

Kuskokwim River Salmon Management Working Group

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

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

July 6, 2018

Meeting called to order at 10:02 a.m. on Friday July 6, 2018 and adjourned at 12:30 p.m. Meeting time was approximately 2 hours and 30 minutes. Twelve full voting members were present and a quorum was established. Fritz Charles chaired the meeting.

AGENDA ITEMS:

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: *No Action Items at the time of this meeting.*

WORKING GROUP MOTIONS:

1. Approve the agenda. *Passed (Unanimous)*
2. To support the US Fish and Wildlife Service and the Kuskokwim River Inter-Tribal Fish Commission in rescinding the Federal Special Action in the Kuskokwim River federal waters, allowing the state (ADF&G) to resume management of the Kuskokwim River drainage. *Passed (Unanimous)*
3. To extend the July 6, 2018 Working Group meeting beyond 12:00 p.m. *Passed (Unanimous)*
4. For the next Working Group meeting to be scheduled for Wednesday July 11, 2018 beginning at 10:00 a.m. *Passed (Unanimous)*
5. Adjourn at 12:30 p.m. *Passed (Unanimous)*

USFWS/KRITFC UPDATE: Ken Stahlnecker (USFWS) reported that the USFWS and KRITFC provided a subsistence fishing period on July 5 in federal waters. Mr. Stahlnecker commented that the intent of the Federal Subsistence Board (FSB) was for the inseason federal manager to determine when to relinquish management authority, allowing the state to resume management of the entire Kuskokwim River drainage. Mr. Stahlnecker provided an update on the USFWS 2018 Kuskokwim Salmon Preservation Study.

Lew Coggins (USFWS) reported that during the June 29 subsistence fishing opening in federal waters ~3,200 Chinook salmon; ~18,000 chum salmon; and ~7,500 sockeye salmon were estimated to have been harvested. Harvest estimates for the July 5 opening had not been determined at the time of the July 6 meeting.

(For more information on harvest data, please see the July 6 supplemental documents in the Informational Packet.)

ADF&G MANAGEMENT ACTIONS UNDER CONSIDERATION: Aaron Tiernan (ADF&G Area Management Biologist) reported that Section 4 and Section 5 of the Kuskokwim River were open with restricted gear until further notice. Mr. Tiernan commented that following rescinding of the Federal Special Action, ADF&G recommended opening the lower river until further notice while maintaining gear restrictions of 6" mesh gillnets with a maximum length of 25 fathoms from the Johnson River upstream and 50 fathoms from the Johnson River to the Kuskokwim River mouth. Mr. Tiernan commented that the BTF had averaged a 17:1 ratio of chum and sockeye salmon to Chinook salmon during the previous six days and ~87–89% of the Chinook salmon run had passed the Bethel area to date. Mr. Tiernan added that subsistence harvest reports indicated that people were primarily harvesting chum and sockeye salmon as of July 6, 2018.

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PEOPLE TO BE HEARD:

- Dwayne Hoffman (Kalskag) commented that he was thankful for the fish he had harvested and noted that the fish were in “good condition.”

SUBSISTENCE REPORTS:

- **Lowest River:** James Charles (Downriver Elder) reported that on June 29 he harvested 46 “reds,” 23 king salmon, and 23 chum salmon in one drift using a gillnet. Mr. Charles commented that people no longer depended on chum salmon like they had historically; he added that historically people did not harvest king salmon. Mr. Charles shared how fishing gear had changed from when he was younger and that his family had relied on a variety of fish.
- **OTNC Subsistence Report:** Janelle Carl (OTNC) summarized the June 29 to July 1 Bethel area fish camp surveys. She reported that the BTF fish distribution program completed on July 2. Janessa Esquible (OTNC) summarized OTNC harvest reports from the June 29 opening. *(For more information on the OTNC summary, please see the July 6, 2018 Informational Packet.)*
- **Lower River:** Mary Peltola (Lower River Subsistence alternate) reported that her family was “halfway done” with harvesting their fish and would like to catch more fish once the restrictions were lifted. Fritz Charles (Member at Large) commented that he was finished fishing until coho salmon season. He estimated that he had harvested ~15–20 king salmon and 20–30 chum and sockeye salmon combined. John Andrew (Downriver Elder alternate) thanked the managers for the opportunity to fish. Mr. Andrew reported catching 80 fish, which were primarily chum salmon on June 29. On July 5, he made one drift with his gillnet in the morning and caught a “whole tote” of chum salmon; he drifted in the afternoon and harvested 73 chum salmon, 40 “reds,” and 1 Chinook salmon. He observed fishing effort to be low on July 5. Mike Williams Sr. (Lower River Subsistence) thanked the Kuskokwim River for its resources. He reported that the majority of fishers used 5 ½” mesh or less gillnets on July 5. Mr. Williams harvested 50 “reds,” 50 chum salmon, and 2 king salmon early on July 5; in the afternoon he harvested 30 “reds” and 20 chum salmon for another family. He observed that the majority of the king salmon had passed through the lower river at this time in the 2018 season.
- **Middle River:** Darren Deacon (Middle River Sub) reported that he had finished harvesting fish; he had harvested ~1/5 of what he had historically harvested. Lisa Feyereisen (Middle River Subsistence alternate) commented that people were putting in a great deal of effort with low catch rates. Nick Kameroff (KRITFC) reported that he had harvested a total of 32 king salmon to date and was waiting to harvest “reds” and whitefish. Bob Aloysius (YK Delta RAC) reported that, historically, people in his region targeted chum and sockeye salmon; king salmon were too heavy for the fish wheels. He commented that he grew up eating chum salmon and it disheartened him that people “downgraded” chum salmon.
- **Upriver:** Mark Leary (Upriver Subsistence) reported that on June 30 he harvested 18 chum and 12 king salmon in one short drift. At the time of the July 6 meeting, he commented that people in his area were primarily focused on processing fish. He reported that the Napaimute fish wheel was being operated to harvest sockeye salmon. Mishka Andreanoff (Upriver Elder) reported that on July 2 he harvested four “jack” salmon, three “reds,” and chum salmon. Barb Carlson (Upriver Subsistence alternate) reported that her smokehouse was filled with king salmon and “reds.” Ms. Carlson commented that she observed an increase in the 2018 king salmon size compared to recent years and the fish wheel was catching small “reds”. She observed that the 2018 Chinook and sockeye salmon had a later run timing than previous years.

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- **Headwaters:** Ray Collins (Western Interior RAC) reported that Chinook salmon were beginning to appear in the McGrath area; people were fishing with setnets and the fish wheel. He commented that a fisher caught 23 king salmon using a setnet within two days.

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. Mr. Smith reported that, to date, the water temperature was near the historical average, water clarity was below the historical average, and the water level was higher than average. *(For more information on the 2018 inseason assessment projects, please see the July 6 Informational Packet).*
 - **Bethel Test Fish:** As of July 5, the Chinook salmon cumulative CPUE was 579. Mr. Smith reported that ~87% of the Chinook salmon run was estimated to have passed Bethel by July 6 based on historical run timing data. As of July 5, the chum salmon cumulative CPUE was 2,579 and the sockeye salmon cumulative CPUE was 1,008. Chum and sockeye salmon were the most abundant salmon species at the BTF site to date.
 - **Sonar:** Mr. Smith reported that between June 21 and June 29, the sonar was partially operating. To date, chum and sockeye salmon were increasing at the sonar site.
 - **Weirs:** High water had delayed the installation of several weirs during the 2018 season; the George River weir was fully operational on June 14, the Salmon River (Pitka Fork) was fully operational on June 17, the Salmon River (Aniak) weir was fully operational on July 4, and the Kogrukluk and Telaquana Lake weirs were fully operational on July 5.
 - **Subsistence Division Projects:** Chris McDevitt (ADF&G) reported that the Atmautluak and Kasigluk creel survey project had completed; staff were transitioning to the middle river survey project that was operated in cooperation with NVN. Mr. McDevitt reported that ADF&G staff provided outreach during a Tuluksak Tribal Council meeting on June 28.
 - **NVN Projects:** Rebecca Wilmarth (NVN) reported that Lower Kalskag fishers continued to catch a variety of salmon species using setnets. Red Devil fishers were still catching king salmon; minimal sockeye salmon had been observed near Red Devil.
2. **Discussion of ADF&G Management Consideration and Discussion of Possible Alternatives:** *(See Motion 2 on page 3.)*

WORKING GROUP MOTIONS:

1. **Approve the agenda. Passed (Unanimous)**
2. **To support the US Fish and Wildlife Service and the Kuskokwim River Inter-Tribal Fish Commission in rescinding the Federal Special Action in the Kuskokwim River federal waters, allowing the state (ADF&G) to resume management of the Kuskokwim River drainage. Passed (Unanimous)**

Working Group members discussed the salmon ratios and the inseason assessment data. LaMont Albertson commented that he was in support of the motion and encouraged a formal agreement between the state and “other authorities” in order to “formalize these sorts of discussions.” Mike Williams Sr. commented that after reviewing the run timing, assessment data, and subsistence reports, he was in support of USFWS relinquishing management back to ADF&G. He commented that fishing effort would be minimal at this time in the season.

3. **To extend the July 6, 2018 Working Group meeting beyond 12:00 p.m. Passed (Unanimous)**

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4. **For the next Working Group meeting to be scheduled for Wednesday July 11, 2018 beginning at 10:00 a.m. Passed (Unanimous)**
5. **Adjourn at 12:30 p.m. Passed (Unanimous)**

COMMENTS FROM THE WORKING GROUP:

- Dan Esai commented that he had been involved with a local culture camp. Mr. Esai commented that he hoped for the development of an exchange program where people could experience different areas of the river.
- Ray Collins commented that recording the history of the Kuskokwim River fisheries was important.
- Barbara Carlson thanked the people of the lower river for their “hardships” during the fishing restrictions.
- Mishka Andreanoff thanked staff for providing the Working Group Informational Packet; he thanked Working Group participants for sharing their comments and knowledge with the group.
- LaMont Albertson commented that BSFA had been supporting Alex Nicori, a new fisheries biologist, through working with Kevin Whitworth (KRITFC) at the Takotna River weir. Mr. Albertson commented that he felt “encouraged” by the coordination between different areas of the river.
- Bob Aloysius commented that he experienced telephone service issues when attempting to call in for the Working Group teleconference meetings from Kalskag.
- Nick Kameroff commented that the 2018 season had been better than he had expected. He encouraged people to harvest only fish that were needed during times of Chinook salmon conservation. Mr. Kameroff commented that he was thankful for the fish that had been harvested and he appreciated the hardships that people endured during the 2018 restrictions.
- Darren Deacon commented that it had been a “pleasure” working with the management agencies and the people from the Kuskokwim communities during the 2018 fishing season.
- Mike Williams Sr. commented that since his service on the Working Group and KRITFC began there had been a significant amount of work that had been conducted and, at times, there had been strained relationships. Mr. Williams reported that Will Baron, a graduate student, was studying Kuskokwim River fishing practices and how management affected local communities. Mr. Williams commented that additional work was needed in order to have a “real” partnership up and down the river.
- Mary Peltola commented that Chinook salmon may not “rebound” as quickly as people may have hoped and suggested that people “take a longer view” of Chinook salmon conservation.
- Fritz Charles commented that the boundary line below Kalskag had “opened up a new can of worms.” Mr. Charles commented that people did not have accurate estimates on the amount of salmon that were harvested in the non-salmon spawning tributaries. Mr. Charles discussed the changes in fishing gear that had occurred over his lifetime.
- James Charles commented that he appreciated the people he had worked with over the years and especially thanked his mom who taught him to think of other people along the river. Mr. Charles reported that people from his area heard management announcements from the marine radio, KYUK, and Facebook.

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WORKING GROUP ATTENDANCE:

MEMBER SEAT:	NAME:
DOWNRIVER ELDER	James Charles
UPRIVER ELDER	Mishka Andreanoff
LOWER RIVER SUBSISTENCE	Mike Williams Sr.
MIDDLE RIVER SUBSISTENCE	Lisa Feyereisen
UPRIVER SUBSISTENCE	Mark Leary
HEADWATERS SUBSISTENCE	Daniel Esai
MEMBER AT LARGE	Fritz Charles
WESTERN INTERIOR RAC	Ray Collins
YK DELTA RAC	Bob Aloysius
COMMERCIAL FISHING	Greg Hoffman Jr.
SPORT FISHING	LaMont Albertson
PROCESSOR	<i>Vacant</i>
KRITFC	Nick Kameroff (<i>Arrived at 10:58 a.m.</i>)
ADF&G	Aaron Tiernan
CHAIR	Alissa Rogers

Other Participants:		
<u>ADF&G Comm. Fish:</u> Nick Smith, Bobette Dickerson, Jen Peeks		
<u>Subsistence Division:</u> Chris McDevitt, Lisa Olsen		
<u>USFWS:</u> Ken Stahlnecker, Lew Coggins		
Avery Hoffman (OTNC)	Robert Lekander (OTNC/ KRITFC)	Alice Bailey (Virginia)
Janessa Esquible (OTNC)	Jim Simon (BSFA, KRITFC)	<u>WG Alternates:</u>
Rebecca Wilmarth (NVN)	Bill Bechtol (KRITFC)	John Andrew
Janelle Carl (OTNC)	Chelsey Zaukar (Crooked Creek)	Mary Peltola
Van Kapsner (OTNC)	Brittany Rutherford (KRITFC)	Darren Deacon
Elijah Lindley (OTNC)	Sarah Mutter (AVCP)	Barbara Carlson
Destiny Ropati (OTNC)	Meredith Witte (GTC)	<u>Media:</u>
Clarissa Zeller (OTNC)	Dwayne Hoffman (Kalskag)	Anna Rose MacArthur (KYUK)

GLOSSARY OF ABBREVIATIONS:

Alaska Department of Fish and Game (**ADF&G, department, State**), Orutsaranmiut 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, 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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