

# Kuskokwim River Salmon Management Working Group

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

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

**June 17, 2014**

Meeting called to order at 1:30pm on Tuesday June 17, adjourned at 6:00pm. Total meeting time was 4.5 hours. Ten voting members were present and a quorum was maintained throughout the meeting.

## **AGENDA ITEMS:**

### **People to be heard**

**Continuing Business:** Run assessment and management actions

### **Old Business Discussion Topics:**

1. Discussion of suggestion to delay commercial salmon fishing until 1 August 2014.
2. Outreach, public announcements

### **New Business Discussion Topics:**

1. Update from Mike Williams on the Yupiit Nation meeting, June 12-13, 2014
2. Update on law enforcement activities from ADF&G and USFWS
3. Update on radio talk show with ADF&G, USFWS and Working Group members
4. Update on PSA's regarding fishing restrictions and Chinook salmon conservation
5. Update on dipnet fishery

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

1. To share Working Group Talking Points and flyers with Lower Kalskag so they can better inform community members of the Chinook salmon conservation concerns and management regulations. (*Jen Peeks, completed 6/18/2014*)
2. Distribute the recent beaver dam study to Kuskokwim Tribal Organizations.
3. Include the KNA subsistence survey summary in the next Working Group Informational Packet. (*Jen Peeks/ Chris Shelden*)
4. Provide a report on statewide Chinook salmon fisheries at the next Working Group meeting. (*ADF&G*)
5. Provide an update on a possible elder fishery by Friday, June 20 (*ADF&G*)
6. Request continued input from biologists Bill Bechtol (AVCP) and Lou Coggins (USFWS). (*AVCP, USFWS*)
7. The Working Group, USFWS, and ADF&G will participate in a 2-hour KYUK bi-lingual radio call-in show on Monday June 23, 2014 from 10:00am- 12:00pm.

## **WORKING GROUP MOTIONS:**

1. Approval of the agenda as amended. *Motion passed (unanimously).*
2. To have a Working Group meeting on Friday, June 20, to focus specifically on a recommendation on whether or not to open up to a larger mesh size. *Motion failed (0 yeas, 8 nays, 1 abstention)*
3. The Working Group supports federal and state managers to be given a few days to look at the numbers in the Bethel Test Fishery and decide on an opener starting in the lower Kuskokwim River as early as Friday June, 20. *Motion passed (9 yeas, 0 nays).*
4. To not have a commercial opener regardless of abundance of chum salmon until August 1, 2014. *Motion failed (6 yeas, 3 nays).*
5. Adjournment. *Motion passed (unanimous).*

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## **PEOPLE TO BE HEARD:**

1. Tim Andrew (AVCP) commented on the need to develop a unified management plan for the future. He reported people were feeling anxious due to food insecurity and concerned regarding the limited drying weather available for processing. He commented that people would like assurance that they will have the ability to harvest fish before the flies and bad weather come.
2. Chris Shelden (ADF&G) requested that contributions to the Working Group Informational Packet be sent to ADF&G no later than 12noon the day prior to the scheduled meeting. He stressed that staff could not guarantee that any late submissions would be included.
3. Fred Phillip from Kwigillingok commented that many people in his area had no fish on their drying racks and they noticed that the majority of king salmon had already passed. He requested that the management boundary restrictions be lifted so they could fish at their historical fishing sites in marine waters near the mouth of the Kuskokwim River.
4. Walter Morgan from Lower Kalskag, a subsistence fisher with the Central Kuskokwim Advisory Committee, reported that fishing had slowed and that it was difficult to catch fish with 4-inch mesh gillnets. He reported catching a few sockeye salmon, but that chum salmon were infrequent. Mr. Morgan expressed that the community felt stressed due to the restrictions, but they supported the conservation efforts for future Chinook salmon runs. He suggested that in the lower portion of the river, they shorten allowable nets to 150 feet in length as opposed to 300 feet.
5. Nastasia Levi from Lower Kalskag commented that some of the Kuskokwim River residents were still confused regarding the conservation efforts. She requested more information for their Tribal Gathering.
6. Palasa Evan from Lower Kalskag asked for the opportunity to fish. She was worried about the few fish being harvested.
7. Moses Pavilla (translated by Fritz Charles) from Atmautluak commented that he did not like the idea of dipnetting for salmon. He said he was unable to use dipnets because of his age. He commented that he had observed a lot of fish in the river. He tried using the 4-inch mesh gillnet but was not successful. Mr. Pavilla suggested a connection between the first fishing restrictions in the 1980's and the beginning of the decline in king salmon. He requested that the restrictions be relaxed and that 6-inch mesh gear be allowed.
8. Moses Littlefish from Upper Kalskag recommended going back to 6-inch mesh gillnet.
9. Henry Tikiun Sr. from Atmautluak requested a 1-3 day opener to target chum and sockeye salmon to help ease the tension among people. He commented that with a one day opener they would not get too many fish.
10. Nick Alexie from Lower Kalskag requested that the restrictions be lifted to provide for a few days of fishing.
11. Carl Motgin from Napakiak informed the Working Group that the Elders in his community requested a fishing opportunity for chum and sockeye salmon as they observed that the Chinook salmon run had passed. He commented that in the past they did not use dipnets and were uncertain about their use in swift currents.
12. Nastasia Evan from Lower Kalskag was concerned about illegal fishing for salmon in the ocean. She was also worried that beaver dams restrict fish migration.
13. Edward Nicholai from Atmautluak was concerned that the tundra villages did not have any salmon. He asked the state to have an opener in order to harvest fish.

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## **CONTINUING BUSINESS:**

### **1. Subsistence Reports:**

- **Lowest River Reports:** James Charles (Downriver Elder) commented that a few people in the Tuntutuliak area had reported that they had not been successful with the dipnet fishing. He said that he did not understand why they were not catching. He reported that people were worried that there was no date set for future openers. Mr. Charles was also concerned of overharvesting whitefish.

Charlie Brown (Commercial Fisher) said that a few boats from Eek had gone to the Quinhagak area to harvest salmon, and warned that it was risky to travel that distance in marine waters in small boats. He commented that he believed the king salmon had migrated passed their area.

- **ONC In-season Subsistence Report:** Iyana Dull (ONC) reported that ONC had surveyed 24 families. They reported observing 132 setnets from Church Slough to below Napaskiak. (*See the June 17 Information Packet for full survey results.*)
- **Lower River Subsistence:** Mike Williams (Middle River Subsistence) reported that in Tuluksak, Akiak and Akiachak 70-80% of fishcamps had not started harvesting salmon, but he had noticed a lot of whitefish hanging on the dry racks. Mr. Williams commented that a few people had tried dipnetting with no success. He also said that Akiachak had not started harvesting their allotted fish for their social and cultural permit.

Mary Sattler (Middle River Subsistence alternate) reported that in Steamboat Slough a few camps had several fish in their smokehouses and drying racks, including whitefish and salmon. She commented that many families were using 2 setnets and were catching several sockeye.

Bev Hoffman reported that she had received several phone calls voicing concerns about the number of setnets in the river.

Fritz Charles reported that many people were not fishing. He said that one person tried dipnetting but had less success than with setnets.

- **KNA In season Subsistence:** Megan Leary (KNA) commented that people in the middle and upper river communities were harvesting a large amount of whitefish. One family from Kalskag reported being done fishing, having harvested 40 king salmon and 20-25 Sheefish. She said this family was fishing for 4 households using a 4-inch mesh set gillnet. Many families were fishing for several families or were waiting for a larger mesh gillnet opener.

### **• Middle River Subsistence:**

Lisa Feyereisen (Middle River Subsistence alternate) reported from Chuathbaluk down to Kalskag 5-6 smokehouses were operating and had primarily chum, sockeye and Chinook salmon. She reported that there were not many setnets in the area. Ms. Feyereisen reported seeing some law enforcement in the area.

Bob Aloysius (YK Delta RAC) reported ~10 families that were putting up whitefish and Sheefish. He commented that people were thankful for what fish they had been able to harvest.

Nick Kameroff (Middle River Subsistence) reported that there had been an increase of sockeye and chum salmon in the Aniak area. He commented that it was his opinion that the majority of the king salmon had passed and that the second run of king salmon had begun.

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- **Upriver Subsistence Reports:**

Mark Leary (Upriver Subsistence) commented that it appeared that many king salmon had made it up the river. He commented that he drifted using his 4-inch mesh gillnet and caught 5 king salmon all over 20 lbs.

- **Headwaters Subsistence Report:** Ray Collins (Western Interior RAC) reported that king salmon had started coming to McGrath. He reported that people are only using setnets catching up to 8-10 king salmon per day. He expressed concern that there was still confusion regarding gear size restrictions.

## 2. Overview of Kuskokwim River Salmon Run Assessment Projects:

- Bethel Test Fish: Colton Lipka (ADF&G) reported that water temperature remained within historical average range, water clarity was above average, and that water level had come up and was near the average. Mr. Lipka adjusted the numbers on page 8-10 of the Informational Packet for BTF: Chinook salmon: 343, chum salmon: 255 and sockeye salmon: 108 as of June 16. He went over the daily CPUE. (*For more information on the BTF, please see the June 17 Informational Packet*)

Kevin Schaberg (ADF&G) reported seeing an increase of chum and sockeye salmon in the river relative to king salmon. Mr. Schaberg informed Working Group participants that reports from commercial and subsistence fishers in the past estimated the run timing to be from 3-5 days from Tuntutuliak to Bethel. Mr. Schaberg cautioned that it was still too early to determine escapement.

- Weirs: Kevin Schaberg reported that the ADF&G weir projects were installed as scheduled (*See Informational Packet on page 16 for more information*) Steve Miller with USFWS reported they were in the process of installing the Kwethluk River weir and would move on to the Tuluksak River weir later in the week. Ken Harper (USFWS) reported he had been working on locating extra funding for the Takotna River weir with no success.

- Radio Tagging Project: Zach Liller (ADF&G) reported that the tagging project near Tuntutuliak was a pilot project with the purpose of better understanding the run timing of salmon. He said there was also a potential for the project to assist in abundance estimation. Mr. Liller went through the data in the Informational Packet for both the Kalskag and Lower River tagging projects. In addition, he provided detail on the process of capturing and tagging the king salmon. (*For more information on the tagging projects please see p. 12 of the Informational Packet*)

- 3. **Intercept Fishery Report:** Kevin Schaberg (ADF&G) reported 13,421 Chinook salmon by-catch for all Bering Sea ground fish fisheries.

- 4. **Weather Report:** Bev Hoffman noted an improvement in the forecasted weather.

- 5. **Recommendations:**

- Aaron Poetter (ADF&G) reported that ADF&G was still considering an elder fishery for upper river communities, though no determination had been made. He reported an opening for a dipnet and fishwheel fishery in the upper river starting on June 19<sup>th</sup>. Mr. Poetter also reported that ADF&G would be looking into a subsistence opener at the mouth of the river toward the coast to provide an opportunity for fishing in collaboration with USFWS.
- Brian McCaffrey (USFWS) indicated potential for providing a driftnet fishing opportunity for salmon perhaps by the end of the week. He reported that managers wanted to evaluate the data for a few more days. He reported that he was confident that the Chinook salmon run was early for the 2014 season, but that managers were unable to determine the quality of the run at this time. Mr. McCaffrey noted that the conservation of king salmon remained the USFWS's main objective.

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## **OLD BUSINESS:**

1. **Recommendation by a Working Group member to not open any commercial salmon fishing until 1 August 2014.** (*See Motion 4 for Working Group Comments*)
2. **Outreach, public announcements:** Bev Hoffman reported that Casie Stockdale compiled outreach activities by the Working Group regarding Chinook salmon conservation. USFWS created flyers for federal waters highlighting the restrictions and regulations.

## **NEW BUSINESS:**

1. **Update from Mike Williams on the Yupiit Nation meeting June 12-13:** Mike Williams discussed the recent Yupiit Nation meetings and the need to move toward a co-management system. (*Please see summary on pg. 17-18 in the June 17 Informational Packet*)
2. **Update on law enforcement activities:** Brian McCaffrey (USFWS) reported a compliance rate of over 90%. He commented that when illegally caught fish were confiscated they were distributed to the villages.
3. **Update on a radio talk show with ADF&G, USFWS and Working Group Members:** Suggestion was made by Fritz Charles to have the radio show on Monday June 23, 2014 from 10:00am-12:00pm in order to allow time for Yup'ik translation.
4. **Update on dipnet fishery:** Aaron Poetter (ADF&G) reported he had not received any reports on successful dipnetting. Roberta Chavez reported that ONC had purchased 10 dipnets that would be available on loan to the community.

## **WORKING GROUP MOTIONS:**

### **Motion 1: To approve the agenda as amended. Motion passed (unanimous):**

**Motion 2: To have a Working Group meeting on Friday, June 20, to focus specifically on a recommendation on whether or not to open up to a larger mesh size.** (*Motion failed (0 yeas, 8 nays, 1 abstention)*): Some Working Group members were concerned that scheduling a Friday meeting to discuss a possible opener could delay such an opener. Others were concerned about the number of people that could travel down river to fish. Brian McCaffrey (USFWS) noted that chum and sockeye were now abundant and fishers would have less impact on Chinook salmon. Bob Aloysius reported that upriver people wanted gear restrictions to be relaxed to allow up to 6-inch mesh gillnets and up to 25 fathoms. Working Group members also expressed concern, saying downriver channels change and time was needed to locate appropriate drifting locations. State, federal and AVCP biologists cautioned the need to remain conservative.

**Motion 3: The Working Group supports federal and state managers to be given a few days to look at the numbers in the Bethel Test Fishery and decide on an opener starting in the lower Kuskokwim River as early as Friday June, 20.** (*Motion passed (9 yeas, 0 nays)*): Working Group members agreed that it was important to allow managers to consider the options and possibly open subsistence fishing opportunity prior to having another Working Group meeting.

**Motion 4: To not have a commercial opener regardless of abundance of chum salmon until August 1, 2014.** (*Motion failed (6 yeas, 3 nays)*): There was discussion regarding concerns over when commercial salmon fishing opportunity would be allowed. A Working Group member pointed out that if opportunity were provided to fish for chum salmon in mid-July, there was potential that king salmon could still be in the commercial districts. It was also discussed that in 2014, subsistence fishers would be relying on other

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salmon species, and that a commercial opening down river could negatively impact that subsistence harvest. Concern was expressed regarding the difficulty of assessing subsistence harvest inseason. Several members were apprehensive about the motion due to the possibility that the king salmon run could be passed well before 1 August, and that restricting commercial fishers represent an unnecessary hardship.

**Motion 5: Adjournment.** Motion passed (*unanimous*).

## **COMMENTS FROM THE WORKING GROUP**

Fritz Charles commented that he would contact the lower river villages regarding the possibility of a subsistence opener. He also reported that he had been hearing threats of violence, but that he did not support them. He said that subsistence fishers were stressed by the restrictions. He cautioned people to be careful.

Bob Aloysius requested that people along the river be treated as equal when it comes to management. He also requested that threats be reported to the authorities.

Mike Williams recommended continued communication with the federally recognized tribes regarding management. Mr. Williams reported that the community of Akiak did not agree with having their social and cultural practices regulated by a permit system but wanted to explore other options. He commented that the people in his area would like immediate relief from the current restrictions.

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## **WORKING GROUP ATTENDANCE:**

MEMBER SEAT:	NAME:
DOWNRIVER ELDER	James Charles
UPRIVER ELDER	<i>Absent</i>
LOWER RIVER SUBSISTENCE	Mike Williams
MIDDLE RIVER SUBSISTENCE	Lisa Feyereisen
UPRIVER SUBSISTENCE	Mark Leary
HEADWATERS SUBSISTENCE	<i>Absent</i>
MEMBER AT LARGE	Fritz Charles
WESTERN INTERIOR RAC	Ray Collins
YK DELTA RAC	Bob Aloysius
COMMERCIAL FISHING	Charlie Brown
SPORT FISHING	LaMont Albertson
PROCESSOR	Henry Mitchell
ADF&G	Aaron Poetter
CHAIR	Bev Hoffman

## **Other Participants:**

ADF&G Comm. Fish: Chris Shelden, Kevin Schaberg, Colton Lipka, John Linderman, Dan Bergstrom, Zach Liller, Jan Conitz, Katie Froning, Jen Peeks  
Subsistence Division: Dave Runfola, Oden Miller, Hazel Nelson

USFWS: Brian McCaffrey, Ken Harper, Steve Miller, Robert Sundown, Spencer Reardon

OSM: Don Rivard, George Pappas

Dan Gillikin (KNA) Megan Leary (KNA) Roberta Chavez (ONC) Iyana Dull (ONC) Alissa Joseph (ONC) Bill Bechtol (AVCP) Tim Andrew (AVCP) Doug Molyneaux (Unaffiliated) Kate Schaberg (NVGT) Will Heartman (NVGT) Buddy Kutch (NVGT) Napakiak Tribal Office Adrian Boelens (KRWC) Creighton University students Edward Nicholai Carl Motgin Henry Tikiun Sr.	Barbara Carlson (Upper River Subsistence alternate) Nick Kameroff (Middle River Subsistence alternate) Mary Sattler (Lower River Subsistence alternate) Casic Stockdale (Lower River Subsistence alternate) Greg Hoffman Jr. (Commercial Fishing alternate) Ben Matheson (KYUK Radio) Nastasia Levi (Kalskag) Anita Williams (Kalskag) Nick Alexie (Kalskag) Palasa Evan (Kalskag) Nastasia Evan Moses Littlefish Moses Pavilla (Atmautluak) Fred Phillip (Kwigillingok) Adolph Lupie (Tuntutuliak)
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## **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**)

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