

Kuskokwim River Salmon Management Working Group

1 (800) 315-6338 (MEET) Code: 58756# (KUSKO)-*this meeting was not teleconferenced*
ADF&G Bethel toll free: 1 (855) 933-2433

Meeting Summary Part 1: Kuskokwim Chinook Inseason Management After Action Review (AAR)

August 21 and 22, 2012- This meeting was not teleconferenced because the main purpose of the meeting was 1) to facilitate an After Action Review of Chinook salmon management and the Working Group process; and 2) to provide in depth presentations describing the science behind population dynamics and the direction of management on the Kuskokwim River (Mtg. Summary Part 3). The complexity of the discussion and presentations required that participants attend in person, and members were asked to attend in person at the Department's expense. *Meetings were held at The Long House Bed and Breakfast in Bethel.*

AGENDA ITEMS:

1) Chinook Management After Action Review

- 2) Continuing Business (Mtg. summary Part 2)
August 22

August 22

- 3) Presentations: Kuskokwim River Chinook salmon run reconstruction, brood table, and spawner recruit concepts. (Kevin Schaberg; August 22 Mtg. summary)
- 4) Old business: housekeeping discussions on old action items, attendance, etc. (Tabled, Mtg. Summary Part 2)
- 5) New Business: Board of Fish proposals (Tabled, Mtg. Summary Part 2)

In attendance for the After Action Review:

Jennifer Yuhas – ADF&G (Meeting Facilitator)
Lamont Albertson – KRSMWG
Bob Aloysius – KRSMWG
Gerald Simeon – KRSMWG
Fritz Charles - KRSMWG
John Chythlook - ADF&G
Ray Collins – WI RAC
James Charles - KRSMWG
Chuck Chaliak - KRSMWG
Tom Taube - ADF&G
John Linderman- ADF&G
Corinne Truesdale- ADF&G
Amy Brodersen- ADF&G
Zach Liller- ADF&G
Dan Esai - (Headwaters)
Dave Runfola- ADF&G
Casie Stockdale – AVCP
Brittany Blain – ADF&G
Nick Souza – KRSMWG

Travis Elison- ADF&G
Scott Ayers- ADF&G
Hiroko Ikuta- ADF&G
Mila Thalhauser – KNA
Kevin Schaberg- ADF&G
Pat Samson – (Translator)
Dan Gillikin – USF&WS
Mark Leary- Napaimute
Tim Andrew – AVCP
Dave Cannon- Napaimute
Beverly Hoffman- KRSMWG
Greg Roczicka – ONC
Sophie Evan – KYUK Radio
Gene Peltola Jr. USF&WS
Jan Conitz- ADF&G
Steve Miller- USF&WS
Megan Leary- Napaimute
Luke A Smith – Bethel ONC
John Andrew - KRSMWG

**Staff Note: Persons listed signed an attendance form, most remained present for the duration of the discussion.*

**Topic of After Action Review was limited to:
INSEASON MANAGEMENT OF KUSKOKWIM CHINOOK**

The After Action review was held between the hours of 09:00am and 12:00pm. Translation services were provided by Peter Samson.

AGREEMENTS:

- **Discussion was to include Working group members, managers, and those who were major contributors of data throughout the season**
 - **Be respectful**
 - **Be candid / open**
 - **Focus was on Major Themes**
 - **Speak to what we can ALL learn**
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Several 2012 Working Group Meeting summaries are referenced below. These documents can be found on the ADF&G

website: <http://www.adfg.alaska.gov/index.cfm?adfg=commercialbyareakuskokwim.salmon#/management>

ADF&G Staff Notes on the AAR

During the AAR on August 21, discussion points were recorded by meeting facilitator Jennifer Yuhas. These are listed below as bulleted points. Each of the bulleted points was recorded to capture a thought, and the length of the meeting did not allow these points to be clarified. As instructed by the meeting facilitator, staff members have attempted to include some context here in the form of staff notes and references to regulations and prior Working Group meeting summaries that dealt with the issues discussed.

The Plan: Those present at the discussion agreed that the plan for this year included the following (bullets):

Staff Notes: ADF&G staff was most interested in clarifying the preseason plan. Effort was made to clarify points of discussion and chain of events. Discussions are well documented in Working Group meeting summaries (references provided; web address above).

- **Low abundance of Chinook salmon expected in 2012.**

*At the time of the **March 30 meeting**, the 2012 Chinook salmon forecast was 158,000 to 236,000.*

The forecast was updated in late April using available data and the forecast was adjusted to 157,000 to 236,000.

- **Conservation of resource to ensure future returns.**

The forecast indicated that there was conservation concern for Chinook salmon escapement and a conservative plan for resource management was warranted:

The State of Alaska recognizes that salmon resources cannot be maintained unless adequate numbers of fish return to the spawning

*grounds each year: **Policy for the management of sustainable salmon Fisheries (5AAC 39.222):***

Numbers of fish beyond what is needed to provide for escapement are considered harvestable surplus.

The state recognizes subsistence as the highest priority use for the harvestable component of salmon runs.

*If a harvestable surplus is not identified or if the surplus is less than the Board of Fish designated **Amounts Reasonably Necessary for Subsistence (ANS)**, restriction of the subsistence fishery may be warranted.*

The preseason forecast suggested that the harvestable surplus of Chinook salmon might not be adequate to meet ANS in 2012. Close monitoring would be necessary to ensure that harvest would not threaten escapement. If it appeared that escapement would not be adequate, it would be necessary to restrict all types harvest to ensure future runs of Chinook salmon.

*The **May 30 meeting** of the KRSMWG included the details of a discussion between state and federal managers of what the escapement Management Objective should ultimately be and why (see summary for details).*

*At the **June 6 meeting** of the KRSMWG, state and federal managers presented the agreed upon escapement Management Objective for Chinook salmon in 2012.*

*The forecast suggested that the 2012 run would be insufficient to provide for both the escapement Management Objective and traditional levels of subsistence harvest of Chinook salmon. All parties agreed that conservation measures would be necessary to ensure the health of future runs of Chinook salmon to the Kuskokwim River (**March 30, June 6, and June 8 Mtgs.**).*

- **Identify potential actions pre-season.**

*The preseason management plan, as amended through discussion with the Working Group, is presented at the bottom of Page 1 of the **March 30 meeting summary**.*

- **Restrictions only if necessary.**

March 30 Mtg. Summary pg. 10; Motion 4 Comments.

- **Preseason conservation actions on tributaries as amended through discussion with the Working Group.**

*Defining the closed portion of Kuskokuak Slough: **March 30 Mtg. Summary Page 2; Page 10 under Motion 3 comments.***

- **Inseason management actions (including restrictions).**

*If during the upcoming season, Chinook salmon abundance appeared to be worse than previously suspected, further measures would be taken. This includes the definition and implementation of full subsistence closures for Chinook salmon subsistence harvest (page 2 of the **March 30 mtg**).*

summary). The original detailed description of the type and implementation of further restrictions are defined on page 10 of the **March 30 meeting summary** under Motion 4 and Comments for Motion 4. These include descriptions of:

-Rolling closures: definition; implementation strategy; minimum duration; and the reasons why.

-Gear restrictions: timing; implementation; and the reasons why.

- **Graduated restrictions to maximize subsistence opportunity.**

*-Discussed in the **March 30 Mtg. summary**, Pg. 8 under Kuskokwim River Mainstem: The original plan anticipated that subsistence salmon fishing would initially be open and would only be closed if run indicators suggested that Chinook escapement objectives could not be reached without restrictions to harvest. In other words, the original plan suggested that restrictions would be initiated in a stepwise fashion as information became available.*

In a year when Chinook salmon present a conservation concern "maximizing subsistence opportunity" would be irresponsible and this was never an option in 2012.

This bullet could probably be better worded to properly capture the speaker's idea.

- **Provide subsistence opportunity.**

AS 16.05.258 Subsistence Use and Allocation of Fish and Game states that "(b) The [Board of Fish] shall determine whether a portion of a fish stock or game population ... can be harvested consistent with sustained yield. If a portion of that stock or population can be harvested consistent with sustained yield, the board shall determine the amount of the harvestable portion that is reasonably necessary for subsistence uses and

(1) If the harvestable portion of the stock or population is sufficient to provide for all consumptive uses, the appropriate board.

(A) Shall adopt regulations that provide a reasonable opportunity for subsistence uses ..."

*Amounts Reasonably Necessary for Subsistence (ANS) are defined for the Kuskokwim River and surrounding areas under regulation **5 AAC 01.286 Customary and traditional subsistence uses of fish stocks and amounts necessary for subsistence uses**. These amounts are used to determine whether an identified harvestable surplus of salmon will be adequate to provide for subsistence needs. If the projected harvestable surplus is well below ANS, we can reasonably assume that normal harvest activity will adversely impact escapement, and under such a scenario, subsistence restrictions are warranted to provide for future salmon runs.*

It is the mandate of the Department of Fish and Game to provide opportunity for the subsistence harvest of salmon resources above all other

use. As long as escapement is not threatened by such harvest, that opportunity will always be provided. In those instances when escapement does appear to be threatened it is the mandate of the Department to protect fish stocks with restrictions to harvest. These measures are only taken when there is adequate information available to indicate that escapement objectives will not be met.

In March of 2012, restrictions were being discussed to protect the escapement of Chinook salmon, and it was anticipated that, although restrictions might be necessary, there would be some level of harvestable surplus available for subsistence fishers.

- **Identify sockeye & chum harvest surplus and make that available to subsistence users**

It was anticipated that chum, sockeye and coho abundance would be similar to 2011. Opportunity would be provided to subsistence users for harvest of these species so long as it did not adversely impact Chinook salmon.

- **Provide 24hour advance notice to subsistence users (management decisions).**

Whenever possible, the Department of Fish and Game endeavors to provide 24hr advance notice on fisheries management actions within the Kuskokwim Area. Traditionally this has related to subsistence fishing closures surrounding commercial fishing openings. In 2011 and 2012, this has been applied to subsistence fishing closures associated with conservation for escapement (5 AAC 07.365 (d) (4)).

- **Assess the run daily using Bethel Test Fishery (BTF) as the primary indicator for action along with weir, subsistence reports, and stakeholder input.**

*Similar to 2011, relationships between the BTF index for Chinook salmon and monitored escapements were examined to assess overall run strength and adequacy for meeting escapement. This method was improved upon in 2012. A preliminary description of methodology was given during the **March 30 meeting summary** pg. 10 Motion 4. Detailed descriptions of the methods used are presented in the **June 8 Informational Packets and June 8 meeting summary**.*

- **Management Objectives: number of Chinook needed for escapement.**

*ADF&G and USF&WS jointly recommended an escapement Management Objective of 127,279 Chinook salmon for the Kuskokwim River drainage (**June 6 Mtg. summary**, pg. 1 under ADF&G Recommendations).*

157,000 (lower end of the forecast) minus 127,279 (escapement Management Objective) indicates a harvestable surplus of 29,721 Chinook salmon. The lower end of ANS for the Kuskokwim River is 64,500; well above the estimated harvestable surplus.

The acceptance of this objective suggested that harvestable surplus of Chinook salmon in 2012 would not be adequate to meet ANS. This

determination immediately activated mainstem restrictions in order to attempt to meet the Management Objective (June 8 Mtg. summary).

- **Kogrukluk will be used as an index for the Kuskokwim River, BTF catches will be used to project whether the objective will be reached.**

During the May 30 meeting, updated Chinook salmon forecast was presented and Management objectives for escapement were discussed. This included a presentation describing the discussion between USF&WS and ADF&G on what objective should be chosen and why. At this meeting, the Department and the USF&WS pledged to work together to agree on a suitable management objective. This objective was presented at the June 6 meeting of the KRSMWG.

Kogrukluk River weir provided our only index of escapement on the Kuskokwim River for many years. The dataset is long and encompasses several cycles of increasing and decreasing abundance of Chinook salmon.

The Kogrukluk River shows solid relationships with other escapement projects on the Kuskokwim River and can be used with some confidence as an index for other escapements (June 8 Info Packet, pg. 7, June 8 Mtg. Summary).

The BTF shows a solid relationship with all escapement projects, including the Kogrukluk River and can be used to predict escapement to that river well before fish are seen at the weir in numbers (June 8 Info Packet, pgs. 5-6, June 8 Mtg. Summary).

The escapement Management Objective for the Kuskokwim River was correlated with escapements at Kogrukluk River weir, and an escapement management objective was calculated for Kogrukluk River. If this number were reached, the likelihood was high that escapement goals on other tributaries would be reached and the overall Kuskokwim River escapement Management Objective would be reached (June 8 Mtg. summary).

The relationship between BTF and Kogrukluk would be used to predict whether numbers of Chinook passing Bethel suggested a run of adequate size to meet these objectives (June 8 Info Packet, pgs 8-16, June 8 Mtg. Summary).

If it appeared that these objectives would not be met, that would be an indication that additional fishing restrictions were necessary.

- **Workgroup meetings will be called if management action is needed.**

The Department renewed its commitment to keeping the Working Group informed and calling meetings/consulting members before major fisheries related decisions.

- **Working group participants committed to support conservation plan.**

*The preseason plan was discussed at length during the March 30 meeting. Each detail of the plan was discussed at length and the plan was voted on in Motions 2, 3, and 4. All votes were unanimously in favor of supporting the plan as amended at that meeting. Several participants expressed the hope that none of these measures would be necessary but agreed that if the Chinook run were poor enough, these actions would be warranted. Details can be found in the **March 30 meeting summary**.*

*At the June 6 meeting, the Working Group and state and federal managers discussed the Chinook salmon Management Objective jointly proposed by management agencies. Also discussed were the boundaries for implementing rolling closures and recommendation to implement 7 day rolling closures. Motions were made to accept each of these recommendations and each motion was passed unanimously. Details can be found in the **June 6 meeting summary**.*

- **ADF&G Subsistence Division to monitor plan of working group and develop plan to assist working group and Commercial Fisheries Division.**

ADF&G Subsistence Division endeavored to assist this process through public outreach and receiving feedback from subsistence users. Their efforts on the forefront of public communication and outreach were much appreciated by Commercial Fisheries Division staff.

- **General commitment by others to support working group with information.**

ADF&G, USF&WS, ONC, KNA, and AVCP staff all committed to providing information to the Working Group. Working Group members also committed to communicating with constituents in communities and bringing data and comments forward for discussion.

- **Improve outreach**
 - **Designed to obtain as much buy-in as possible**
 - **Pre-season consultations with villages, RAC, *State of Our Salmon meeting (sponsored by ACVP)**

*During the **March 30** meeting there was discussion of outreach in both the prior year and looking forward to the coming season (pages 3 and 13 of Mtg. summary).*

What happened: Those present at the discussion agreed that the following bullet points represent what happened this season.

Staff notes: A few limited notes were added for clarification. These were verified from summaries.

- **The Department could not identify a harvestable surplus of Chinook salmon that was sufficient to meet both Escapement and Subsistence needs.**

June 8 meeting summary, page 5 under Recommendation (Sixth bullet).

- **Water was colder and stayed cold later than usual.**
- **The water was high.**
- **The Chinook salmon run appeared to be late.**
- **The Chinook salmon run appeared to be poor.**
- **Agencies made decisions based on pre-season plan.**
- **Sport fishing for Chinook was closed all season.**

All waters and tributaries of the Kuskokwim River from the Aniak River to the mouth were closed to sport fishing for Chinook salmon as part of the preseason conservation measures. Sport Fish Division closed all remaining waters and tributaries of the Kuskokwim River to Chinook salmon sport fishing on June 22, before Chinook salmon could reach the middle and upper portions of the river.

- **ADF&G and USF&WS met regularly.**
- **7 day closures happened after the plan was made.**
*The perception that 7 day rolling closure actions had not been part of the original plan is incorrect. Rolling closures were first described and voted on during the **March 30 meeting** and the reasons for closing no less than 7 days were also described (see meeting summary). All planned measures were unanimously accepted at that time.*
- **Villages agreed to a 7 day closure but considered extra closures a hardship.**
- **No window of opportunity occurred within the first 12 days of closure.**
- **Subsistence fishers desire for opportunity was not met.**
 - **A request was made for a 5 day opening after the 7 day closure.**
- **Subsistence needs for Chinook were not met.**
This opinion is widely held throughout the Kuskokwim Area. The Post Season Subsistence Survey project will attempt to quantify the level of subsistence Chinook harvest in 2012. Cooperation of subsistence fishers is crucial to making this determination.
- **Working group input was not incorporated at the level that members wanted.**

- **Managers believe workgroup members veered off the plan as it had been agreed upon by all parties, including the Working Group.**
 - **Subsistence reports were included in assessment at working group meetings but it was perceived the information did not influence decisions.**
 - **Lack of flexibility in the plan was frustrating to working group members.**
 - **People were surprised when the plan was followed as managers had outlined.**
 - **Public buy-in was lost.**
 - **The second closure surprised people and produced insecurity.**
 - **Public members disagreed with the necessity of closures after they occurred.**
 - **Public and Working Group members were willing to sacrifice conservation for harvest.**
 - **Regulations were disobeyed and fishing occurred during closures.**
 - **Opportunity was provided for the harvest of chum and sockeye salmon using 6" mesh nets following the 12 consecutive days of subsistence salmon fishing closure.**
 - **Weather was bad when there was opportunity to fish and spoilage occurred.**
 - **Competing objectives of different groups and agencies produced confusion.**
 - **The media reported that some management decisions were made without working group support.**
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What went well: Those present at the discussion agreed that the following were items that went well this season:

Staff notes: Staff saw no need to add additional comments to this section.

- The working group had a quorum for all but one meeting (which was held at the call of the chair with short notice) and member participation was much better than in previous years.
- The agreed to plan was enforced
- 6" gear was identified as effective for conservation and provided some opportunity through use of gear types rather than closures.
- Fish were protected all the way up the river.
- Enforcement action provided observation opportunities and it was learned that 50-60 sockeye and chum were present for each Chinook in the nets observed.
- ADF&G Subsistence Division spoke to people who reported they were satisfied even with hardships this season.
- State and Federal research staff worked together in a positive environment.
- Chinook conservation radio shows reached many people and provided good information.
- Formal pre-season Chinook salmon forecast was available for the first time.
- People who had good setnet spots with 4" mesh were able to get some fish during the closures.
- Managers did a better job explaining what would happen and involving the Working Group.
- Everyone is still at the table.
- Outreach to local groups, including community meetings did a good job spreading the message.
- Nets were given away for free (this was listed as a positive even though it was recognized there were some negative aspects to how this occurred).
- The Working Group chair was included in one of the management-only meetings this year.
- Chinook caught during commercial chum openings were retained or distributed for subsistence.
- Chums and sockeye salmon received a renewed respect this year.
- Many calls received by ADF&G were respectful and cordial even when people called to complain.
- The Napaimute website produced easy to understand information.
- Announcements for regulation changes were better this year.
- Unified recommendations from the two management agencies occurred.
- Agencies went to great lengths to be more transparent in the decisions they made.
- Rolling closures protected fish.

- There was a proactive plan.
 - The provision of daily information was increased.
 - Some flexibility of the plan occurred between March and May.
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What needs improvement: Those present at the discussion identified the following areas for improvement:

Staff notes: This is probably the most important section. Staff saw no need to add context to this section.

- Working Group members viewed their role as diminished.
 - Knowledge of users was not well or fully incorporated in decisions.
 - Partnerships with elders are desired by working group members and public.
 - Working group members want more decisions based on their input.
 - Management-only meetings were perceived as secret.
 - More clarification is desired of plan details.
 - It was unclear whether Working Group members fully understood the consequences of management decisions/strategies before they were implemented.
 - It was unclear whether the explanations of the science were fully affective.
 - Clarification of competing objectives of agencies, users, or groups in general was lacking.
 - Increased communication of what level of flexibility exists for decision making is desired.
 - Increased communication of the benefits of complying with management decisions was suggested.
 - Clear communication of the consequences of not complying with management decisions was suggested.
 - Even more outreach for announcements of regulation changes was suggested.
 - Application of rolling closures could be done in a simpler way.
 - Flexibility of plan could be improved.
 - Consideration of environmental factors could be improved.
 - Identification of all indices could be improved.
 - Increased public education of tools used by managers.
 - Daily provision of information was suggested.
 - Some information was not ready for the first interagency meeting which would have been beneficial.
 - Increase conscientiousness of Working Group members to attend meetings and participate.
 - The phone system makes things hard.
 - Understanding for elders and Yupik speakers; things get lost in translation.
 - Simplify the plan so it is easier for non-managers to understand.
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Items for future discussion: The following items were identified for discussion at future working group meetings. These items either did not fit within the topic of the discussion, or required more time than practical for the AAR:

Staff notes: none.

- **Social issues and the younger generation**
 - **Outreach details**
 - **Fish cycles regardless of management decisions / global view of cycles and the Bering Sea**
 - **Who is sacrificing vs. who is responsible for the decline of the salmon**
 - **Quinhagak**
 - **Napaimute**
 - **Details of all indicators**
 - **Bethel Test Fishery details**
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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 (**USF&WS**), 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**)