and the Upriver Elder seat. Mike Savage from Kalskag was elected as the primary representative to the Middle River Subsistence seat. Darren Deacon from Kalskag was appointed as an alternate to the Middle River Subsistence seat. Mishka Andreanoff from Crooked Creek was elected as the Upriver Elder representative.

KRITFC/ USFWS UPDATE: Mary Peltola (Executive Director of KRITFC) reported that the KRITFC met on June 5 with USFWS and ADF&G to discuss fishing opportunities. She reported that federal management of Kuskokwim River federal waters would begin on June 12, 2018. A 12-hour harvest opportunity was scheduled in federal waters on June 12 and June 16 for 6" mesh or less gillnets, not to exceed 45 meshes in depth. Below the Johnson River, 50 fathoms in length would be allowed and from the Johnson River upstream to the refuge boundary at Aniak up to 25 fathoms in length would be allowed. Ken Stahlnecker (USFWS) summarized the justification used to establish the harvest opportunities. Mr. Stahlnecker commented that USFWS and KRITFC had determined that there were ~16,000 Chinook salmon available for harvest in 2018 based on the KRITFC

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and USFWS escapement goal of 110,000 Chinook salmon. Mr. Stahlnecker reported that federal law enforcement (LE) would patrol the federal waters during the 2018 Chinook salmon season.

ADF&G MANAGEMENT ACTIONS UNDER CONSIDERATION: Aaron Tiernan (ADF&G Area Management Biologist) reported that ADF&G was considering opening Section 5, the Holitna River mouth to the headwaters, on June 12 using 6" mesh gillnets, 25 fathoms in length, and 45 meshes in depth, or less, until further notice. In Section 4, from the refuge boundary at Aniak to the Holitna River mouth, ADF&G recommended a 12-hour opportunity using gillnets with the same restrictions as suggested for Section 5. Mr. Tiernan reported that following the June 12 subsistence opening, ADF&G recommended the implementation of the king salmon subsistence harvest permit program in state waters. Future subsistence openings would be determined using the June 12 harvest estimates and the inseason assessment tools. Mr. Tiernan commented that, to date, ADF&G did not have concerns about the number of salmon caught in state waters outside of the refuge boundary at the Kuskokwim River mouth.

PEOPLE TO BE HEARD:

- Noah Alexie (Tuluksak) commented that in 2017 the Quinhagak area had used king salmon gear while the Kuskokwim River fishers were restricted to the use of 4" mesh gillnets to conserve Chinook salmon. Mr. Alexie commented that he did not agree with using large gear because it harvested larger fish; he suggested that the Quinhagak area be closed to fishing with this gear size. Mr. Alexie reported that people caught whitefish during the 4" mesh gillnet opportunities. Mr. Alexie suggested that the Tuluksak River be tested for heavy metals. Mr. Alexie suggested that people with experience on the Kuskokwim River should be conducting the inseason surveys.
- Bill Bechtol (KRITFC) summarized the Community Harvest Survey data from the June 6, 2018 opening. He reported that three fishers had been interviewed between the Johnson River and Napaskiak with a total fishing time of 19 hours and 15 minutes; total harvest was nine kings, three sheefish, and nine whitefish.
- Gary Decossas (USFWS) reported that USFWS flew five flights between May 28 and June 6 to count netting effort during the 4" gillnet openings and in the non-salmon spawning tributaries. (*For more information, please see the USFWS supplemental document in the June 7 Informational Packet.*)
- Kevin Whitworth (McGrath) reported that one person in his area caught seven sheefish with a 6" mesh set gillnet over a two day period.
- Peter Napoka Jr. (Tuluksak) reported that he harvested 16 king salmon and 6 whitefish during the June 6 gillnet opening. He commented that he checked his net every four hours.

SUBSISTENCE REPORTS:

- **Lowest River:** *No information was provided by lowest river members at the time of this meeting.*
- **OTNC Subsistence Report:** Janessa Esquible (OTNC) reported that eight fish camp surveys had been conducted from June 1 to June 4, 2018. (*For more information on the OTNC subsistence survey report, please see the June 7, 2018 Informational Packet.*)
- **Lower River:** *No information was provided by lower river members at the time of this meeting.*
- **Middle River:** Mike Savage (Middle River Subsistence) reported that on June 6 he harvested one pike and four whitefish. He commented that his relative caught two "jack" salmon and ~five whitefish. Darren Deacon (Middle River Subsistence alternate) reported that during the June 6 harvest opening he harvested four whitefish, two "jack" salmon, and one pike. He released one king salmon back into the water alive. Lisa Feyereisen (Middle River Subsistence alternate) reported that her family caught pike with their set

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gillnet on June 6. Nick Kameroff (KRITFC) reported that he fished for eight hours on June 6 and caught five whitefish, one sheefish, one “jack” salmon, and one “bottom feeder.” Mr. Kameroff commented that his neighbor harvested five whitefish, one sheefish, two sockeye salmon, one pike, one “jack” salmon, and one “sucker” on June 6.

- **Upriver:** Mark Leary (Upriver Subsistence) reported that he operated a set gillnet for three days and caught whitefish and sheefish. On June 6 he counted 34 gillnets in the Kuskokwim River over a distance of 165 miles. Mr. Leary commented on the traditions and the process of “getting ready” for fishing. Barbara Carlson (Upriver Subsistence alternate) reported that on June 3, she operated a 6” gillnet and harvested one broad whitefish. On June 4, she operated the fishwheel for 24 hours, but did not catch any fish. Mishka Andreanoff (Upriver Elder) commented that some people were operating drift gillnets in his area and his son caught ~five sheefish. Mr. Andreanoff reported that a few small king salmon had been caught in the area.
- **Headwaters:** Dan Esai (Headwaters Subsistence) commented that no one was “soaking nets” to date in Nikolai. He reported that the water level was rising and that the Elders believed this was due to salmon being in the river. Mr. Esai commented that, traditionally, people were told that fish would pass by fish camps that were not clean and prepared to receive fish. Ray Collins (Western Interior RAC) reported that there had been debris in the river. No one in his area was actively fishing to date.

CONTINUING BUSINESS:

1. **Overview of Kuskokwim River Salmon Run Assessment Projects:** Nick Smith (ADF&G Research Biologist) provided an overview of the ADF&G assessment projects. He reported that, to date, water temperature was near average, clarity was below average, and the water level was near historical average for this time in the season. Aaron Tiernan explained that the USGS (US Geological Survey) crew had reset the water level gauge at Crooked Creek causing a “spike” on the water level graph that was included in the June 7 Informational Packet. (*For more information on the 2018 inseason assessment projects, please see the June 7 Informational Packet*).
- **Bethel Test Fish:** Mr. Smith reported that, as of June 5, the cumulative CPUE for Chinook salmon was 12; ~1–4% of the run was complete based on historical data. The chum salmon cumulative CPUE was seven as of June 5. Mr. Smith commented that Chinook salmon ASL (Age-Sex-Length) and genetic data were being collected.
- **Aniak Test Fish:** As of June 5, the cumulative CPUE for Chinook salmon was eight and the cumulative CPUE for chum salmon was eight.
- **Sonar:** Mr. Smith reported that the sonar project began full operations on June 4, 2018; test fishing at the sonar site began on May 28. Mr. Smith reported that, to date, the sonar site was passing ~1,500 fish daily; species were predominately Chinook salmon, sheefish and whitefish.
- **Subsistence Division project update:** Dave Runfola (ADF&G Subsistence Division) reported that ADF&G staff was collaborating with USFWS, KRITFC, and OTNC to conduct inseason harvest surveys in the lower river and would be collaborating with NVN to conduct inseason surveys in Kalskag and Aniak during the 2018 season. At the time of the June 7 meeting, outreach was being conducted in communities upstream of Aniak.
- **NVN:** Dan Gillikin reported that a crew had been hired for the Salmon River escapement project. Mr. Gillikin introduced Chelsey Zaukar from Crooked Creek as a new Fisheries Resources Information Technician for NVN.

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Due to the June 12 subsistence openings scheduled on the Kuskokwim River, Fritz Charles recommended that the next Working Group meeting occur on June 14 to allow more preparation time for the harvest estimates and enforcement summaries.

5. Adjourn at 12:55 p.m. Passed (Unanimous)

COMMENTS FROM THE WORKING GROUP:

- Ray Collins commented on the importance of gathering accurate harvest data during subsistence openers. Mr. Collins commented that he was pleased by the Federal Subsistence Board's actions to maintain the early season closure through June 11 in order to protect the early Chinook salmon stocks bound for the headwaters.
- Mark Leary commented that he was feeling positive that "things" were becoming balanced; he commented that he was hopeful there would be more fish in 2018 than in previous recent years.
- Fritz Charles congratulated Mishka Andrianoff and Mike Savage for being elected to serve on the Working Group. Mr. Charles "hoped for the best" during the 2018 fishing season.
- Alissa Rogers congratulated the newly elected representatives to the Working Group. She thanked Working Group participants, agencies, and KYUK for attending the meetings and encouraged youth to attend future meetings.

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WORKING GROUP ATTENDANCE:

MEMBER SEAT:	NAME:
DOWNRIVER ELDER	Absent
UPRIVER ELDER	Mishka Andreanoff
LOWER RIVER SUBSISTENCE	Mary Peltola
MIDDLE RIVER SUBSISTENCE	Lisa Feyereisen/ Mike Savage
UPRIVER SUBSISTENCE	Mark Leary
HEADWATERS SUBSISTENCE	Daniel Esai
MEMBER AT LARGE	Fritz Charles/ Barbara Carlson
WESTERN INTERIOR RAC	Ray Collins
YK DELTA RAC	Absent
COMMERCIAL FISHING	Greg Hoffman Jr.
SPORT FISHING	Absent
PROCESSOR	<i>Vacant</i>
KRITFC	Nick Kameroff
ADF&G	Aaron Tiernan
CHAIR	Alissa Rogers

Other Participants:

ADF&G Comm. Fish: Nick Smith, Chuck Brazil, Jen Peeks

Subsistence Division: Chris McDevitt, Dave Runfola

USFWS: Ken Stahlnecker, Ben Staton, Lew Coggins, Aaron Webber

OSM: Gary Decossas

Jennifer Hooper (AVCP)	Chelsey Zaukar (NVN/ Crooked Creek)	Noah C. Alexie (Tuluksak)
Janessa Esquible (OTNC)	Tim Zaukar (Crooked Creek)	Kevin Whitworth (KRITFC)
Elijah Lindley (OTNC)	Jerry Peterson (Chuathbaluk)	Bill Bechtol (KRITFC)
Avery Hoffman (OTNC)	Jonathan Samuelson (GTC)	<u>Media:</u>
Mary Mathias (OTNC)	Meredith Witte (GTC)	Anna Rose MacArthur (KYUK)
Dan Gillikin (NVN)	Rebecca Wilmarth (Red Devil)	Petra Harpak (KYUK)
Nathan Underwood (Aniak)	Audrey Leary (Napaimute)	<u>WG Alternates:</u>
Joe Kameroff (Aniak)	Peter Napoka Jr. (Tuluksak)	Darren Deacon (Middle River Sub. Alt.)

GLOSSARY OF ABBREVIATIONS:

Alaska Department of Fish and Game (**ADF&G, department, State**), Orutsararmut Traditional Native Council (**OTNC**), 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**), Native Village of Napaimute (**NVN**), Yukon Kuskokwim Health Corporation (**YKHC**), Alaska State Troopers (**AST**)

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