

Kuskokwim River Salmon Management Working Group
1 (800) 315-6338 (MEET) Code: 58756# (KUSKO)
ADF&G Bethel toll free: 1 (855) 933-2433

July 17th, 2024

On Wednesday, July 17th, 2024, the KRSMWG meeting was called to order at 10:03 a.m. and adjourned at 12:00 p.m. Meeting time was approximately 2 hours. A quorum was established with 7 full voting members in attendance. Alissa Rogers chaired the meeting. Primary themes and recurrent discussions include the pike near Aniak and restrictions in the lower river.

AGENDA ITEMS AND SUMMARY INFORMATION:

A. USFWS/KRITFC UPDATE: *Audio for this update begins at 15:50 – Meeting Audio – 7/17/24*

- Chris Tulik, USFWS, briefly summarized the currently announced subsistence openers, one of which was set to close at noon and a couple that were coming up beginning on July 19th, 23rd, and 26th. He concluded by saying that the management team would be meeting to decide on any further management actions on July 30th.
 - Robert Hoffman, Bethel, asked who the In-season managers are and how he could be involved in the in-season management meetings for the lower Kuskokwim River. Mr. Tulik described KRITFC's recruiting process. *Audio for this update begins at 21:25 – Meeting Audio – 7/17/24*

B. ADF&G MANAGEMENT ACTIONS UNDER CONSIDERATION: *Audio for this update begins at 26:45 – Meeting Audio – 7/17/24*

- Sam Decker, ADFG, said that she had no recommendations for management actions and reminded everyone that upriver of Aniak was currently open, but the Aniak River is closed to fishing for Chinook salmon. Dave Runfola, ADFG, summarized management actions in the Kuskokwim Bay and rivers near Quinhagak. In the Kuskokwim Bay fishing had been restricted to 50 fathom, 6-inch or less mesh nets and no fishing on Sundays, however those restrictions expired on July 15th.
 - Robert Hoffman, Bethel, asked why the bay and upriver were open but in the lower river fishing is restricted. Charles Brazil, ADFG, explained that the state only had authority to manage subsistence sections 4 & 5 of the Kuskokwim River. A lawsuit has barred the state from making management decisions in subsistence sections 1-3. Tad Lindley, Bethel, felt the lower river should be open and said that people need to fish according to the weather rather than openers. A conversation continues on the subject. Pike was also briefly discussed and John Chythlook, ADFG, stated that the Sport Fish division was considering a project to catch pike and examine their stomach contents. *Audio for this update begins at 29:30 – Meeting Audio – 7/17/24*

B. 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 who have not caught their goal of fish are looking forward to good weather and hopefully they can make up for the lack of

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fish. People are thinking about berries. *Audio for this update begins at 43:40 – Meeting Audio – 7/17/24*

- Albert Kawagley, Bethel, said that fish camps are dealing with bad weather, and he didn't think they will catch many now. He added that it would be good to have some nice weather. *Audio for this update begins at 44:45 – Meeting Audio – 7/17/24*
- Robert Hoffman, Bethel, hoped that most people were able to catch the fish they need during the dry season, and he spoke about fish that had been discarded due to mold. He said he didn't think that escapement goals could be met and satisfy subsistence users' needs. Mr. Hoffman felt that improving escapement would help. *Audio for this update begins at 45:45 – Meeting Audio – 7/17/24*
- Lucinda Alexie, Bethel, said that she was grateful for the fish distribution bin. Ms. Alexie said that she has not been able to go get her own fish. *Audio for this update begins at 48:00 – Meeting Audio – 7/17/24*
- John Andrew, Kwethluk, said that he had been able to go out and fish for the last 3-4 weeks because of motor problems and it has been difficult to get parts. He has heard from others that the wet weather has made it difficult to dry fish. During the most recent opener he heard reports from other fishers who said that it was hard to setnet because there was too much debris, and the water was too high and murky. It was difficult to find good eddies to set in. He finished that it is the same situation now with the rainy spell. *Audio for this update begins at 49:35 – Meeting Audio – 7/17/24*
- ONC In-season Report
 - Jordan Klejka, ONC, said that ONC did not have a report for this week as they have all been busy with culture camp, but she did conduct boat harbor surveys. Ms. Klejka said that she was only able to get 3 surveys in 7 hours, so she felt there was not much to report. *Audio for this update begins at 48:35 – Meeting Audio – 7/17/24*
- Middle River
 - Allen Simeon, Aniak, said that there had been high water in his area too. He said before the water started rising a couple people had been out driftnet fishing and did well with sockeye but now there is too much debris. Mr. Simeon said that between Aniak and Kalskag it is difficult to fish due to the high water and debris. He mentioned that there is a river about 5-6 miles upriver of Aniak where he occasional goes to get berries and fish coho salmon. Mr. Simeon requested a test fishery there because he believes the salmon's migration routes have changed. He addressed Mr. Hoffman's comments regarding regulations in the lower river by explaining that when the lower river is driftnet fished with so many boats no salmon make it upriver to other villages or to

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spawn. He reminds everyone that we are all in this together. *Audio for this update begins at 54:40 – Meeting Audio – 7/17/24*

- Upriver and Headwaters
 - Dan Esai, Nikolai, said that the “run is good and strong.” Mr. Esai spoke about the weather conditions and how it has not been good for drying but that the salmon berries had dried out, but the blueberries looked good. He said that he hopes the sockeye and the coho are increasing in numbers. He said that the water was high but had come down. He added that people in the area are avoiding the Tanzania River and using barbless hooks. People are also releasing big salmon unless their gills have been measured. Mr. Esai finished his report by suggesting a program that fishers from the lower river switch places those from the headwaters so that they can have a better understanding of what fishing is like in opposite parts of the river. *Audio for this update begins at 1:39:15 – Meeting Audio – 7/17/24*
- KRITFC In-season Report
 - There was no KRITFC In-season report at this meeting
- Overview of the Kuskokwim River salmon run assessment
 - *Audio for this update begins at 59:45 – Meeting Audio – 7/17/24*
 - Information about this report can be found starting on page 5 of the Informational packet.
 - Sean Larson, ADFG, reported on the salmon run assessment projects. Some highlights include that the Chinook run is almost done and a little lower numbers than last year. Chum numbers are about average for this date and approximately 60-80% of the run has passed. Bethel Test Fish numbers for sockeye are low but do not agree with sonar or Aniak Test Fish. At the sonar project sockeye has been counted in slightly lower numbers than last year but last year was an especially good year for sockeye. Chum salmon numbers at sonar are the highest they have been since 2019. At this date mostly chum salmon are in the river. Coho salmon are just starting to come into the river.
 - Sean Larson, ADFG, fields some questions about mesh size and the reason for restricting to 6-inch or less mesh. Some members wanted to return to 8-inch mesh. James Nicori, Kwethluk, said that he had heard from one of the elders that 8 to 8 ½ inch mesh was used when the Chinook started running to allow the smaller jack salmon to pass through and spawn under the impression that they would return to the ocean and come back to the spawning grounds again when they reached 4-5 years. Robert Hoffman, Bethel, thought that jack salmon were a different kind of fish and not Chinook. However, Sean Larson and Sam Decker explained that jack salmon are just small salmon and not a different species and they do not return to the ocean and instead die

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when they are done spawning. The reasoning behind restricting to 6-inch or less mesh was explained as allowing bigger fish with more eggs to pass. *Audio for this update begins at 1:16:15 – Meeting Audio – 7/17/24*

- Subsistence Division Project Update
 - Tim Bimbenic, ADFG, reported that he would be taking the lead to conduct the Post-season Subsistence Surveys. Currently he is working on getting together the harvest calendars and outreach materials. *Audio for this update begins at 1:27:55 – Meeting Audio – 7/17/24*
 - Alissa Rogers, Bethel, asked about the 2023 report and Tim responded that they are currently working on it and hope to have the first draft finished by late July and sent to publications in September. *Audio for this update begins at 1:28:35 – Meeting Audio – 7/17/24*
- NVN Report
 - Sam Decker, ADFG, read a brief report from Dan Gillikin. Dan Gillikin, NVN, said that people are generally done fishing until coho season. He had heard that people had been catching more large Chinook than in previous years. He had also heard reports from sport fishers and guides up the Kipchuk River that it was running clear and was full of big Chinook.
- Sport Fish:
 - John Chythlook, ADFG, said that he had not heard many reports yet because sport fishing for Chinook had been closed. *Audio for this update begins at 1:29:35 – Meeting Audio – 7/17/24*
- Intercept Fishery Report
 - Sean Larson, ADFG, briefly went over data received from Alaska Peninsula commercial fisheries. Through July 15th just over 3,000 Chinook, almost 2-million sockeye, almost 4,500 coho, about 287-thousand pinks, and 449,061 chum salmon have been harvested. *Audio for this update begins at 1:30:15 – Meeting Audio – 7/17/24*
 - Alissa Rogers, Bethel, asked if the department had information about bycatch numbers from the trawl fleet. Mr. Larson agreed to bring that information to the next meeting. *Audio for this update begins at 1:31:20 – Meeting Audio – 7/17/24*

E. OLD BUSINESS:

- No old business was addressed at this meeting.

F. NEW BUSINESS:

- No new business was addressed at this meeting.

G. COMMENTS FROM WORKING GROUP MEMBERS:

- Albert Kawagley said he thought that female fish big or small had the same number of eggs, but smaller fish had smaller eggs and larger fish had larger eggs. Following there was also a brief

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discussion about the subject. Alissa Rogers, Bethel, said the egg size gets bigger as they get closer to the spawning grounds and is not related to the size of the fish. Sean Larson, ADFG, said that bigger female fish generally have more eggs. *Audio for this update begins at 1:34:30 – Meeting Audio – 7/17/24*

- Tad Lindley, Bethel, commented that he felt fishing should be wide open considering the data from sonar. He continued that chum salmon numbers are above the 15-year average. He thought if it was open then people may be able to fish during a good drying weather window. *Audio for this update begins at 1:49:35 – Meeting Audio – 7/17/24*

The meeting was adjourned at 12:00 p.m.

WORKING GROUP MOTIONS:

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

- *Audio for this update begins at 14:40 – Meeting Audio – 7/14/23*
- 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: For the next working Group meeting to occur on Wednesday July 31st beginning at 10:00 am. *Passed (unanimous)*

- *Audio for this discussion begins at 1:54:20, the motion was made at 1:55:40 – Meeting Audio – 7/17/24*
- Motion made by James Nicori, 2nd by Tad Lindley

Motion 3: Adjourn at 12:00 p.m. *Passed (Unanimous)*

- *Audio for this update begins at 1:57:30 – Meeting Audio – 7/17/24*
- Meeting adjourned by the chair.

WORKING GROUP ATTENDANCE:

MEMBER SEAT:	NAME:
DOWNRIVER ELDER	John Andrew
UPRIVER ELDER	Allen Simeon
LOWER RIVER SUBSISTENCE	Alissa Rogers
MIDDLE RIVER SUBSISTENCE	<i>Absent</i>
UPRIVER SUBSISTENCE	<i>Absent</i>
HEADWATERS SUBSISTENCE	<i>Absent</i>
MEMBER AT LARGE SEAT 1	Albert Kawagley
MEMBER AT LARGE SEAT 2	Kara Domnick
WESTERN INTERIOR RAC	<i>Absent</i>
YK DELTA RAC	Robert Hoffman
COMMERCIAL FISHING	Tad Lindley
SPORT FISHING	<i>Absent</i>

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KRITFC	Absent
ADF&G	Dave Runfola
CHAIR	Alissa Rogers
<u>ADF&G Comm. Fish:</u> Sam Decker, Sean Larson, Iris Fletcher, Dave Runfola <u>Sport Fish Division:</u> John Chythlook, <u>Subsistence Division:</u> Tim Bembenic <u>Commissioner's Office:</u>	
<u>USFWS:</u> Frank Harris, Christian Alexie, Emmit Nicori, Chris Tulik <u>OSM:</u> Kevin Foley <u>NVN:</u> <u>ONC:</u> Jordan Klejka, Kara Domnick <u>AVCP:</u> <u>KRITFC:</u> <u>UAF:</u> <u>WIRAC:</u> <u>YK Delta RAC:</u> Alissa Rogers, Robert Hoffman	
<u>WG Alternates:</u> (not already listed above)	<u>Media:</u>

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**),

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