

Kuskokwim River Salmon Management Working Group

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

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

May 1, 2015

Meeting called to order at 10:00am and adjourned at 12:01pm. Total meeting time was 2 hours. A quorum was maintained throughout the meeting.

AGENDA ITEMS:

Summary of the Foraker Meeting

USFWS Special Action

2015 Kuskokwim River Preseason Management Plan Review

- Potential fishing with short 6-inch mesh gillnets.
- Input on a schedule for allowing 4-inch mesh set gillnet openings to harvest non-salmon species and minimize incidental harvest of Chinook salmon.
- Location requirement for 4-inch mesh set gillnets.
- Schedule to begin the subsistence salmon fishing closure on the Kuskokwim River.

Kuskokwim River Chinook Salmon Run Reconstruction Model and Investigative Data Weighting Report

Seat Elections

People to Be Heard:

WORKING GROUP ACTION ITEMS: *These items were not called "action items" at the time of meeting; however work was assigned or volunteered.*

1. Post the run reconstruction assessment and data weighting report on the ADF&G Working Group website. (*Chris Sheldon, 05/15*)
2. Send out information to the Working Group regarding the state's regulations on number of nets allowed to be fishing at one time per household. (*Aaron Poetter, 06/08/15*)

WORKING GROUP MOTIONS: *For full verbiage and description of motions, see the section on Motions, starting on page 3.*

1. To approve the agenda as amended. *Passed (Unanimous).*
2. The schedule for 4" opportunity to harvest non-salmon species during times of Chinook salmon conservation should be set to extend weekly for 72 hrs. from 6am on Thursdays to 6am on Sundays in 2015. *Passed (Unanimous).*
3. To adjourn at 12:01pm. *Passed (Unanimous).*

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AGENDA ITEMS:

SUMMARY OF THE FORAKER GROUP MEETING:

Bev Hoffman (Chair) provided a verbal report of the Foraker Group meeting held on April 22-23 in Anchorage. The group worked toward improving relations between Working Group members and ADF&G. Chris Shelden (ADF&G) noted that Working Group members and the department agreed to cooperate with each other. Ms. Hoffman acknowledged USFWS's commitment to attending Working Group meetings. *(For more information on the Foraker Group meeting, please see the May 1 Informational Packet).*

USFWS SPECIAL ACTION TO MANAGE THE LOWER KUSKOKWIM RIVER:

Neil Lalonde (USFWS) reported on the federal Special Action that would limit Chinook salmon harvest to federally qualified users within the boundaries of the Yukon Delta National Wildlife Refuge (YDNWR). He reported that refuge managers were working with ADF&G and other constituents to further define the 2015 management plan. Robert Sundown (USFWS) commented that USFWS had visited ten villages.

ADF&G PRE-SEASON MANAGEMENT PLAN:

Aaron Poetter (ADF&G) discussed the 2015 management options for state managed waters. He noted that a recent News Release had been distributed detailing the Board of Fish (BOF) decisions and resulting regulations.

- **Potential fishing with short 6-inch mesh gillnets:** Dan Bergstrom (ADF&G) said the department was looking at a conservative management plan for Chinook salmon to allow for escapement and subsistence opportunities. ADF&G had not committed to any particular tools if a harvestable surplus of Chinook salmon was identified. ADF&G commented that the use of historical data and inseason assessment tools would likely result in a more conservative approach. John Linderman (ADF&G) commented that if the department did not have confidence that the run strength was consistent with 2014 or better, they would proceed with caution. USFWS said their management decisions could only be made using the available inseason assessment tools.
- **Input on a schedule allowing 4" mesh set gillnet openings to harvest non-salmon species and minimize incidental harvest of Chinook salmon:** With support from USFWS, the department suggested 72 hour harvest opportunities using 4" gear during Chinook salmon conservation and requested schedule recommendations from the Working Group. ADF&G and USFWS agreed to collaborate on a consistent schedule along the entire river. Mr. Poetter said the department had the authority to limit 4" mesh gear to setnet only with a bank orientation. USFWS did not plan to have 4" mesh drift opportunities.
Discussion: Some Working Group members commented that a 72 hour schedule would offer some harvest opportunity while still focusing on Chinook salmon conservation. Other members noted that many fishers in the lower river did not have 4" mesh gear. The issue of multiple nets per household was also mentioned. Mark Leary (Upriver Subsistence) made a motion. *(See Motion 2 on page 3)*
- **Location Requirement for 4" Mesh Set Gillnets:** Aaron Poetter discussed the regulatory definition of the "ordinary high water mark." He noted that due to Chinook salmon conservation, 4" gear would be restricted to 60' in length and would need to be within 100' from the ordinary high water mark on the river bank. He added that this would move the nets further from salmon migration routes. Working Group members suggested that ADF&G provide maps specific to the Kuskokwim River regarding this regulation. Neil Lalonde reported that USFWS was reviewing the BOF regulation changes and would continue to consider recommendations from constituents. *(For more information please see the May 1 Informational Packet).*
- **Schedule to Begin Subsistence Fishing Closure:** USFWS and ADF&G agreed that a May 1 closure may prevent people from harvesting non-salmon species. Zach Liller (ADF&G) reported that the tagging project below Bethel would help provide information on run timing and speed. Mark Leary commented that he would support a closure later in May, but reminded the group that in 2014 people

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caught king salmon on May 11. Dave Cannon (Middle River Subsistence) was concerned that some people may target king salmon. He encouraged conservation outreach to continue in the communities. Neil Lalonde said USFWS was considering a harvest permit for traditional use.

KUSKOKWIM RIVER CHINOOK SALMON RUN RECONSTRUCTION MODEL AND INVESTIGATIVE DATA WEIGHTING REPORT:

The Working Group had requested in March an overview of the state's Kuskokwim Chinook salmon run reconstruction model. Lew Coggins (USFWS) reported on the run reconstruction model assessment report that was provided to the Working Group. Mr. Coggins commented that the investigators found the model to be consistent with "standard practices of stock assessment models". Bev Hoffman requested more time to review the report and further discussion on May 27th.

SEAT ELECTIONS:

Evelyn Thomas from Crooked Creek recommended Tim Zaukar and David John from Crooked Creek to serve as members on the Working Group. David John was eligible for the Upriver Elder seat. Other Working Group members were in support. Further discussion was tabled until a later date.

PEOPLE TO BE HEARD:

- Grant Fairbanks from Bethel asked ADF&G to discuss their winter outreach. Aaron Poetter reported that ~20 staff attended the March three day meeting in Bethel. Zach Liller commented that he had traveled to Nikolai and McGrath and that other staff had traveled to Kwethluk. ADF&G was consulting with the Village of Akiak on in-season assessment projects. Hiroko Ikuta (ADF&G Subsistence Division) had visited Aniak in April. Mr. Poetter said ADF&G planned to visit more villages once staff was stationed in Bethel for the season.
- Jeff Sanders from Bethel commented on the 4" mesh gear and the web specification. He suggested limiting the amount of gear deployed by each household. Mr. Sanders also commented that there was a large amount of sheefish on drying racks in the middle and upper river communities during the early part of the season. He suggested a closure that would assist upriver residents in harvest opportunities for other fish species. Brian McCaffery (USFWS) responded that in 2014 the management did have a rolling closure. He said that people had been confused and there was a need for improved communication.

COMMENTS FROM THE WORKING GROUP:

- Bev Hoffman suggested a May 27th Working Group meeting. She commented that the Working Group would like to schedule radio "fish talk" shows to inform the public of the 2015 regulations.
- Lisa Feyereisen announced that Robert Sundown (USFWS) had been awarded USFWS Regent 7 Officer of the Year.

WORKING GROUP MOTIONS:

Motion 1: To approve the agenda as amended. Passed (Unanimous).

USFWS Special Action was added to the agenda.

Motion 2: The schedule for 4" opportunity to harvest non-salmon species during times of Chinook salmon conservation should be set to extend weekly for 72 hrs. from 6am on Thursdays to 6am on Sundays in 2015. Passed (Unanimous).

Some Working Group members were concerned with conservation and discussed the potential for incidental Chinook salmon harvest. Many members thought the 72 hour opportunities provided more conservation than the previous year.

Motion 3: To adjourn at 12:01pm. Passed (Unanimous).

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WORKING GROUP ATTENDANCE:

MEMBER SEAT:	NAME:
DOWNRIVER ELDER	James Charles
UPRIVER ELDER	<i>Vacant</i>
LOWER RIVER SUBSISTENCE	<i>Absent</i>
MIDDLE RIVER SUBSISTENCE	Dave Cannon
UPRIVER SUBSISTENCE	Mark Leary
HEADWATERS SUBSISTENCE	Daniel Esai
MEMBER AT LARGE	Fritz Charles
WESTERN INTERIOR RAC	Ray Collins
YK DELTA RAC	<i>Absent</i>
COMMERCIAL FISHING	<i>Absent</i>
SPORT FISHING	Bev Hoffman
PROCESSOR	<i>Absent</i>
ADF&G	Aaron Poetter
CHAIR	Bev Hoffman

Other Participants:

ADF&G Comm. Fish: Aaron Poetter, Brittany Blain, Nick Smith, Chris Shelden, Zac Liller, Dan Bergstrom, John Linderman, Jan Conitz, Commissioner Sam Cotton

Sport Fish: John Chythlook

Subsistence Division: Hiroko Ikuta, Andrew Brenner

ADF&G Liaison Team: Jennifer Yuhas

USFWS: Neil Lalonde, Lew Coggins, Robert Sundown, Ken Harper, Brian McCaffery

OSM: Don Rivard

Ben Matheson (KYUK Radio)
Lisa Demer (AK Dispatch)
Grant Fairbanks
Jeff Sanders
Henry Cole

Barbara Carlson (Upper River Subsistence alternate)
Lisa Feyereisen (Middle River Subsistence alternate)
Nick Kameroff (Middle River Subsistence alternate)

GLOSSARY OF ABBREVIATIONS:

Alaska Department of Fish and Game (**ADF&G**), Orutsararmiut Native Council (**ONC**), Kuskokwim Native Association (**KNA**), 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**), 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**)