Meeting Summary

June 15, 2012

Called to order at 10:00 am at ADFG in Bethel and adjourned at 1:32 pm. Nine of thirteen members were present and a quorum was established. Three members left after the break, which resulted in no quorum for the last KRSWMG recommendation.

AGENDA ITEMS:
1.) Continuing Business
2.) Old Business
3.) New Business

WORKING GROUP ACTION ITEMS: N/A

MEETING ACTION ANNOUNCEMENT:
The next KRSMWG meeting will be at the Call of the Chairs.

ADF&G RECOMMENDATION:
ADF&G recommended a five-day extension to the current 7-day rolling closure, beginning June 17 at 12:00 am in Section 1. This 5-day extension will be applied to sections further upriver if run assessment continues to indicate that the Chinook salmon Management Objective will not be met.

WORKING GROUP MOTIONS:
1.) To accept ADF&G’s recommendation of a 5-day extension in rolling closure Section 1, beginning June 17, and applicable to upriver sections if necessary. Motion failed.

2.) The KRSWMG recommended a 5-day window of subsistence fishing opportunity following 7-day rolling closures in each section. Motion passed.

3.) Members unanimously supported Mark Leary’s proposal to close all sport fishing for Chinook salmon in the Kuskokwim River drainage (Unofficial motion, since a quorum could not be established at this point).

PEOPLE TO BE HEARD:
1.) Jackson Williams from Akiak thanked Travis Elison (ADF&G) for visiting Akiak to explain rolling closures and the 4-inch mesh restriction on the Kisaralik River, a tributary of Chinook conservation concern.

2.) Steven Maxie from Napaskiak commented that people were not happy about the 7-day closures. They would be satisfied with 3-day or 5-day closures instead in order to take advantage of the good drying weather.
3.) Tad Linlay from Bethel expressed his thanks to the KRSMWG. He acknowledged that the KRSMWG has been “making tough decisions.” When referring to the KRSMWG’s support of 7-day rolling closures for Chinook conservation, he stated that “the most powerful piece of this whole process was the fact that it was unanimous….I think that helps people support the mission and support the closures.”

4.) Greg Roczicka (Chair) shared comments from members of the public:
   - One woman was not in favor of the 7-day closure because the rainy weather later in June causes flies and maggots on drying fish. She said that other ladies agree that the current time was the best drying weather.
   - Lucy Crow reported that Nelson Island fishermen were catching about 20 kings and 50 chums in short drifts. The Chinook seemed to be milling there, and people were concerned that they would be cited for intercepting Yukon or Kuskokwim stock.
   - A resident of Kipnuk reported that herring were just beginning to arrive there, which was extremely late. On the coast herring usually arrive in late April.

7.) Bev Hoffman (Sport Fish) shared comments from members of the public:
   - Many people hoped that ADF&G would provide a window of fishing opportunity. They asked that gear restrictions and other options would be considered instead of another closure.

CONTINUING BUSINESS:

LOWER RIVER SUBSISTENCE REPORTS:
Charlie Brown (Commercial Fisher) and James Charles (Downriver Elder) reported that no one was fishing because Section 1 was closed. Many fish racks in Tuntutuliak were empty.

Beverly Hoffman reported her catch before Section 2 closures, which was one of the better catches in the Bethel area. She harvested twelve medium-sized Chinook, five chum, two sockeye, and two sheefish.

Greg Roczicka reported fishing in the Bethel area as “dismal.” At the most, people were catching one or two fish per drift. Many “hung up their nets for June” and were waiting for other species.

Mike Williams (Lower River Subsistence) thanked Travis Elison and Robert Sundown (USFWS) for traveling to Akiak to explain rolling closures. People were aware that “time was passing” and were anxious for the upcoming opening. In the meantime, fishermen were catching whitefish to sustain the closure. Mike added that next week will be good drying weather and “we need this opportunity to put up our fish or we will have a hard time this winter.”

Steven Maxie reported average catches of three to eight small Chinook per day at the fishing “hot spot” near Napaskiak. 6-inch gear was the most effective.

ONC IN-SEASON LOWER RIVER SUBSISTENCE REPORT:
Please see the June 15 Information Packet for ONC’s full report.
ONC technicians surveyed 24 families, 13 of which were fishing before the Section 2 closure. Most people reported poor fishing and many changed to a smaller mesh size. Surveyors observed fish hanging in 16 out of approximately 80 active fish camps in the Bethel area. During the four day survey period technicians counted 32 set nets and 36 drift nets from Bethel to Napaskiak.

**MIDDLE RIVER SUBSISTENCE REPORT:**
Bob Aloysius (YK Delta RAC) reported fishing as “dismal” in the middle river. In Kalskag the water was high and muddy and people were catching either one chum or one Chinook per drift. Bob was concerned that Quinhagak was intercepting fish.

Gerald Simeon (Middle River Subsistence) reported high water in Aniak and average catches of only one fish per every four or five drifts. He commented that “people were very disappointed.” The community asked him to request that the Owhat and Oskawalik Rivers be included in the rolling closures so they are not overrun with sport fishermen.

**KNA INSEASON MIDDLE RIVER SUBSISTENCE REPORT:**
Mike Thalhauser (KNA) agreed with Gerald’s report. Aniak residents reported the Chinook run as late and below average. However, people “believed that the windows were helping.” Napaimute had very high water and fishermen thought that fish could be swimming under nets. One Sleetmute fishermen reported that he had not caught any salmon yet with his 6.5-inch set net.

**UPPER RIVER SUBSISTENCE REPORT:**
Mark Leary (Upriver Subsistence alternate) reported that he saw schools of fish of mixed sizes near Napaimute with his fish finder. All were swimming at 14 feet or deeper. One chum salmon had been caught which was shared with the community.

Evelyn Thomas (Upriver Subsistence) reported that six Chinook had been caught in Crooked Creek, which was unusual because Chinook usually arrive after June 18th. One fish was 40 pounds, a size that had not been seen there in years. Travis Elison clarified that Crooked Creek still had one more week of fishing before the Section 4 rolling closure.

**HEADWATERS SUBSISTENCE REPORT:** N/A

**DISCUSSION OF RUN ASSESSMENT DATA:**
*Please see Run Assessment Information in the June 15 Information Packet.*

Kevin Schaberg (ADF&G) reported below average water temperature and below average water temperature at the BTF site.

As of June 15, BTF CPUE shows fewer Chinook salmon than all years except 1985. The current chum salmon CPUE indicates another strong year. The current sockeye salmon cumulative CPUE of 0 is not unusual for this time of year.

Kevin explained why ADF&G has not applied a correction factor to the cumulative Chinook CPUE for years prior to 2008:
• Years prior to 2008 are not comparable because the mesh type used resulted in different catchability.
• Adding a correction factor would add more uncertainty to the projection and assessment of whether or not the management objective will be achieved.

Kevin oriented the group to the Chinook salmon projection tool that will be used inseason (See page 7 of the Information Packet). He suggested that based on several factors, the Late Run Timing model would fit best.
• The dashed line is the cumulative line, which is compared to the range between the two blue lines.
• The shaded area is our projection based on run timing.
• As the run progresses, we are fall further behind historic numbers. The shaded band is narrow at this point because we haven't seen anything historically similar to this year's low cumulative BTF CPUE.
• Projection looks well below the Management Objective.

COMMENTS:
In response to a question regarding BTF methodology in 2012, Travis Elison clarified that the additional sockeye nets are fished after the standard BTF nets. This data is for a separate research project and is not factored into the BTF CPUE. He clarified that salmon caught in the additional nets were not added to the BTF indices for 2012 because they had never been used before and might skew the index and make it incomparable to other years.

Bob Aloysius asked why BTF fished after the high tide. Travis Elison replied that fishing occurs after the high tide to ensure that fish being caught are actually swimming upstream against the outgoing tide and not milling with the slack tide. BTF has been operating the same way since 1984, and keeping the drift times standardized keeps the project consistent. The goal is not to catch as many fish as possible, but keep the data comparable.

WEIRS/FISH WHEELS/MARK-RECAPTURE/AERIAL SURVEYS:
Upriver weirs will be installed as soon as high water recedes.

The Kwethluk River weir should be operational next week. Steve Miller (USFWS) reported that video monitoring will be used there for the first time, as well as the previous method of collecting data.

Zach Liller explained the Kalskag Fish wheel project:
• Fish Wheel data is not considered a good index of salmon abundance year to year because operational dates and methods have shifted over time. This project was never designed to work as a test fishery. It has been a platform for research on different species in different years since it began operation. Publishing this data in packets is being done at the request of the Working Group members but this data is not a good index of Chinook salmon abundance.
• In 2012, the fish wheels were set up to targeting sockeye, not Chinook.
• From the two fish wheels that began operation on June 10, a total of two Chinook salmon and four chum salmon had been caught.
• Kevin Schaberg added that ADF&G investigated using the Kalskag Fish Wheels as an additional test fishery, but has not done so because the changing study objectives have
prevented a strong predictive relationship from being demonstrated between that project and weir escapements. Also, the Bethel Test Fish relationship with escapement appears to be adequate for the purpose.

**COMMERCIAL CATCH REPORT:**
There were no planned commercial fishing periods at this time in either the Kuskokwim River District (W1), or the separate Kuskokwim Bay districts (W4 and W5).

As far as subsistence fishing in Districts W4, Quinhagak’s Chinook run appeared to be late. Travis Elison spoke with a subsistence user who caught 20 Chinook, which was more than most were able to harvest at that point. He expected the run to pick up soon.

As far as other areas, ADF&G has not been successful with obtaining salmon fishing information Kwigillingok or other coastal villages. Beverly Hoffman suggested that AVCP try obtaining fishing updates. Casie Stockdale (AVCP) suggested that the KRSMGW have a coastal member seat.

**PROCESSOR REPORT:**
Stuart Currie (Processor) had nothing to report.

**SPORT FISH REPORT:**
John Chythlook (ADF&G) explained the Sport Fish data tables in the information packet. One table was logbook data from guides and the other table showed numbers of Chinook retained by anyone with a sport fishing license, including the Bethel area. All numbers were estimates. John presented the tables to show the KRSMGW that guides were not keeping Chinook salmon.

Much discussion regarding sport fishing in tributaries that flow into restricted mainstem areas occurred later in the meeting.

**WEATHER FORECAST:**
The weather on June 15 was hot and sunny. The forecast for the following week was mostly cloudy with highs of 40 to 50.

Henry Lupie commented that the past month had north or westerly winds. The winds recently changed to being from the south or southeast.

**RECOMMENDATION:**
Travis Elison stated that current run assessment information indicates that the agreed-upon inseason Management Objective of 127,280 Chinook salmon drainage-wide will not be achieved with expected subsistence harvest levels.

ADF&G recommended a five-day extension to the existing 7-day rolling closure, beginning June 17 at 12:00 am in Section 1. This 5-day extension will be applied to sections further upriver if the run assessment continues to indicate that the Management Objective will not be met.

ADF&G will provide details in upcoming news releases that will describe the extension for each section if warranted. Travis suggested a KRSMGW meeting on Wednesday, June 20, to further discuss 5-day rolling closure extensions.
Travis added that, “The department and the federal inseason manager feel that it is very unfortunate that we need to take these actions at this time. We do realize how hard this is on the people on the Kuskokwim River, but we feel that this is the most appropriate thing to do.”

**WORKING GROUP MOTIONS:**

**MOTION 1:** To approve ADF&G’s recommendation of a 5-day extension of the rolling closure in Section 1, beginning June 17, which would also apply upriver if necessary. Motion failed (1 yea, 7 nays, 1 abstain).

**COMMENTS FOR MOTION 1:**
Beverly Hoffman saw problems with the Recommendation and Motion 1. She recognized the indications of high water, cold water temperatures, late Chinook run timing, and the likelihood for a weak Chinook run. “I see the numbers, and I know it’s bad. But I think that people have been very respectful and civil and have tried hard to go with this early 7-day rolling closure. I would like to see a window of opportunity for people, and then close it at a later date.”

Much discussion followed. Many agreed with Bev Hoffman:
- Mike Williams reiterated that the 7-day closure had been very hard and to extend restrictions “would create more pain and suffering.”
- Fritz Charles thought that people were going to fish regardless of the closure to get food for the winter. He said, “If it comes to desperate measures they will do it.”
- Evelyn Thomas said that Crooked Creek residents depend heavily on subsistence catches. Times were difficult because of the lack of jobs and because not everyone was eligible for food stamps. She referred to “depriving us of a food source” as “genocide.”
- Robert Enoch from Tuntutuliak stated that the water was still high after this year’s cold, difficult break-up. Indications of summer had just arrived, such as mosquitoes swarming, which is what elders traditionally use to predict salmon runs. He wanted Lower River communities to have an opportunity to fish because “they had nothing yet.” Robert stated that he would be fishing after the original 7-day closure ended, regardless of the consequences.
- Greg Roczicka’s fear was that the current rolling closure would be seen as “wasted” because it occurred too early. He did not want “the department to try to come back and get their savings again, if they didn’t get savings yet because there were no fish.” In that case, the current closure was lost fishing opportunity.

Robert Sundown (USFWS) addressed the group: “I know this is fairly unpopular, but I would like to hear back from the public and the Working Group what your plan is to make escapement. That’s the primary objective of fish management. If we don’t make escapement over consistent years, you are robbing your kids and your future generation from harvest.”

Travis Elison explained ADF&G’s reasoning behind a 5-day rolling closure extension:
- “Right now we are seeing some of the lowest numbers we have ever seen. We are way behind 2010 and 2011, when we didn’t even come close to meeting a lot of our escapement goals. If we allow harvest right now on what appears to be, although late, a weak run of Chinook salmon...we may drive escapement numbers down to below a level that we may not see returns to sustain subsistence fishing for the future.”
He explained that a five-day window of fishing opportunity on this weak of a run was “way too much” and could have dire consequences for the future. The most responsible thing for ADF&G and federal managers to do “is to conserve whatever Chinook salmon we can right now.”

Regarding 6-inch mesh:
- After the recommended 5-day extension is over, the subsistence fishery will likely be opened to 6-inch mesh to provide fishing opportunity on chum and sockeye when their abundance increases.
- Travis Elison replied that today’s data and Napaskiak subsistence reports show that 6-inch mesh was currently harvesting more Chinook than other species. Such a measure was “not on the table as conservation measure because there are enough chum and sockeye right now.”

Tom Doolittle (USFWS) agreed with Travis in that “the data needs to show the influx of chum and sockeye to make 6-inch gear effective.” He clarified that both agencies were monitoring the fishery daily to find the point when a gear restriction would be effective. He encouraged people to use other species because of the absence of Chinook salmon. Tom reiterated that that this is one of the poorest years on record, and if we want to see fish returning in future “we have to go the extra mile.” He assured the group that USFWS and ADF&G have thought “hard and long, and looked at this from every angle possible.”

KRSWMG members and members of the public commented on a 5-day extension:
- Douglas Kernak disagreed with an extension in Section 1 since the majority of communities are located in Section 2. He explained that fishing in Eek and Tuntutuliak was more difficult because the river was 80 feet deep in places and fishing there “was a game of chance sometimes.”
- Charlie Brown added that fisherman drove an hour from Eek, which took more than six gallons of gas because the river was three or four miles wide in some places. Charlie wanted a 5-day window of fishing opportunity, not an extension of closures.
- Tad Linlay from Bethel suggested a 48-hour opening following the 7-day closure so that people could at least get some fish. He said that “there seems like an unprecedented amount of cooperation right now” and an extension of closures could cause a “breach of trust.”
- Steven Maxie thought that people would go fishing regardless of an extension, and he was concerned that “they would be made criminals.” He explained that instead of fishing all day and all night, fishermen wait until the best part of the tide in order to save gas. Steven also said that many lower river fishermen did not have 6-inch mesh nets.
- James Charles referred to Robert Sundown’s earlier comments, and said that closures were “robbing people of food now.” He did not agree with an extension because the closure in Section 1 was not even finished yet.
- Mark Leary commented that he could not support a closure based on BTF data. He said that we “need more backup, especially with the high water.” He suggested sonar or one test fisherman in each village.

**MOTION 2:** The KRSWMG recommended a 5-day window of subsistence fishing opportunity following each section’s 7-day rolling closure. Motion passed (8 yeas, 1 nay).
Stuart Currie asked Bev Hoffman if she would amend the motion to give ADF&G the authority to issue an Emergency Order if there was a sudden influx of Chinook so they would not be harvested. Bev did not accept the amendment.

COMMENTS FOR MOTION 2:
Bev Hoffman made this recommendation in order to give people more fishing opportunity. If the run continued to appear weak, she would accept more closures after the 5-day window.

There was much support for Motion 2:
• Henry Lupie commented that if Bev’s recommendation did not override the ADF&G recommendation, “the KRSWMG’s relationship with ADF&G could be lost.”
• Lillian Liabon from Akiak commented that a 5 day opening “is better than nothing” and she would be pleased if she caught 10 Chinook and a few reds.

Jackson Williams recalled an extremely low Chinook run in the 1960’s, similar to 2012. His hope was that this year’s Chinook run was late and that it would peak later in the season. He reminded the group that there was still ice on the coast until recently.

Mark Leary was concerned that the several thousand families fishing on the lower river would prevent fish from reaching the middle and Upper River. However, Bev was confident that people would take less because of this year’s public outreach efforts.

Henry Kohl, Jr., suggested a longer window of opportunity to prevent the river from becoming crowded with fishing boats. He thought that an opening of one week would put people at ease.

Kevin Schaberg explained that later runs are often compressed. In 1985, 75% of the Chinook run came in one week. Therefore, a 5-day opener could potentially harvest 75% of the total run.

Bev Hoffman stated that she respected the data but ADF&G “needs to hear what the people are saying.”

ADF&G and USFWS took a caucus break to discuss the Working Group recommendation: Managers did not accept the recommendation. Travis Elison explained that the agencies discussed the pros and cons of an opening of 5 or fewer days:
• Allowing additional fishing opportunity at this time “would make it very unlikely” to achieve the 2012 Chinook salmon Management Objective agreed upon by the ADF&G, USFWS, the KRSMWG and later endorsed by AVCP and ONC. Travis also said that based on current numbers, “We do not have an indication that there is any surplus whatsoever beyond the Management Objective for subsistence harvest.”
• A 5-day extension at this time would allow a potentially earlier relaxation of closures and provide sooner opportunity to potentially harvest chum and sockeye with 6-inch mesh.
• Further, he clarified that the length of the first closure and the subsequent addition of 5 days should go a long way to conserving salmon, whereas any closure shorter than 6 or 7 days had little potential to save fish.
COMMENTS:
KRSWG members expressed their disappointment:

- Beverly Hoffman “was deeply disappointed that ADF&G did not hear the people.” She claimed that agency staff did not understand how difficult it was for low income households to get food on the table.
- Evelyn Thomas said that she would try for silver salmon, but that the Middle River is affected by commercial openers in the lower river.
- Greg Roczicka was disappointed to miss out on the good drying weather in June.

OLD BUSINESS:
1.) Update on public outreach:
   - Travis Elison, Fritz Charles, and Robert Sundown participated in a call-in radio show on KYUK on June 11 to discuss Chinook conservation. The next radio show was scheduled for Monday, June 18.
   - Travis Elison and Robert Sundown met with the community of Akiak on June 11 to discuss rolling closures and the Kisaralik River’s 4-inch mesh restriction.
   - Travis Elison and Robert Sundown will visit Tuluksak on June 15 to discuss rolling closures.
   - Mark Leary in Napaimute presented Napaimute’s website which will display information on Kuskokwim fisheries management. The web address is: www.napaimute.org.

2.) Remaining old business items were tabled until mid-July.

NEW BUSINESS:
1.) Mark Leary recommended closing all sport fishing for Chinook salmon, especially in tributaries not affected by rolling closures. The remaining six KRSMWG members unanimously supported his recommendation.

Mark explained the importance of closing Chinook salmon sport fishing:
- The Emergency Orders that ADF&G issued were appreciated, but were not enough. From experience, he knew that Aniak guides move into unrestricted areas. He was especially concerned about the Holokuk River near Napaimute.
- Mark was adamant that, “This is no time for anyone to be playing with king salmon, with all the sacrifices subsistence fishermen along the river are doing.” He continued, “Even though the bag limit is one king salmon, we need every single king salmon to get home.”
- He heard of clients who caught and released over 100 Chinook salmon in a weekend. “That is hard on those fish... They [Chinook salmon] made it up through everything in the ocean, they made it up the river past all the nets, and they made it home. Leave them alone. Especially this year, leave them alone.”

COMMENTS:
John Chythlook (ADF&G) stated that the Sport Fish Division was leaving regulations “as is” for the moment, for the following reasons:
- Many fishermen who use rod and reel at the mouth of tributaries were subsistence fishermen. Subsistence fishing for Chinook with rod and reel will be prohibited when rolling closures are in effect in those areas.
• Ample time remained to watch the Chinook run develop since the areas of concern were upriver.
• If Chinook did not show up, at that time the Sport Fish Division would consider taking action.

Mark Leary expressed dissatisfaction that sport fishermen could still target Chinook during the rolling closure, when subsistence fishermen could not. He was especially concerned about the 4th of July weekend, which usually has a large influx of sport fishermen.

Casie Stockdale (AVCP) commented that middle river subsistence reports showed that Chinook were being caught, which should be enough evidence that Chinook were in the river.

Mike Thalhauser (KNA) commented that a closure like this would at least be “an act of good faith” from the Department. It would also keep guides out of those areas completely.

Travis Elison reiterated that, “No matter what way we look at it, we are not looking at a good [Chinook Run].” He clarified that the Division of Commercial Fisheries did not have authority over the Sport Fish Division.

Note on sport fishing for Chinook Salmon: On June 20, 2012, ADF&G Sport Fish Division issued an Emergency Order effective 12:01 am, Friday, June 22, until 11:59 pm Wednesday, July 25, that closed all waters of the Kuskokwim River Drainage to sport fishing for king salmon.

GENERAL COMMENTS FROM WORKING GROUP MEMBERS: N/A

WORKING GROUP ATTENDANCE:

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<td>UPRIVER ELDER</td>
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<td>DOWNRIVER ELDER</td>
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<td>COMMERCIAL FISHER</td>
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<td>LOWER RIVER SUBSISTENCE</td>
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<td>PROCESSOR</td>
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<td>MEMBER AT LARGE</td>
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<td>SPORT FISHER</td>
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<td>Y-K DELTA RAC</td>
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<td>ADF&amp;G</td>
<td>Travis Elison</td>
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<td>CHAIR</td>
<td>Greg Roczicka</td>
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Other Participants:

ADF&G Comm. Fish: John Linderman, Travis Elison, Kevin Schaberg, Alice Bailey, Doug Bue, Zach Liller, Amy Brodersen, Chris Shelden, Scott Ayers, Brittany Blain, Jennifer Yuhas
Sport Fish: Tom Taube, John Chythlook
Subsistence Division: James Park, Hiroku Ikuta
| USFWS: Dan Gillikin, Ken Harper, Tom Doolittle, Steve Miller, Robert Sundown |
| OSM: Don Rivard, Pippa Kenner, George Papas |

| Mike Thalhauser (KNA) | Gerri Sumpter (Senator Murkowski’s) |
| La Donn Robbins (KNA) | Maridon Boario (Senator Hoffman’s) |
| Alexandra Waska (KNA) | Angela Denning Barnes (KYUK) |
| Mark Leary (Napaimute) | Alissa Joseph (ONC) |
| Dave Cannon | Steven Maxie (Napaskiak) |
| Jackson Williams (Akiak) | Robert Enoch (Tuntutuliak) |
| Casie Stockdale (AVCP) | Eva Patton |
| Lillian Lliabon | Iyana Dull (ONC) |
| Tad Linlay | Henry Kohl, Jr. (ONC) |
| Douglas Kernak | Jeff Sanders |

**GLOSSARY OF ACRONYMS:**
Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ADF&G), Orutsararmiut Native Council (ONC), Kuskokwim Native Association (KNA), Association of Village Council Presidents (AVCP), 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), Regional Advisory Council (RAC), Kuskokwim River Salmon Management Working Group (KRSMWG or Working Group, WG), Sustainable Escapement Goal (SEG), Biological Escapement Goal (BEG), Management Objective (MO), Amounts Reasonably Necessary for Subsistence (ANS), Emergency Order (EO)