

# YUKON RIVER GOLD

SALMON from the HEART of ALASKA

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RC43

TO: Chairman - Board of Fisheries  
COMMENTS: Yukon River proposals 241 and 240  
DATE: 14 January 2013

## Alaska's Oldest Salmon Fishery

### Re-starting of Middle Yukon commercial chum fishery and recommendations.

Dear Mr. Chairman,

Last spring we approached the Board with an emergency regulation request. You granted the request and changed the regulations for us this last summer. We owe you many thanks ... and a report.

Without your collective emergency action to change the harvest regulations this last spring, allowing us to harvest chum salmon with fish wheels, this fishery would have ended. Your regulation change made the fishery possible.

This summer we harvested 108,000 chums and incidentally caught 59 Chinook salmon. All but one of the 59 of the incidentally caught Chinook salmon were returned alive into the Yukon, to continue their spawning journey. We apologize for the death of one Chinook.

This summer we created approximately 130 direct jobs in the Kaltag area. Kaltag has had chronic unemployment in excess of 60%, since this fishery collapsed in 1997. The processing plant operated around the clock for three weeks straight. Unemployment dropped to zero and the call went out for more workers, and they came from surrounding villages.

Understanding the importance of this fishery to the region, can only be understood with a little history.

In 1833 the Russian established Redoubt St. Michael on the ocean shoreline of Norton Sound. Then in 1838 the ancient trade route Kaltag Portage was opened up for travel between Norton Sound and the Yukon River by overland winter trail. This trail saved hundreds of miles compared to following the shoreline to the mouth of the Yukon River, and then traveling upstream. The Kaltag Portage enabled the establishment of trading post Nulato in 1838.

TO: Commissioners - Board of Fish

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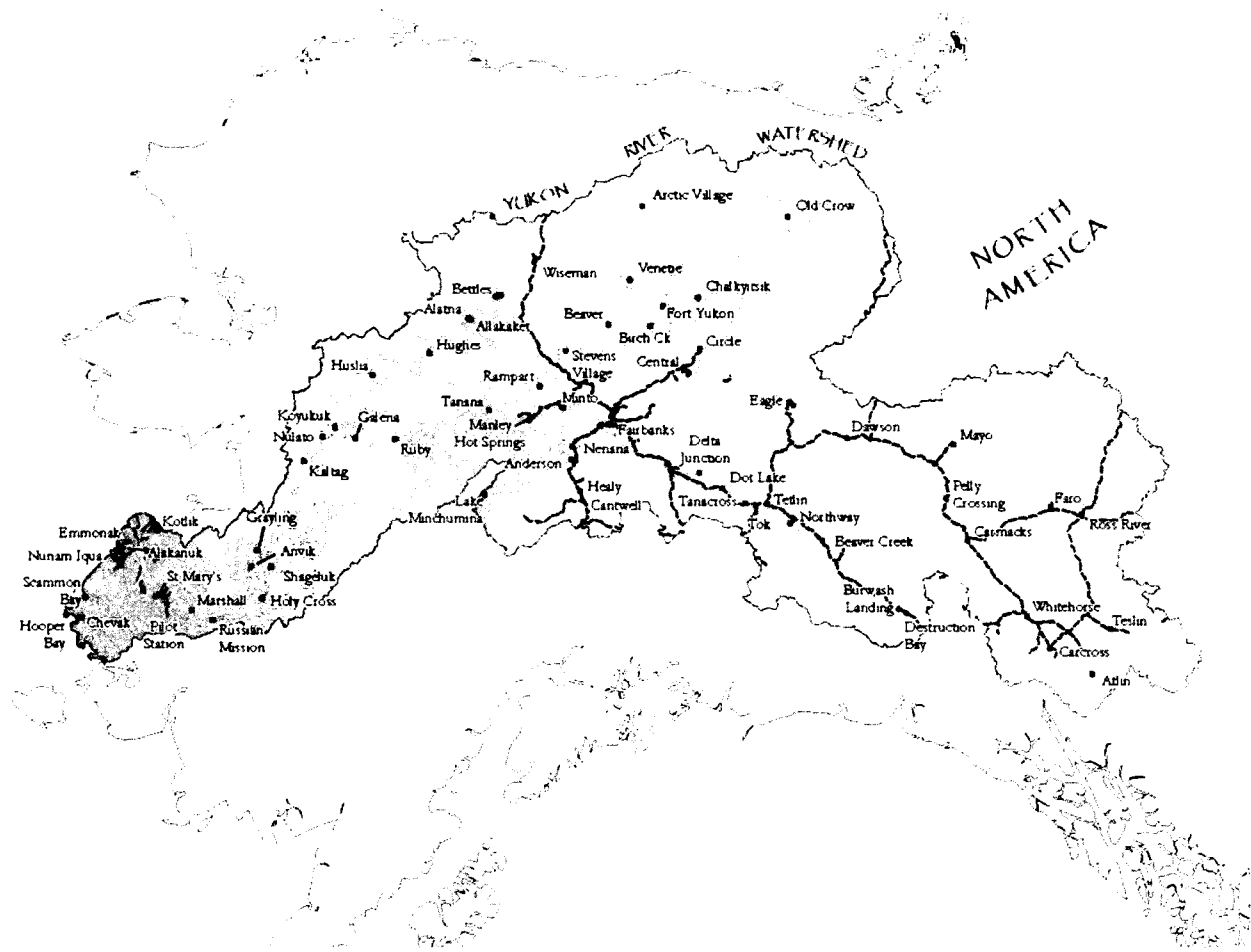
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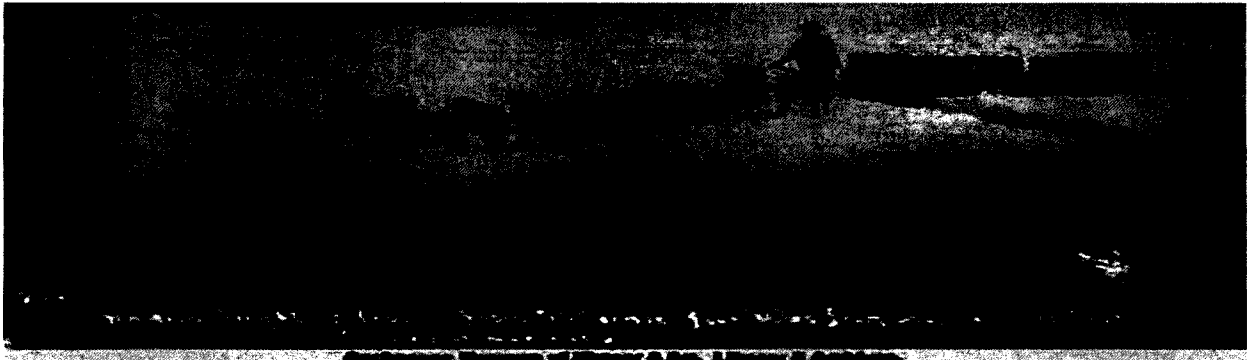
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This opened up then what was Alaska's critical trading route through the interior into Canada and to the year round Inside Passage port of Skagway.



Tons and tons of freight, people, technology, and trade goods flowed both directions along this early State highway system the Yukon River provided. Much of this cargo was transported during the winter via large teams of dogs in harness.

Alaska's early transportation needs were met with tens of thousands of dogs in harness, and these dogs needed lots of food to endure the cold and physical exertion required of them. The perfect food for these working dogs was dried salmon. Many foods were tried, but only dried salmon provided the light weight and perfect nutrition for these dogs. Because of this burgeoning need, dried salmon became a commercial trade good and the commercial salmon fishery in the middle Yukon was borne.



So in 1838 the commercial salmon fishery on the Yukon was borne, thirty years before the first salmon cannery. Alaska was owned by the Russian, Washington and Oregon were owned by the British, and California was owned by Mexico. Historical accounts present a concise picture of millions and millions of pounds harvested to feed these dogs, which in turn provided transportation. Dried salmon was worth more then, then salmon is worth today in constant dollars.

Millions of dollar worth of dried salmon.



Careful surveys of the fishery show up to 350 fish wheels in operation, and consistent, conservative harvests of 1-2 million chums salmon landed annually for over a century, until the chum salmon resource mysteriously collapsed in 1997.

Fast forward to today. This middle Yukon never really produced human food, and the dried salmon market for dogs has virtually evaporated. Fifteen years of not fishing and little capital to modernize the industry for human consumption, this is a difficult project to re-start this old fishery.



This is the task at hand, and we are giving it one helluva go, and making significant progress. This progress would not have been possible without your actions to support this fishery. We deeply appreciate your actions and would ask that you pass Proposal 241 and make these changes permanent.

While full time manning of fish wheels is a burden, the folks are willing to do so to be able to fish early, like they historically had. Compliance with the manning requirement has been exemplary and incidental catches of Chinooks is extremely low using fish wheels.

With the passage of this regulation, the middle Yukon fish wheels can begin turning on the historical start date of June 20<sup>th</sup>. This will be the first time that the wheels have begun fishing on this date since 1997, ... sixteen years ago.

Warmest personal regards,

Doug Karlberg

PS, we are fully supportive of Proposal 240 and you may want to allow fish wheels as a legal gear type to allow for experimentation.

*Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it's the only thing that ever has.*

*Margaret Mead*