

Kuskokwim River Salmon Management Working Group

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

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

June 19th, 2024

On Wednesday, June 19th, 2024, the KRSMWG meeting was called to order at 10:01 a.m. and adjourned at 11:28 a.m. Meeting time was approximately 1 hour and 30 minutes. A quorum was established with 9 full voting members in attendance. Another member was able to join after roll call had been taken, making 10 full voting members in attendance.

AGENDA ITEMS AND SUMMARY INFORMATION:

A. USFWS/KRITFC UPDATE: *Audio for this update begins at 12:40 – Meeting Audio – 6/19/24*

- Spencer Rearden, USFWS, spoke about the subsistence opening that USFWS had announced that morning and the reasoning used to make their decision. There will be a 12-hour drift or set net opportunity on June 22nd beginning at 7:00 am that will apply for the lower Kuskokwim below the Kalskag bluff line. Above the Kalskag bluff line to the boundary of the Aniak Box the river will open to gill nets (set or drift) with 6-inch or less mesh until further notice. In the portion of the Aniak box within the Yukon Delta National Wildlife Refuge fishing will remain closed except to hook and line with restrictions on Chinook, chum, and coho salmon. Mr. Rearden said that this is similar to last year. He added that USFWS had listened to KRITFC morning meeting where they look for public input and take that into consideration when making decisions.
- Kevin Whitworth, KRITFC, added that the teleconference is held each week on Tuesdays at 10:00 AM and encouraged the people to call in. He continued that decisions were made using traditional knowledge, not just Western science and the teleconference is meant to listen to public input. *Audio for this update begins at 17:55 – Meeting Audio – 6/19/24*
- There is a brief discussion about the Aniak Box and if there has been any local feedback to the limited hook and line opportunity there. Mr. Rearden said that feedback he had heard was that people wanted to fish like they used to, and the restrictions were similar to last year. He added that feedback came through Dan Gillikin, NVN. Mr. Whitworth added that this year the Kuskokwim River was clearer than the Aniak and thought it would be tough to fish there with hook and line until the water started to clear more. Overall, USFWS and KRITFC thought that allowing harvest above the Kalskag line and limited harvest in the portion of the Aniak Box that is within the Yukon Kuskokwim Wildlife Refuge would have little impact. *Audio for this update begins at 20:22 – Meeting Audio – 6/19/24.*

B. ADF&G MANAGEMENT ACTIONS UNDER CONSIDERATION: *Audio for this update begins at 23:38 – Meeting Audio – 6/19/24.*

- Sam Decker, ADFG, said that she had no updates or management actions under consideration.

C. PEOPLE TO BE HEARD:

- There were no people to be heard at this meeting.

D. CONTINUING BUSINESS:

- Subsistence Reports: Lower River, Middle River, Upper River, ONC In-season Subsistence Report
 - Lower River
 - Tad Lindley, Bethel, said that people did better during the last 12-hour fishing period that they had during previous openers. Mr. Lindley said that the day

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before, June 18th, at the Johnson River it looked like chum salmon were outperforming the Kings, so he anticipates more chums will be caught. He said that he saw fish jumping similar to sockeye behavior, but he has not caught any sockeye yet. He would be interested to hear from people who used 4-inch nets to see how they did. *Audio for this update begins at 26:35 – Meeting Audio – 6/19/24.*

- Albert Kawagley, Bethel, said that a lady had given him his first King salmon soup. He said his sister had caught some fish and had made strips. Mr. Kawagley's son would be in Anchorage during the next opener so he will be unable to fish but said that his brother-in-law and his sons will probably fish. He added that he has not been out on a boat yet this year. *Audio for this update begins at 27:50 – Meeting Audio – 6/19/24.*
- Lucinda Alexie, Bethel, said she had not gotten anything yet. *Audio for this update begins at 29:15 – Meeting Audio – 6/19/24.*
- James Nicori, Kwethluk, said that people that he spoke to who had gone out with a drift net caught an average of about 10 King salmon. Mr. Nicori said that he caught 1 chum and 1 sockeye. He said he spoke to some who had fished below the Johnson River, and they were starting to catch more chums and sockeye at the last opener, but they were catching more jacks than the bigger Kings. He said some people he had spoken to wanted to know when the next opener would be because they had a lower harvest than in previous years. *Audio for this update begins at 32:05 – Meeting Audio – 6/19/24.*
- Mike Williams, Akiak, said that his cousins in Tuluksak had done better on the most recent opener and he believed the first pulse of Chinook was past Tuluksak. He said that in Akiak fishing was about the same as the previous opener, but they are catching more chums, and he is hoping the sockeye show up soon. Mr. Williams said Akiachak had similar fishing to what Mr. Nicori had described. He said people want to have more openers but are thankful for the good drying weather. Mr. Williams said that some people including himself were fishing closer to the main channel in Akiak because of the clear water and have been catching more there. He said that the restrictions were needed because of outside effects and probably climate change as well. Friends in Tuntutuliak and Napakiak said that they were seeing more fish so hopefully the Chinook are late and hopefully some of the wind will help push more into the bay. *Audio for this update begins at 33:55 – Meeting Audio – 6/19/24.*
 - Mike Williams spoke up after other subsistence reports had been given and added that Akiak has had no electricity for over a week and many have their emergency generators turned on, but others have lost their frozen subsistence foods. Alissa Rogers suggested getting in touch with

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the sonar project to see if they can help with fish. *Audio for this update begins at 51:30 – Meeting Audio – 6/19/24.*

- Alissa Rogers, Bethel, said that a couple people she spoke to had gone out and done 4 drifts but did not catch any fish. Others she spoke to who were out all day said that they got 12-13 Chinook salmon and yet others got snagged. Ms. Rogers said usually in the spot her family fishes she sees people hugging the beach while fishing but when she went out during the last opener, she saw people fishing the main channel which had high water. She said that her family did not fish the opener and they typically don't fish until coho salmon are in the river. *Audio for this update begins at 37:25 – Meeting Audio – 6/19/24.*
- Avery Hoffman, Bethel, said that he had fished in front of Bethel, instead of going down river. He said that they caught more sockeye than chums, but most of the fish were King salmon. Local fishing spots were packed. Fishing was steady. *Audio for this update begins at 46:05 – Meeting Audio – 6/19/24.*
- Kara Domnick, Bethel, said her family fished in two boats and caught about 10 King salmon and a couple chums. Ms. Domnick said she spent most of the fishing period out in the boat. *Audio for this update begins at 47:00 – Meeting Audio – 6/19/24.*
- ONC In-season Report
 - *Audio for this update begins at 29:30 – Meeting Audio – 6/19/24.*
 - Information about this update can be found on page 3 of the Informational Packet.
 - Jordan Klejka, ONC, gave a brief report regarding boat harbor and fish camp harvest surveys as well as how many fish had distributed to elders by ONC.
 - Alissa Rogers asked what percentage of those interviewed felt their subsistence needs had been met. Kara Domnick, ONC, said that it was still early, and they had not started to ask those questions yet. She said many people feel that the run is late and are just starting to catch fish now. *Audio for this update begins at 30:35 – Meeting Audio – 6/19/24.*
- KRITFC In-season Report
 - *Audio for this update begins at 38:45 – Meeting Audio – 6/19/24.*
 - Information about this update can be found on page 13 of the Informational packet.
 - Kevin Whitworth, KRITFC, gave a brief summary of the harvest and effort data that KRITFC had collected from the opener on June 16th. Mr. Whitworth thanked Justin Leon and Bill Bechtol for putting together all the data from KRITFC surveys, ONC surveys and USFWS aerial surveys. He said villages from Bogus Creek downriver to Tuntutuliak are covered and that 200 interviews were conducted. Mr. Whitworth summarized by saying that the lowest river communities are starting to see more harvest.

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- Middle River
 - Allen Simeon, Aniak, said that he hasn't been fishing yet and that they will wait until Saturday to go but he spoke to many people in Aniak who had gone out. He said during the opener on Father's Day people did ok and caught some mid-size, Kings. Mr. Simeon said that the other day an upriver relative of his had done 9 drifts and caught 8 jacks. He went on to say that it is different fishing in different parts of the river. He was thankful for managers who waited until later in the year because the mountain snow has melted, and he thinks the salmon runs will get better and that the rains will help too. Mr. Simeon said that the salmon runs get better when the snow is all the way down the mountains. *Audio for this update begins at 42:25 – Meeting Audio – 6/19/24.*
 - Barbara Carlson, Sleetmute, said she spoke to many people in Sleetmute but not many had been fishing partly because they are busy with other chores and fishing is slow. The fish wheel is not operating this year. *Audio for this update begins at 45:00 – Meeting Audio – 6/19/24.*
 - Dan Esai, Nikolai, said that no one is fishing yet in Nikolai because of the price of gas, but maybe in McGrath. He said the water was high in his area. Mr. Esai continued that he had attended a KRITFC and USFWS meeting a couple of weeks ago and enjoyed it. He added that he is curious to hear Kevin Whitworth's report and that the berries look good. *Audio for this update begins at 47:35 – Meeting Audio – 6/19/24.*
 - Kevin Whitworth, McGrath, said that McGrath has had high water and a lot of debris in the river. He had set a net for 5 hours and caught one pike and it was full of debris. He did not leave his net out. Mr. Whitworth said that he has heard of 3 King salmon being caught in the area early last week. Some people caught sheefish and whitefish. *Audio for this update begins at 49:45 – Meeting Audio – 6/19/24.*
- Overview of the Kuskokwim River salmon run assessment
 - *Audio for this update begins at 54:20 – Meeting Audio – 6/19/24.*
 - Information about this update can be found beginning on page 6 of the Informational packet.
 - Sean Larson, ADFG, gave a brief report on assessment projects headed by ADF&G. Some highlights include that the King salmon appears to be a poor run so far. Some chum salmon are starting to be caught by Bethel Test Fish, but it is still early in their run. A few sockeye have made it into the river but they are not included in the Bethel Test Fish data since one has not been caught yet. Sonar numbers appear similar to last year's and it is still in the early days for sockeye are chum salmon. Chum and sockeye have been coming in late for the past few years. Aniak Test Fish has only caught King salmon so far.

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- There were some questions about the sockeye salmon caught at the sonar project including mesh size and if they had heard any feedback about if the fish had a lot of worms. *Audio for this update begins at 1:00:05 – Meeting Audio – 6/19/24.*
- Subsistence Division Project Update:
 - *Audio for this update begins at 1:02:20 – Meeting Audio – 6/19/24.*
 - Katie Hayden, ADFG, said that most projects on the Kuskokwim have been finished. She said two ethnography studies had been done in the lower Kuskokwim River that are being finished up for publishing and will be sent out to communities that had participated. Ms. Hayden thanked the communities involved. Currently the subsistence division is working on the 2023 Post Season Surveys and preparing for the upcoming season and finishing up the natural indicators project in the upper river and headwaters communities.
- Sport Fish:
 - John Chythlook, ADFG, said that he did not have much to report. He expects to hear more as the water levels come down and become less cloudy. Mr. Chythlook also responded to a question about barbless hooks. *Audio for this update begins at 1:03:30 – Meeting Audio – 6/19/24.*
- Intercept Fishery Report
 - Tad Lindley, Bethel, said that as of Monday, June 17, 2024, 86,479 chum salmon had been harvested from S. Unimak district and he discussed proportions of their catch. Mr. Lindley found the information online for the group. He said that Pt. Moeller genetics results on sockeye should be available today. Mr. Lindley hopes that the high amount of chums caught means that there will also be a high number of chums headed toward the Kuskokwim. *Audio for this update begins at 1:05:050 – Meeting Audio – 6/19/24.*
 - Kevin Whitworth, McGrath, requested that the Area M June fishing schedule be included in the KRSMWG Informational packet and said that it had been helpful last year. Mr. Whitworth was not happy to see that there was a high proportion of chums caught because they could have been fish bound for Western Alaska. *Audio for this update begins at 1:07:05 – Meeting Audio – 6/19/24.*
 - James Nicori, Kwethluk, made a comment about the trawling boats that had been spotted near the mouth of the Kuskokwim. Mr. Nicori said that he had read that the boats were 25 miles out from Kipnuk, but people in Kipnuk said they saw them closer than 25 miles. *Audio for this update begins at 1:09:00 – Meeting Audio – 6/19/24.*
 - There was a brief conversation regarding trawlers in Kuskokwim Bay, media coverage and the state's seat on the North Pacific Fisheries Management Council. Kevin Whitworth suggested writing a letter to that representative. Mr. Nicori calls for the state and federal agencies to

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work together. *Audio for this update begins at 1:12:20 – Meeting Audio – 6/19/24.*

E. OLD BUSINESS:

- No old business was discussed at this meeting.

F. NEW BUSINESS:

- No new business was discussed at this meeting.

G. COMMENTS FROM WORKING GROUP MEMBERS:

- Dan Esai, Nikolai, said that he had found some older pictures of Black River with fish hanging and would like to share. *Audio for this update begins at 1:17:25 – Meeting Audio – 6/19/24.*

The meeting was adjourned at 11:28 a.m.

WORKING GROUP MOTIONS:

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

- *Audio for this update begins at 10:57 – Meeting Audio – 6/19/24.*
- Motion made by Alissa Rogers, 2nd by Mike Williams.
- A Working Group member joined into the meeting at approximately 10:45 a.m. establishing a quorum.

Motion 2: To write a letter to Rachel Baker, the ADFG Commissioner and carbon copy the North Pacific Fisheries Management Council about trawlers fishing by the mouth of the Kuskokwim. *Passed (Unanimous)*

- *Audio for this update begins at 1:18:10 – Meeting Audio – 6/19/24.*
 - This motion was a continuation of an earlier conversation begun by James Nicori. The earlier discussion can be found in the audio at 1:09:00
- Motion made by Kevin Whitworth, 2nd by Avery Hoffman
- This issue had been addressed earlier in the meeting and was continued during closing comments when this motion was made.
- There is some discussion about how to handle writing the letter and what should be included. Mr. Nicori would like to send a copy to our congressman and our 2 U.S. senators. Mr. Lindley suggests the letter be data driven. Other group members would like to include how the trawlers affect the habitat and other species.

Motion 3: Adjourn at 11:28 a.m. *Passed (Unanimous)*

- *Audio for this update begins at 1:27:10 – Meeting Audio – 6/19/24.*

WORKING GROUP ATTENDANCE:

MEMBER SEAT:	NAME:
DOWNRIVER ELDER	<i>Absent</i>

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UPRIVER ELDER	Allen Simeon
LOWER RIVER SUBSISTENCE	Mike Williams
MIDDLE RIVER SUBSISTENCE	<i>Absent</i>
UPRIVER SUBSISTENCE	Barbara Carlson
HEADWATERS SUBSISTENCE	Daniel Esai
MEMBER AT LARGE SEAT 1	Albert Kawagley
MEMBER AT LARGE SEAT 2	Avery Hoffman
WESTERN INTERIOR RAC	Kevin Whitworth
YK DELTA RAC	Alissa Rogers
COMMERCIAL FISHING	Tad Lindley
SPORT FISHING	<i>Absent</i>
ADF&G	Sam Decker
CHAIR	Alissa Rogers
<p><u>ADF&G Comm. Fish:</u> Sam Decker, Dave Runfola, Keegan Birchfield, Iris Fletcher, Sean Larson, Charles Brazil <u>Sport Fish Division:</u> John Chythlook <u>Subsistence Division:</u> Katie Hayden <u>Commissioner's Office:</u></p>	
<p><u>USFWS:</u> Spencer Rearden, Jaden Andrew <u>OSM:</u> <u>NVN:</u> Dan Gillikin <u>ONC:</u> Jordan Klejka, Vjosa Pellumbi, Kara Domnick <u>AVCP:</u> <u>KRITFC:</u> Kevin Whitworth, Avery Hoffman <u>UAF:</u> <u>WIRAC:</u> Kevin Whitworth <u>YK Delta RAC:</u> Alissa Rogers</p>	
<p><u>WG Alternates:</u> (not already listed above) Kara Domnick (Member at Large 2, alt.)</p>	<p><u>Media:</u> <u>Other:</u> Lucinda Alexie</p>

GLOSSARY OF ABBREVIATIONS:

Alaska Department of Fish and Game (**ADF&G**), Orutsarmiut 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**),

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