

Kuskokwim River Salmon Management Working Group

1 (800) 315-6338 (MEET) Code: 58756# (KUSKO)
ADF&G Bethel toll free: 1 (855) 933-2433

Meeting Summary

June 19, 2013

Meeting called to order at 10:10 am and adjourned at 12:35 pm. Eight full voting members were present and a quorum was established.

AGENDA ITEMS:

Continuing Business: Run assessment and management actions.

Old Business:

1. Clarification of the Working Group's position on the use of 6-inch gear.

New Business Discussion Topics: N/A

WORKING GROUP ACTION ITEMS: N/A

WORKING GROUP MOTIONS:

1. To accept the agenda as amended. Motion passed unanimously.
2. To accept ADF&G's recommendation to maintain tributary restrictions in the Aniak, Tuluksak, Kisaralik, Kasigluk, and Kwethluk Rivers; maintain restrictions in Kuskokuak and Old Kuskokuak sloughs, and leave the remainder of the Kuskokwim River open to all gear types and gillnet mesh sizes. Motion passed unanimously.

PEOPLE TO BE HEARD: *Working Group members provide comments at the end of the meeting under "Comments from the Working Group." People to be Heard is reserved for non-working Group members speaking on items not included in the Agenda.*

1. Henry Tikkiun, Sr. reported that he has seen unmarked setnets that have been out all summer. Ken Actin (Alaska Wildlife Troopers) replied that the Troopers have pulled many nets left unattended, one with wasted and rotten beaver, king salmon, and chum salmon. Ken said if the buoys are marked properly, he can identify the net and contact the owners to remind them to tend their nets. He urged people to be more responsible for their setnet sites.
2. Stuart Currie (speaking as himself, not as a member) thanked the many people in Bethel that have been giving him salmon to eat this year.
3. Tim Andrew (AVCP) said that he has seen many photos of large Kuskokwim king salmon posted on Facebook. He said that he was encouraged by the 40 pound king that he caught recently.

CONTINUING BUSINESS:

1. Subsistence Reports

- Lower River Reports:

James Charles (Downriver Elder) said that the mouth of the river was experiencing wind and high water, which he hoped would help fish go upriver. He said that most people in Tuntutuliak weren't fishing as hard for kings anymore and were waiting for chums. James said that when he used his 6-inch gear he caught a mix of king, chum, and sockeye, and he had not used 8-inch net in 2012. He said that other people have voluntarily switched to 6-inch gear to let the big kings go upriver. James commented that, overall, "People are happy and are catching what they want." He said that most people had already met their subsistence needs for Chinook and had no complaints.

Henry Lupie (Member at Large) also said that fishing for Chinook had slowed down because most people have harvested all the Chinook they need. Henry said he, like others, would switch to using his 5 ½-inch net to catch chum. He commented that at the beginning of the season people were anxious to fish because they were worried about the possibility of closures, but now they were relaxed and are enjoying not having to fish "full force." Henry noted that most people fish on the incoming tide or before the high tide shifts.

Charlie Brown (Commercial Fisher) said that many people in Eek slowed down subsistence fishing and seemed pleased with their harvests. He noted that people had hurried to fish this year because they were concerned about possible closures. Charlie said he was ready to put his salmon in the smokehouse.

Bev Hoffman (Sport Fish) said that she had talked to people who were generally happy but concerned about conservation for sustainability. She said that some people tried to fish early because they heard rumors that subsistence fishing would close June 11. Bev also commented that many families, including hers, chose to use nets smaller than 8-inch, and made sure to process everything. She told the group that she cut back this year by harvesting 28 kings for four families instead of the usual 80 kings. Bev said that the sunny weather was nice and, "Life is pretty good compared to last year."

Fritz Charles (Member at Large) noted that out of the 20 Chinook he caught only 2 were females. He said that his in-laws only caught 7 females out of 26 Chinook. Fritz said he is happy and has many more salmon in the freezer than last year.

Mike Williams (Lower River Subsistence) said that, "This year is much better" and that, "All in all, people are happy." He commented that people voluntarily switched to smaller gear to allow the first of the Chinook run to pass, and now many fishermen are using 6-inch or 5 ½ inch gear to catch sockeye. Mike said that he didn't anticipate food shortages this winter.

John Andrew (YK Delta RAC) said that the majority of subsistence fishermen were happy with the amount of kings they harvested. He said that about half of

them had switched to smaller gear and were catching equal numbers of king, sockeye, and chum.

- **ONC Inseason Subsistence Report:**

Alissa Joseph (ONC) reported that some families were “half-way done” with subsistence salmon fishing, while others were finishing fixing up their fish camps. No families fishing reported poor catches. *See the June 19 Information Packet for full survey results.*

- **Middle River Reports:** *none*

- **KNA Inseason Subsistence Reports:**

Dan Gillikin (KNA) commented that fishing was still slow but better than last year. In Kalskag, he said that people who fished all night only caught a couple of fish per drift. Dan said that most people were waiting for bigger densities of fish before they went subsistence fishing.

- **Upper River Subsistence Reports:**

Mark Leary (Upriver Subsistence) said, “We sure have a lot to be thankful for: no major flooding, good weather, lots of wood, and pretty good fishing.” He noted that Crooked Creek had been catching kings regularly since June 11, and speculated that those fish passed Bethel under the ice or before anyone had nets in the water. Mark said that he had never seen so many large Chinook so early in Napaimute. He noted that he was catching 30 pound fish with his 6-inch mesh 50-fathom net. He remarked that another unusual thing about this season was that the better fishing was on the south side of the river instead of the north side. However, he said he was concerned because the fishing had “dropped to almost nothing” in the past few days because of all the harvest in the lower river. He warned the Working Group, “We still need to be careful. If I’m looking at the Bethel Test Fish numbers right, this isn’t that strong of a run that has been fished heavily. It might be time to think about slowing things down in the lower river.”

Barbara Carlson (Upriver Subsistence alternate) said that people had just started catching kings in Sleetmute, Stony River, and Red Devil. She said that average catches were 1 king per drift, and all medium and small sized males so far.

- **Headwaters Report:**

Dan Esai (Headwaters Subsistence) said that his family had caught a large female king in Blackwater.

2. Overview of Kuskokwim River salmon run assessment projects:

- **Bethel Test Fishery:**

Colton Lipka (ADF&G) reported that the water level had dropped and was closer to the 10-year average, water temperature was now slightly above average, and both the Mainstem Kuskokwim and many tributaries remained muddy.

Chinook salmon:

Kevin Schaberg (ADF&G) interpreted the Late Run Timing figure for Chinook salmon in the June 19 Information Packet. He said was at least a 90% chance or better of meeting the lower bound of the escapement goal, which was a conservative target. He also clarified that the run at the BTF site was about 1 week late this year and not "extremely" late, even with the late breakup. Kevin summed up by saying, "Based on BTF information it looks like we are ok right now."

Chum and sockeye salmon:

Colton Lipka reported that the chum and sockeye runs were building.

Comments/Questions:

Bev Hoffman asked about the free fish bin where BTF donates their catches. Colton Lipka replied that this year the bin will be at the pullout by Brown Slough so that it is accessible to more Bethel residents and people from other communities.

Charlie Brown asked if the channel changed at the BTF site each year. Kevin Schaberg replied that ADF&G had mapped the contours of the river bottom in 2012 and will continue to monitor the bottom profile. Bev Hoffman explained to Charlie that the BTF site might not be where she fishes, but the project has given good information the last few years.

Dan Gillikin (KNA) requested that all years on the BTF Cumulative CPUE graph reflected the new Management Plan (*established in Spring 2013*). Travis Elison agreed because years 2008, 2009, and 2011 would then show as meeting the new escapement goal. Kevin Schaberg pointed out that in 2012, the new Chinook escapement goals had been achieved, but only through significant restriction. Alice Bailey (ADF&G) suggested adding written comments to the graph that explained whether or not escapement was achieved for each year as well and which restrictions (or lack thereof) were in place. Bev Hoffman commented that she wanted to see when people met subsistence needs, as well.

There was some discussion about Chinook age composition, sampling, and subsistence calendars:

- Charlie Brown asked what the forecast for Chinook salmon was for 2013, and if there was a forecast for the ages of returning salmon. Kevin Schaberg replied that the 2013 forecast was 160,000-240,000. He could not, however, give an age forecast because "age compositions don't dramatically change year to year."
- Mark Leary said that there seemed to be larger Chinook salmon in the 2013 run, so it would be interesting to know their age. Kevin said that he would try to provide some preliminary age information collected from BTF Chinook scale samples at the next meeting.
- Zach Liller (ADF&G) commented that ONC and ADF&G have been partners for 10 years helping to collect scale samples from subsistence fishermen. He discussed the importance of this data, the fact that fishers are paid to participate, and asked for volunteers in 2013.

- Zach Liller also noted that the 2013 subsistence fishing calendar distributed to Kuskokwim communities had good information on how to age fish by reading scales. Henry Lupie commented that some people refused to fill out their subsistence fishing calendar in 2012 because they were upset about closures. He thought there would be more participation this year because of the increased lottery amount for completed calendars. Chris Shelden (ADF&G) told people to contact him or Alice Bailey if they would like to receive a calendar or pick one up at the Bethel office.
- Weirs: Brittany Blain (ADF&G) gave an update on ADF&G and USFWS weir project installations. *Please see June 19 Information Packet.*
- 3. **Weather:** Colton Lipka (ADF&G) said the forecast was for sun, highs in the 70's and lows in the 40's, then clouds later in the week. Bev Hoffman noted that Alaska had been hotter than Hawaii and Miami on June 18.
- 3. **ADF&G Recommendation:** To maintain tributary restrictions in the Aniak, Tuluksak, Kisaralik, Kasigluk, and Kwethluk Rivers; maintain restrictions in Kuskokuak and Old Kuskokuak sloughs, and leave the remainder of the Kuskokwim River open to all gear types and gillnet mesh sizes.
 - Remarks by state and federal staff:

Travis Elison clarified that the recommendation was the same as the one he gave last week. Kevin Schaberg clarified that the above tributary restrictions included all rivers that flow into them.
 - Questions/Comments:

James Charles thanked Travis Elison for keeping the river open to subsistence fishing. He said that even though people were not fishing as hard, they still do not want closures because not everyone had met their subsistence needs yet. James mentioned that some people were worried that the June 19 Working Group meeting would lead to an immediate fishing closure.

Henry Lupie said that the manner in which the recommendations were given had improved: "Instead of in a closed room, they are given in the open." Tom Doolittle (USFWS) explained that state and federal staff continues to meet frequently to discuss data. He also commented that USFWS was still concerned about achieving escapement in the Kwethluk River.

Bev Hoffman commented that she was happy that Tom Doolittle brought up conservation concerns because she had talked with people who were worried about the Chinook run sustaining all the fishing.

OLD BUSINESS:

1. Mark Leary asked that the Working Group clarify their position on publically supporting or not supporting the use of 6-inch gear for Chinook conservation.

Bev Hoffman said that she wanted to people to stop using 8-inch mesh because doing so would help get large female Chinook to the spawning grounds. She

asked biologists if using only 7-inch or 6-inch mesh would be effective for conservation. Travis Elison replied that ADF&G did not have much data on 7-inch gear in the Kuskokwim River. He said that smaller mesh, like 6-inch, targets the center of whatever size class is in the river. Tom Doolittle agreed that 6-inch mesh is a conservation tool when there is saturation of other species. Bev Hoffman said that she thought that the Working Group had done a good job of encouraging people to process all fish, including chum. However, she pointed out that "the preferred fish is the king," and that people continue to say that they don't want chum.

Travis Elison commented that the Department's standpoint is that the purpose of a gear restriction of 6-inch mesh or less is for conservation of king salmon, so "we cannot enact a 6-inch or less mesh restriction unless we are concerned about meeting [Chinook salmon] escapement goals. Today the situation is that we are not concerned, so we are not recommending..." a restriction. Travis also expressed the desire to provide opportunity to families who only owned salmon nets of 6-inch or greater (6 ½ and up) to harvest king salmon.

Kevin Schaberg pointed out that some people using 8-inch mesh were voluntarily waiting for the first part of the Chinook run to pass upriver. Subsistence reports indicated that many others had voluntarily reduced mesh size in 2013 for Chinook conservation. He said that both of these actions had been encouraged by the Working Group's public outreach efforts. Kevin explained that restricting to 6-inch mesh at this time, "...would be trying to do too many things at once."

Mark explained that the issue had come up because he had suggested making an announcement on KYUK radio to tell people to use 6-inch mesh. However, he was fine with tabling the discussion until a later time. Chris Sheldon added that Working Group members were always welcome to state their opinions as individuals.

Bev Hoffman asked what point of the run had the greatest number of females. Kevin Schaberg replied that there was not a specific time, but generally more large females come later in the run. Bev commented that many people reported very few females in their catches so far. She hoped that the Department would consider restricting mesh size later to protect females. Travis reassured Bev, "If we do find ourselves in a situation where we are concerned about meeting escapement goals, and we follow the Management Plan that we worked so hard on, 6-inch or less mesh would be the restriction to conserve king salmon."

James Charles agreed with recommending, rather than restricting, people to use 6-inch gear. He said that people were finished harvesting for kings at the mouth of the river, but he sees many people fishing in the Bethel area. He thinks they would go along with choosing to use 6-inch gear.

Charlie Brown commented that people say there are two kinds of king salmon: the small silvery ones and the large red-colored ones. Charlie asked the Department to explain that all salmon are in the river to spawn. Kevin Schaberg said that he has also heard the misconception that the smaller, bright silver salmon are in the river to feed and return to the ocean. Kevin clearly stated, "All salmon, king salmon included, are there to go upriver, spawn, and die; and they

do not go back out to the ocean.” He clarified that if it were true that smaller kings return to the ocean, the Department would not recommend using smaller gear to target them.

NEW BUSINESS: N/A

WORKING GROUP MOTIONS:

MOTION 1: To accept the agenda as amended. Motion passed unanimously (8 yeas, 0 nays).

MOTION 2: To accept ADF&G’s recommendation. *See ADF&G Recommendation under Continuing Business.* Motion passed unanimously (8 yeas, 0 nays).

COMMENTS FOR MOTION 2:

Please see Agreement/Disagreement/Other Comments under the ADF&G Recommendation in Continuing Business

GENERAL COMMENTS FROM WORKING GROUP MEMBERS:

Henry Lupie commented that it was his understanding that members were supposed to pass the word around to use 6-inch gear. He said that when people asked him and James Charles if they could use 8-inch gear, they encouraged them to use smaller mesh. Henry also commented that when people first go out to catch king salmon, they just want to catch a few fresh fish to put on the table. This year they caught more than expected early on.

Bev Hoffman commented that she was still concerned about how many people come to fish and take salmon out of the area: “Nowhere else in the state do we have a king run like we do here this year.” She explained that many people move to Anchorage because of the cheaper cost of living and then want to return to their roots to fish. Bev said that even though she feels bad, she encourages her relatives not to do that anymore. She noted that she does bring her family members “a dinner, not a cooler,” of Kuskokwim kings sometimes. Don Rivard (OSM) replied that AVCP’s proposal for the Bethel airport and Aniak airport was under review.

John Andrew said that the Kwethluk River was still under 4-inch mesh restrictions. He commented that catching kings is hard for his people, especially because of gas prices. Nevertheless, he reported that his people are pretty happy right now. John added that earlier in June his community asked USFWS and ADF&G to visit in order to discuss using 4 1/2 –inch whitefish nets.

Charlie Brown asked that people stop using 8-inch mesh toward the end of the Chinook season. He thanked USFWS and ADF&G for their recommendations so far.

Casie Stockdale said that this seemed to be a very positive meeting. She asked about the male to female sex ratio caught in BTF. Colton Lipka replied that there were quite a few more males than females so far.

WORKING GROUP ATTENDANCE:

MEMBER SEAT:	NAME:
DOWNRIVER ELDER	James Charles
UPRIVER ELDER	<i>Vacant</i>
LOWER RIVER SUBSISTENCE	Mike Williams / Casie Stockdale
MIDDLE RIVER SUBSISTENCE	<i>Absent</i>
UPRIVER SUBSISTENCE	Mark Leary
HEADWATERS SUBSISTENCE	<i>Absent</i>
MEMBER AT LARGE	Henry Lupie
WESTERN INTERIOR RAC	<i>Absent</i>
YK DELTA RAC	John W. Andrew
COMMERCIAL FISHING	Charlie Brown
SPORT FISHING	Bev Hoffman
PROCESSOR	Stuart Currie
ADF&G	Travis Elison
CHAIR	Fritz Charles

Other Participants:	
<p><u>ADF&G Comm. Fish:</u> Chris Shelden, Brittany Blain, Colton Lipka, Zach Liller, Kevin Schaberg, Travis Elison, Laura Junnge, Alice Bailey</p> <p><u>Sport Fish:</u> John Chythlook</p> <p><u>Subsistence Division:</u> Lorraine Navarro, Dave Runfola, Hiroko Ikuta</p>	
<p><u>USFWS:</u> Tom Doolittle, Gene Peltola, Jr., Stuart Cogswell, Robert Sundown</p> <p><u>OSM:</u> Don Rivard, Trent Lievich</p>	
<p>Dan Gillikin (KNA) Joachim Larson (ONC) Alissa Joseph (ONC) Roberta Chavez (ONC) Shawna Thoma (Senator Begich) Gerri Sumpter (Senator Murkowski) Megan Leary (Napaimute) Henry Tikkiun, Sr. (Atmautluak) Kate Schaberg (Georgetown) Timothy Andrew (AVCP) Kate Schaberg (Georgetown) Ken Actin (AK Wildlife Troopers)</p>	<p>Angela Denning-Barnes (KYUK radio) Barbara Carlson (Upriver Subsistence alternate) Casie Stockdale (Downriver Subsistence alternate) Greg Hoffman, Jr. (Commercial Fisher alternate) Tony Chatwan (National Fish and Wildlife Foundation- NFWF) Carla Evan (NFWF) Ron Rimmelman (Nova Gold) Christian Volnyakawski (NFWF) Claude Gasko (NFWF) Anne Rappleport (NFWF)</p>

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**, **Working Group**, or **WG**), Sustainable Escapement Goal (**SEG**), Biological Escapement Goal (**BEG**), Management Objective (**MO**), Amounts Reasonably Necessary for Subsistence (**ANS**), Emergency Order (**EO**)