

Kuskokwim River Salmon Management Working Group

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

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

July 31st, 2024

On Wednesday, July 31st, 2024, the KRSMWG meeting was called to order at 10:01 a.m. and adjourned at 11:35 a.m. Meeting time was approximately 2 hours. A quorum was established with 8 full voting members in attendance, though 2 members and 1 alternate joined after roll call had been taken. Lamont Albertson chaired the meeting.

AGENDA ITEMS AND SUMMARY INFORMATION:

A. USFWS/KRITFC UPDATE: *Audio for this update begins at 14:20 – Meeting Audio – 7/31/2024*

- Spencer Rearden, USFWS, said that the refuge staff had met with KRITFC regarding future subsistence openers, and they had decided on 2 12-hour drift- or setnet opportunities on August 5th and 10th. Gillnets will still be restricted to 6-inch or less. It was also decided to open all waters within the Yukon Delta National Wildlife Refuge to subsistence rod and reel fishing beginning on August 1st. Mr. Rearden said the announcement will be posted on their website, Facebook, distributed by email and hopefully with KYUK. Refuge staff will also update their info line.

B. ADF&G MANAGEMENT ACTIONS UNDER CONSIDERATION: *Audio for this update begins at 16:45 – Meeting Audio – 7/31/24*

- Dave Runfola, ADFG, said that there were no new recommendations for management actions and reminded everyone management actions in place within state waters in the Aniak box and upriver from there.

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
 - Albert Kawagley, Bethel, said that many people have stopped fishing, and it was time for berry picking, but people may still want fish to put in the freezer. *Audio for this update begins at 19:05 – Meeting Audio – 7/31/2024*
 - Henry Hunter, Bethel, said that talking to others he heard that people did good, and the weather had been good for the most recent opener. He continues, now we are in the rainy season but there is still an opportunity to fish for coho salmon. Mr. Hunter said that a lot of families are catching sockeye and chums and waiting for coho to come into the river. He said most people fillet and freeze them, but a few people try to dry and smoke them, however they must be checked on often because of the wet weather. Mr. Hunter wanted to make sure that people were notified about the openings that had just been announced. *Audio for this update begins at 20:10 – Meeting Audio – 7/31/2024*
 - Kara Domnick, Bethel, said she did not fish this week but was gifted some coho from a family friend. She will go berry picking over the next week or two. *Audio for this update begins at 22:45 – Meeting Audio – 7/31/2024*
 - Avery Hoffman, Bethel, said that he had been away to conduct the drone survey project that had been planned for the Kwethluk River. Mr. Hoffman said that

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the group floated from Boundary Lake and took continuous photos and conducted habitat studies. He said the project and float had been enjoyable and went smoothly. Mr. Hoffman said the crew from Washington State University is headed back home. He will not have data or updates till later when their crew is able to get the photos into the computer and enlarge them so they can do counts. *Audio for this update begins at 23:50 – Meeting Audio – 7/31/2024*

- James Nicori, Kwethluk, said that he had not heard any complaints. People in Kwethluk put away chums, sockeye, and Chinook salmon and are getting ready for berry picking. Mr. Nicori said that he had not seen anyone driftnetting recently and thinks that people are done fishing. He said that he felt the Chinook were missed there because of the timing of the openers. He continued that people were catching more above and below them. He felt the salmon had been below average this season, but that people still got what they needed. Mr. Nicori said that in some areas the berries were still green, small, or half-ripe but thought it could be a plentiful year for berries. *Audio for this update begins at 48:45 – Meeting Audio – 7/31/2024*
- Mike Williams, Akiak, said that it had been a good summer and there were very few fish spoiled. He mentioned that they had seen a lot more chum salmon this summer and felt that it was a good sign. He added there were plenty of sockeye that residents of Akiak were able to dry and/or can. Mr. Williams said that they have had no power in the village for the last month and a half and have been limiting generator use and trying to maintain resources to keep personal generators running. He thanked ONC for loaning pressure cookers to help people can and preserve fish and will be returning them after August is over. He also thanked the community of Bethel and the hovercraft for their contributions as well. Mr. Williams commented that he felt the discrepancy between Bethel Test Fish and sonar data may be in part due to high water. *Audio for this update begins at 35:15 – Meeting Audio – 7/31/2024*
 - Mr. Albertson asked Mr. Williams about the size of the sockeye that had been caught in Akiak and Mike confirmed that the sockeye have been smaller. Mr. Williams added that he had to switch to 5-inch mesh. A brief conversation follows about the average size of multiple species of salmon.
- ONC In-season Report
 - Briana Henry, ONC, said that the natural resources department has been concentrating on culture camp so did not have a report for this week. Ms. Henry answered a few questions about the camp and how it went. She said it went well and spoke about some of the things they did. *Audio for this update begins at 26:55 – Meeting Audio – 7/31/2024*
- KRITFC In-season Report

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- Justin Leon, KRITFC, spoke about the harvest summaries that are included beginning on page 8 of the Informational Packet. He said the Community Based Harvest Monitors are currently standing down but will be gathering information for the next opener on August 5th. The Takotna weir is currently in a “high water outage.” Mr. Leon said that it will be hard to come up with an estimate for escapement from that weir because of how much and how many times it has been out because of high water. KRITFC is considering ending operations at the weir but has not made an official decision. Mr. Leon complimented Avery Hoffman on his report about the drone project. He continued that they are still collecting data at the weir and are looking at other ways to look at information. He hopes that during years like these they will have other ways to count fish.
Audio for this update begins at 30:45 – Meeting Audio – 7/31/2024
- Middle River
 - Walter Morgan, Lower Kalskag, said that he had seen 1 boat driftnetting the previous day for jarring salmon. Mr. Morgan said that he had gone out 2 weeks prior and caught 30 chum, 5 sockeye and 1 Chinook salmon. He said the chums were half-dried and jarred and now he is done fishing, and it is time for berries until the coho salmon are here. Mr. Morgan plans to try jarring some coho.
Audio for this update begins at 43:20 – Meeting Audio – 7/31/2024
 - Lamont Albertson, Aniak, said that he had heard that the water was high in Aniak, but he did not have anything to report. *Audio for this update begins at 45:40 – Meeting Audio – 7/31/2024*
 - NVN Report
 - Dan Gillikin, NVN, said that he had just returned from the George River to help with the intern project. He said that fishing in Aniak had been slow, but people were catching some fish in town. Mr. Gillikin reported that there were a lot of sheefish at the mouth of the Aniak. He finished his report by saying that most people were done driftnetting. *Audio for this update begins at 46:20 – Meeting Audio – 7/31/2024*
- Upriver and Headwaters
 - Barbara Carlson, Sleetmute, said that people are putting things away and the coho had not reached that part of the river yet, but she hopes to see more rod and reeling. She said people have been out picking berries and the salmon berries are doing well, but not many blueberries and it looks good for cranberries this fall. *Audio for this update begins at 47:20 – Meeting Audio – 7/31/2024*
 - Dan Esai, Nikolai, said that it had been a successful year in Nikolai but that it had been hot so there are not many berries because they had dried out. He added that the cranberries did not look good either. Mr. Esai said that he was making plans to head up to Telida to pick berries. He finished that the chum salmon and

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whitefish looked good. *Audio for this update begins at 52:05 – Meeting Audio – 7/31/2024*

- Albert Kawagley, Bethel, said that his children had gone out looking for berries in several spots and finally found a place where they were able to pick 5 gallons.
- Overview of the Kuskokwim River salmon run assessment
 - *Audio for this update begins at 55:40 – Meeting Audio – 7/31/2024*
 - Information about this update can be found beginning on page 5.
 - Sean Larson, ADFG, gave a brief report regarding assessment projects in the Kuskokwim. Some highlights include that coho salmon were just starting to pick up, that the Chinook, chum, and coho numbers are above average, while the sockeye numbers were a little below average at the sonar site, and that high water at Kogrukluuk and George River weirs had caused gaps in counts and he does not know if he will be able to make an estimate for escapement, though the Talequena River weir was doing good but winding down. Mr. Larson finished with saying that Sam Decker had done aerial surveys.
 - Sam Decker, ADFG, said that all the upper Kuskokwim tributary surveys were finished but there were still rivers to do including the Kwethluk, Kanektok, and Kisaralik. Ms. Decker said that there were some waters clarity issues but the pilot she went with had commented that he was seeing more chum and Chinook salmon that last year, so she is hopeful. *Audio for this update begins at 1:00:05 – Meeting Audio – 7/31/2024*
- Subsistence Division Update
 - Tim Bimbenic, ADFG, updated the group about the Post Season Survey project for this year. He said that the crew planned on starting in the upper and middle river during the 2nd week of September and Bethel in October. Mr. Bimbenic said that the 2023 report was wrapping up and they would be getting to publications. *Audio for this update begins at 1:02:10 – Meeting Audio – 7/31/2024*
 - One person asked if the Subsistence Division did any moose research. Mr. Bimbenic answered that they have not had a project for moose in the Western region, but he was interested.
- Sport Fish:
 - There was no Sport Fish report at this meeting.
- Intercept Fishery Report
 - Sean Larson, ADFG, went over the S. Peninsula chum and the Bering Sea Aleutian Islands (BSAI) trawl bycatch numbers. Those numbers and links to additional information can be found on page 18 of the Informational packet. *Audio for this update begins at 1:04:00 – Meeting Audio – 7/31/2024*

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- Henry Hunter, Bethel, said that he had testified with the NPFMC asking for limits but was unsure about what regulations exist for the trawl fleet. He said he was under the impression that there were no regulations. Sam Decker, ADFG, clarified that the BSAI trawl fleet and the Alaska Peninsula “intercept fishery” are different fleets and managed by different entities. She touched on some regulations that the different fleets have. Sean Larson spoke a little about what happens to the bycatch and the group discussed bycatch a little further afterward. Mr. Hunter said he would like to make sure that there are fish for subsistence, not just commercial interests. Albert Kawagley, Bethel, requested that someone from the trawling fleet attend a KRSMWG meeting. Sam Decker, ADFG, said that she had heard someone from NPFMC speak at a YRDFA conference and promised she would reach out to see if someone from NPFMC could attend a Working Group meeting. There is also a brief conversation about regulations on the Yukon River and how agreements between Alaska and Canada are decided. *Audio for this update begins at 1:05:50 – Meeting Audio – 7/31/2024*

E. OLD BUSINESS:

- Savannah Hollingworth, ADFG, informed the Working Group that the letter that had been written to Rachel Baker, NPFMC, regarding trawlers in Kuskokwim Bay written by Kevin Whitworth and approved by the Working Group had been sent. *Audio for this update begins at 1:26:40 – Meeting Audio – 7/31/2024*

F. NEW BUSINESS:

- There was no new business addressed at this meeting.

G. COMMENTS FROM WORKING GROUP MEMBERS:

- Albert Kawagley, Bethel, said that pike eat salmon fry and wanted to know if there was anything being done about the abundance of pike. Sam Decker, ADFG, reminded the group that the Sport Fish division would be conducting an exploratory study. *Audio for this update begins at 1:29:15 – Meeting Audio – 7/31/2024*

The meeting was adjourned at 11:35 a.m.

WORKING GROUP MOTIONS:

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

- *Audio for this update begins at 52:05 – Meeting Audio – 6/21/23*
- 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.

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Motion 2: For the next working Group meeting to occur on Wednesday August 14th beginning at 10:00 am. *Passed (Unanimous)*

- Audio for this update begins at 1:32:10 – Meeting Audio – 7/31/2024
- Motion made by Henry Hunter, 2nd by Lamont Albertson

Motion 3: Adjourn at 11:35 a.m. *Passed (Unanimous)*

- No objections were made

WORKING GROUP ATTENDANCE:

MEMBER SEAT:	NAME:
DOWNRIVER ELDER	<i>Absent</i>
UPRIVER ELDER	<i>Absent</i>
LOWER RIVER SUBSISTENCE	Mike Williams Sr.
MIDDLE RIVER SUBSISTENCE	Walter Morgan
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	<i>Absent</i>
YK DELTA RAC	Robert Hoffman
COMMERCIAL FISHING	<i>Absent</i>
SPORT FISHING	Lamont Albertson
KRITFC	James Nicori
ADF&G	Sam Decker
CHAIR	Lamont Albertson
<u>ADF&G Comm. Fish:</u> Sam Decker, Sean Larson, Dave Runfola <u>Sport Fish Division:</u> <u>Subsistence Division:</u> Tim Bembenic <u>Commissioner's Office:</u>	
<u>USFWS:</u> Spencer Rearden, Frank Harris, Aaron Moses, Nate Akers <u>OSM:</u> <u>NVN:</u> Dan Gillikin <u>ONC:</u> Kara Domnick, Briana Henry <u>AVCP:</u> <u>KRITFC:</u> Justin Leon, James Nicori, Henry Hunter, Avery Hoffman <u>UAF:</u> <u>WIRAC:</u> <u>YK Delta RAC:</u>	
<u>WG Alternates: (not already listed above)</u> Kara Domnick (2 nd Member at Large), Henry Hunter (KRITFC)	<u>Media:</u> <u>Other:</u> Maridon Barrio (Sen. Lyman Hoffman's office)

GLOSSARY OF ABBREVIATIONS:

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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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