

# **Kuskokwim River Salmon Management Working Group**

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

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

**May 17, 2019**

Meeting called to order at 9:10 a.m. on Friday May 17, 2019; recessed for lunch at 12:05 p.m. and reconvened at approximately 1:15 p.m. Meeting adjourned at 5:17 p.m. Meeting time was approximately seven hours. Ten full voting members were present and a quorum was established. Barbara Carlson and Alissa N. Rogers co-chaired the meeting.

## **AGENDA ITEMS:**

### **People to be Heard:**

#### **2018 Fishing Season Recap/ Presentations**

- Assessment projects review (Weirs, Aerial, ASL)
- Chinook salmon total run and drainage wide escapement estimate
- Subsistence Division presentation/Kuskokwim River King Salmon Permits
- Southern Bering Sea Survey
- Review of inconnu (sheefish) research

#### **2019 Fishery Management:**

- Assessment projects
- Alaska Board of Fisheries summary
- Federal Subsistence Board meeting summary
- Kuskokwim River Inter-Tribal Fisheries Commission meetings summary
- ADF&G management presentation & discussion on specific management actions for 2019
  - 2019 Chinook salmon forecast
  - Date to begin early season closure
    - 4-inch mesh gillnet fishing periods during early season closure
  - Tributary management
  - Use of live release gear
  - Chum/sockeye salmon management

#### **Working Group Business:**

- Election of Co-Chairs
- Working Group in-season meeting schedule
- Nominate WG representative to serve at KRITFC inseason meetings

#### **Miscellaneous Business:**

- Working Group off-season process
- Discussion on Donlin Gold's influence on smelt and fishing restrictions

**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. For the 2019 front end closure for king salmon fishing on the Kuskokwim River to begin on May 25. Failed (5 yeas, 4 nays, 1 abstention)*

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3. For the 2019 front end closure for king salmon fishing on the Kuskokwim River to begin on June 1, consistent with the Federal Subsistence Board's action. *Failed (5 years, 5 nays)*
4. For the 2019 front end closure for king salmon fishing on the Kuskokwim River to begin on May 28. *Passed (8 years, 2 nays)*
5. To recommend that ADF&G enact a rolling closure with five day increments for the front end closure similar to 2018: Closing May 28 for Sections 1 & 2, June 1 for Section 3, June 6 for Section 4, and June 11 for Section 5. *Passed (Unanimous)*
6. During the front end closure, to allow one 4" mesh gillnet subsistence opening per week for 12 hours between the days of Friday and Sunday, taking into consideration the tidal influence. *Passed (9 years, 1 nay)*
7. To elect Barb Carlson, LaMont Albertson, Alissa N. Rogers, and Fritz Charles as the 2019 Working Group Co-Chairs. *Passed (Unanimous)*
8. For the 2019 weekly in-season Working Group meetings to occur on Wednesdays from 10:00 a.m. to 12:01 p.m. *Passed (Unanimous)*
9. To elect LaMont Albertson as the Working Group representative on the Kuskokwim River Inter-Tribal Fish Commission (KRITFC). *Passed (Unanimous)*
10. For the in-season weekly Working Group meetings to begin on Wednesday, June 5. *Passed (Unanimous)*
11. Adjourn at 5:17 p.m. *Passed (Unanimous)*

### **PEOPLE TO BE HEARD:**

- **Beverly Hoffman (Bethel):** Ms. Hoffman suggested that management agencies develop a "long term plan" for the Kuskokwim area salmon fishery. She commented that she was concerned regarding her 2018 observations of non-federally qualified users accepting fish from the BTF and presumably shipping them to Anchorage.
- **Father Martin Nicholai (Kwethluk):** Father Nicholai commented on his concerns regarding sport fishing in the Kwethluk River. He requested that the Working Group consider recommending that sport fish user time be shortened to aid in Chinook salmon escapement.
- **George Guy (Kwethluk):** Mr. Guy reminded the Working Group members of previously expressed concerns regarding the various challenges that impacted peoples' ability to subsistence fish. He commented that there needed to be "justice for all" and requested that sport fishing activities be closed. Mr. Guy also commented that people needed to work together for the future of the salmon.
- **Evan Waska (Bethel):** Mr. Waska commented that he was "tired" of being restricted, but also understood that conservation was needed. He commented that it was unfair that other areas of the state were able to harvest and sell Chinook salmon. Mr. Waska commented that the restrictions in the Kuskokwim River made it difficult for people to catch king salmon. He reflected on teachings from his Elders regarding conservation. He suggested that people should be restricted from traveling near and on the spawning grounds.
- **Jen Peeks (ADF&G):** Ms. Peeks thanked the Working Group members for attending the pre-season meeting and sharing their knowledge.

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## 2018 FISHING SEASON RECAP/PRESENTATIONS

- **Assessment projects review:** Nick Smith (ADF&G Research Biologist) provided a summary of the 2018 assessment project results for Chinook, sockeye, chum, and coho salmon. (*For more information on the 2018 assessment project overview please see the May 17 Informational Packet*).
- **Chinook salmon total run and drainage wide escapement estimate:** Nick Smith reviewed the run reconstruction model and discussed the changes, improvements, and affects it had on the run estimates.
- **Subsistence Division presentation/Kuskokwim River King Salmon Permits:** Dave Runfola (ADF&G, SD) summarized the results from the 2018 king salmon permit program; a total of 191 permits had been issued in 2018. Mr. Runfola provided an overview of the 2019 permit program. The ADF&G Subsistence Division presentation to the January 2019 Board of Fisheries (BOF) Arctic-Yukon-Kuskokwim (AYK) meeting was summarized.
- **Southern Bering Sea Survey:** Nick Smith reviewed the objectives and 2018 findings from the Southern Bering Sea Survey project. He reported that 39 out of the 56 stations had been sampled. Mr. Smith summarized the project modifications that would occur during the 2019 season.
- **Review of inconnu (sheefish) research:** John Chythlook (ADF&G, SF) summarized the findings from the inconnu research project that occurred between 2016 and 2018 in the upper Kuskokwim River. Findings included information on inconnu spawning and out-migration characteristics.

## 2019 FISHERY MANAGEMENT:

- **Assessment projects:** Nick Smith provided an overview of the 2019 assessment projects: Bethel Test Fishery was scheduled to begin operations on May 25; Aniak Test Fishery was scheduled to begin operations on June 1; and the Kuskokwim mainstem sonar project was scheduled to begin operations on June 1. Inseason subsistence harvest surveys and subsistence ASL sampling were scheduled to occur in collaboration with ONC and BSFA. The escapement projects scheduled to operate during the 2019 season were the Goodnews River weir, Kwethluk River weir, George River weir, Kogrukluks River weir, Telaquana Lake weir, Takotna River weir, and the Salmon River (Pitka Fork) weir. Aerial surveys were scheduled to occur near the end of July. The second year of the juvenile salmon survey project would be conducted in the Southern Bering Sea during August 2019.
- **Alaska Board of Fisheries summary:** Aaron Tiernan (ADF&G Area Management Biologist) summarized the regulatory changes made by the BOF during their AYK meeting in January 2019. (*For more information on the BOF changes pertaining to the Kuskokwim area please review the 2019 Kuskokwim River Salmon Fishery New Release 1*).
- **Federal Subsistence Board Meeting Summary:** Gary Decossas (USFWS) summarized actions made by the Federal Subsistence Board (FSB) regarding the Kuskokwim River fishery. Mr. Decossas reported that, to date, the Kwethluk River weir was fish tight; the weir would be operated by a crew from Kwethluk beginning in mid-June. Mr. Decossas summarized other fishery related projects that USFWS would be involved with during the 2019 season.

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- **Kuskokwim River Inter-Tribal Fisheries Commission Meetings Summary:** Mary Peltola (KRITFC Executive Director) reported that the 2019 inseason KRITFC managers were Robert Lekander from Bethel, James Nicori from Kwethluk, Jacqueline Cleveland from Quinhagak, and Megan Leary from Aniak/Napaimute. James Charles from Tuntutuliak was elected to be an Elder Advisor. *(For more information on KRITFC summary, please see the May 17 Informational Packet).*
- **ADF&G management presentation & discussion on specific management actions for 2019**
  - **2019 Chinook salmon forecast:** Aaron Tiernan reported that the ADF&G escapement goal range was between 65,000 and 120,000 Chinook salmon. The 2019 forecast was estimated to be ~115,000–150,000 Chinook salmon. Mr. Tiernan reported that the management plan, ANS, assessment tools, and guidance from the Working Group were considered when making management decisions.
  - **Date to begin early season closure:** Working Group members discussed possible dates to begin the early season closure; they came to a consensus on the date of May 28. *(Please see Motions 2–4 on page 5).*
  - **Tributary management:** Aaron Tiernan announced that the 2019 management strategy for the tributaries would be similar to the 2018 season, with the addition of a 100 yard closure area near the mouth of the non-salmon spawning tributaries. Working Group members did not further discuss the tributary management strategy.
  - **Use of live release gear:** Aaron Tiernan announced that live release gear would be allowed during the early season gillnet closure; all Chinook salmon caught in these gear types would need to be released alive to the water.

## WORKING GROUP BUSINESS:

- **Election of Co-Chairs:** LaMont Albertson (Sport Fishing), Barbara Carlson (Upriver Subsistence alternate & Member At Large alternate), Fritz Charles (Member At Large) and Alissa N. Rogers (Lower River Subsistence alternate) were elected as Working Group Co-Chairs for the 2019 season. *(Please see Motion 7 on page 5).*
- **Working Group in-season meeting schedule:** *(Please see Motion 8 on page 5).*
- **Nominate Working Group representative to serve at KRITFC inseason meetings:** *(Please see Motion 9 on page 5).*

## MISCELLANIOUS ITEMS:

- **Working Group off-season process:** Working Group members discussed developing a procedure for conducting Working Group business that occurs outside of the regularly scheduled inseason meetings. The Working Group requested that ADF&G research procedural options for this matter.
- **Discussion on Donlin Gold's influence on smelt and fishing restrictions:** Lisa Feyereisen (Middle River Subsistence alternate) suggested that Working Group members review research on smelt and discuss the potential impacts from the proposed Donlin Gold project. Alissa N. Rogers (Lower River Subsistence alternate) commented on concerns regarding possible fishing restrictions occurring as a result of the proposed Donlin Gold project. Working Group members requested that the research be presented during the next scheduled Working Group meeting.

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- LaMont Albertson (Sport Fishing) requested that the Working Group support the KRITFC recommended 2019 escapement goal of 110,000 Chinook salmon with an allowable harvest of 22,000 king salmon. Working Group members requested that the data used to support this recommended KRITFC escapement goal be provided to the Working Group and be presented at the next scheduled Working Group meeting.

## **WORKING GROUP MOTIONS:**

**1. Approve the agenda as amended. Passed (Unanimous)**

**2. For the 2019 front end closure for king salmon fishing on the Kuskokwim River to begin on May 25. Failed (5 yeas, 4 nays, 1 abstention)**

Lisa Feyereisen commented that the front end closure date should be based on the biological needs of the Chinook salmon. Nick Smith (ADF&G) reviewed run-timing for Chinook salmon in the Kuskokwim River and reported that salmon bound for the headwaters were more abundant during the early portion of the season.

**3. For the 2019 front end closure for king salmon fishing on the Kuskokwim River to begin on June 1, consistent with the Federal Subsistence Board's action. Failed (5 yeas, 5 nays)**

Mike Williams Sr. (Lower River Subsistence) suggested that the early closure begin on June 1, 2019 to be consistent with the Federal Subsistence Board action that set federal management to begin on that date. LaMont Albertson commented that it was important to protect headwaters bound fish so that communities along the entire river may have harvest opportunity. Dan Esai (Headwaters Subsistence) agreed that it was important to protect the early portion of the run. Barb Carlson reminded Working Group members of the early 2019 river breakup and commented that, to date, some people had been fishing for several weeks.

**4. For the 2019 front end closure for king salmon fishing on the Kuskokwim River to begin on May 28. Passed (8 yeas, 2 nays)**

LaMont Albertson commented that an early closure date of May 28 would be a compromise between the prior closure date suggestions.

**5. To recommend that ADF&G enact a rolling closure with five day increments for the front end closure similar to 2018: Closing May 28 for Sections 1&2, June 1 for Section 3, June 6 for Section 4, and June 11 for Section 5. Passed (Unanimous)**

Working Group members supported implementing subsistence rolling closures, similar to previous years.

**6. During the front end closure, to allow one 4" mesh gillnet subsistence opening per week for 12 hours between the days of Friday and Sunday, taking into consideration the tidal influence. Passed (9 yeas, 1 nay)**

Bob Aloysius (YK Delta RAC) commented that he did not support providing 4" mesh gillnet opportunities due to public comments that were in opposition. Ray Collins (Western Interior RAC) commented that some people used hook and line to harvest their fish.

**7. To elect Barb Carlson, LaMont Albertson, Alissa N. Rogers, and Fritz Charles as the 2019 Working Group Co-Chairs. Passed (Unanimous)**

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- 8. For the 2019 weekly in-season Working Group meetings to occur on Wednesdays from 10:00 a.m. to 12:01 p.m. Passed (Unanimous)**
- 9. To elect LaMont Albertson as the Working Group representative on the Kuskokwim River Inter-Tribal Fish Commission (KRITFC). Passed (Unanimous)**
- 10. For the in-season weekly Working Group meetings to begin on Wednesday, June 5. Passed (Unanimous)**
- 11. Adjourn at 5:17 p.m. Passed (Unanimous)**

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

- **Dan Esai** thanked Ray Collins for encouraging him to continue participating in the fishery management discussions.
- **Robert Lekander** (KRITFC) commented on the concerns expressed by members of the public regarding the use of jet boats in spawning ground areas. He also shared his concerns regarding the hovercraft traveling over shallow areas, which could create challenges for spawning fish.
- **Bob Aloysius** reminded participants that “we are still in conservation mode.” He commented that non-salmon spawning streams were important to salmon and that restrictions were important to conserve the king salmon.
- **James Charles** (Downriver Elder) reported that some people fished in the Quinhagak area. He commented on how he began his involvement with the Working Group and that he continued to be involved to help the people of his region.
- **William Charlie Brown** (Commercial Fishing) commented that he had always cared for the people from his home community of Eek and that it was difficult for him when people were unable to dry fish during the month of June. He shared with the Working Group that he has continued to move to his fish camp during fishing season even though it was not widely practiced in the area anymore.
- **John Andrew** (Downriver Elder alternate) commented that he could identify with the comments expressed by Working Group members. He commented that he was concerned about small fry migrating down river and that it was important for people not to be using high powered jet boats during that time. Mr. Andrew added that the Kwethluk River weir was not in a suitable location.
- **Ray Collins** reported that it had been difficult to hear the meeting discussions over the teleconference. Mr. Collins suggested that the Working Group discuss the use of drift gillnets in comparison with other gear types for the harvest of salmon; he recommended further closures on the use of drift gillnets.
- **Barbara Carlson** commented that she appreciated seeing everyone “face to face.” She encouraged members to continue to “push for conservation” despite outside obstacles. Ms. Carlson commented that she hoped people along the river were able to produce dry fish during the 2019 season. She addressed the Kwethluk community’s concerns and encouraged the public to continue to write proposals to the Boards in order to address their concerns.

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- **Lisa Feyereisen** commented that providing pictures while testifying before the BOF may assist in the BOF members' better understanding of the concerns expressed in the proposals. Ms. Feyereisen commented that she was concerned that fishing restrictions were being liberalized too quickly when conservation was still needed. She added that people may be unable to fish as they had historically. Ms. Feyereisen commented that subsistence was a lifestyle and was an important activity to preserve. Ms. Feyereisen remarked that she appreciated the opportunity to respectfully discuss diverse viewpoints as a group.
- **LaMont Albertson** thanked ADF&G and USFWS staff. He also thanked the co-chairs who facilitated the pre-season meeting. Mr. Albertson commented that he appreciated that the Working Group members could share their differences and agreements together.
- **Mike Williams Sr.** thanked ADF&G for facilitating the pre-season meeting and thanked USFWS and KRITFC for their involvement. He commented that he had an optimistic outlook for the 2019 salmon season. Mr. Williams commented that people living along the river had been the first conservationists. He shared that Elder Joe Lomack had requested that Mr. Williams be his replacement on the Working Group. Mr. Williams added that Elders had shared their wisdom and guidance with him. He commented that traditional knowledge was needed to help save the salmon and the people in the region, along with Western science. He noted that the health of the people and the salmon were important and everyone needed to work together.
- **Mary Peltola** (Lower River Subsistence alternate) shared that she was thankful for being raised on the Kuskokwim River and commented that other river systems were having more challenges than the Kuskokwim River.
- **Alissa N. Rogers** thanked agency staff and public participants for contributing in the pre-season meeting discussions. She noted that she had observed people learning and working together toward a common goal. Ms. Rogers commented that she was appreciative of the leadership and mentorship from the Working Group Elder members.

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## WORKING GROUP ATTENDANCE:

MEMBER SEAT:	NAME:
DOWNRIVER ELDER	James Charles
UPRIVER ELDER	<i>Vacant</i>
LOWER RIVER SUBSISTENCE	Mike Williams Sr.
MIDDLE RIVER SUBSISTENCE	Lisa Feyereisen
UPRIVER SUBSISTENCE	Barbara Carlson
HEADWATERS SUBSISTENCE	Dan Esai
MEMBER AT LARGE	<i>Absent</i>
WESTERN INTERIOR RAC	Ray Collins
YK DELTA RAC	Bob Aloysius
COMMERCIAL FISHING	William Charlie Brown
SPORT FISHING	LaMont Albertson
KRITFC	Robert Lekander
PROCESSOR	<i>Vacant</i>
ADF&G	Aaron Tiernan
CHAIR	Barbara Carlson/ Alissa Rogers

## **Other Participants:**

ADF&G Comm. Fish: Aaron Tiernan, Ben Gray, Nick Smith, Keegan Birchfield, Andrew Kastning, Zach Liller, Jen Peeks

Sport Fish Division: John Chythlook, Klaus Wuttig

Subsistence Division: David Runfola, Lisa Olson

USFWS: Gary Decossas, Aaron Moses, Chris Tulik, Spencer Reardon, Carol Damberg, Eva Patton, David Phillips

Jennifer Hooper (AVCP)	Evan Waska (Bethel)	<u>WG Alternates:</u> John W. Andrew (Downriver Elder Alt.) Mary Peltola (Lower River Sub. Alt.) Greg Hoffman Jr. (Commercial Fishing Alt.)
Courtney Osolnik (GTC)	Gerald Kameroff (Kalskag)	
Bill Bechtol (KRITFC)	Father Martin Nicholai (Kwethluk Inc.)	
Janessa Esquible (ONC)	Nick Ayapan (Kwethluk Inc)	
Kevin Whitworth (KRITFC)	Nelson Alexie (Tuluksak)	
Rebecca Wilmarth (NVN)	George Guy (Kwethluk Inc.)	
Jim Simon (KRITFC)	Bev Hoffman (Bethel)	
Walter Blajeski (AWT)	Johanna Eurich (KYUK)	
John Orr (AVCP)		

## GLOSSARY OF ABBREVIATIONS:

Alaska Department of Fish and Game (**ADF&G**), 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**), ADF&G Subsistence Division (**SD**), 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**), Alaska Wildlife Trooper (**AWT**), Native Village of Napaimute (**NVN**)

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