

# **Kuskokwim River Salmon Management Working Group**

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

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

**July 26, 2017**

Meeting called to order at 10:03 a.m. on Wednesday July 26, 2017 and adjourned at 11:38 a.m. Meeting time was approximately 1 hour and 40 minutes. Ten full voting members were present and a quorum was established.

## **AGENDA ITEMS:**

**Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ADF&G) Management Actions Under Consideration:**

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

**People to be Heard:**

**Old Business Discussion Topics:** *N/A*

**New Business Discussion Topics:** *N/A*

**WORKING GROUP ACTION ITEMS:** *No Action Items at the time of this meeting.*

## **WORKING GROUP MOTIONS:**

1. Approve the agenda as amended. *Passed (Unanimous)*
2. Support the ADF&G recommendation to remove all restrictions within the mainstem of the Kuskokwim River including Old Kuskokuak and Kuskokuak sloughs while keeping the salmon spawning tributary restrictions in place. *Passed (Unanimous)*
3. Adjourn at 11:38 a.m. *Passed (Unanimous)*

**ADF&G MANAGEMENT ACTIONS UNDER CONSIDERATION:** Aaron Tiernan (ADF&G acting Area Management Biologist) thanked the Kuskokwim River residents for their patience and sacrifice during the 2017 Chinook salmon season. He reported that all Chinook salmon aerial survey goals were met with the exception of the Holitna River, which had tannic water at the time of the survey causing difficulties in speciation. Mr. Tiernan commented that these goals were met, in large part, because of the conservation efforts of local subsistence users. Mr. Tiernan announced that ADF&G was considering rescinding the Kuskokwim River mainstem management restrictions, including restrictions in the Kuskokuak and Old Kuskokuak sloughs. Tributary restrictions would remain in place to allow Chinook salmon to complete their spawning efforts.

## **PEOPLE TO BE HEARD:**

- Steven Alexie recommended that USFWS and ADF&G be more helpful in providing information regarding legal gear types during times of conservation.
- Gerald Kameroff (Kalskag) commented that he was concerned regarding illegal fishing in Whitefish Lake. Aaron Tiernan responded that ADF&G and the Wildlife Troopers had been notified regarding this issue.
- Warren Nicolai (Kwethluk) requested clarification on current dip net regulations. Aaron Tiernan responded that he would follow-up with Mr. Nicolai after the meeting.

## **SUBSISTENCE REPORTS:**

- **Lowest River:** James Charles (Downriver Elder) reported that subsistence harvest efforts had slowed in the lower river.
- **ONC Subsistence Report:** Avery Hoffman (ONC) and Janessa Esquible (ONC) provided an overview of the ONC subsistence report. ONC completed their 2017 fish camp survey efforts on July 23. *(For more information on the ONC subsistence survey report, please see the July 26 Informational Packet).*

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- **Lower River:** Mike Williams Sr. (Lower River Subsistence) reported that people were primarily finished fishing until coho salmon season. He commented that Unit 4 communities would be providing recommendations regarding the early season closure date and the use of designated fishers as future management tools. John Andrew (Downriver Elder alternate) commented that people from Kwethluk typically use coho salmon only for jarring and freezing.
- **Middle River:** Lisa Feyereisen (Middle River Subsistence alternate) reported that some people were still harvesting fish with fish wheels and hook and line. She commented that people planned to harvest coho salmon. Chris McDevitt (ADF&G, Subsistence Division) surveyed households from Lower Kalskag to Stony River; reports indicated that fishing effort had slowed and that people had observed a strong sockeye salmon run. Some people had concerns regarding the timing of the subsistence openers. He added that although people would have liked more Chinook salmon, the sockeye salmon were abundant.
- **Upriver:** Barbara Carlson (Upriver Subsistence alternate) reported that on August 22 she caught several humpback whitefish, sockeye salmon, chum salmon and one Chinook salmon within six hours of operating her fish wheel. She commented that several people were rod and reeling; the majority of people were finished until coho salmon season.
- **Headwaters:** Ray Collins (Western Interior RAC) commented that people were waiting for coho salmon to continue fishing for salmon; people were using hook and line to harvest sheefish and whitefish. Dan Esai (Headwaters Subsistence) commented that people from his area were done fishing for salmon at this time. He reported that they planned to start operating the fish wheel. Mr. Esai commented that he appreciated the fish processing adaptations that people attempted during the rainy weather in 2017.

## CONTINUING BUSINESS:

1. **Overview of Kuskokwim River Salmon Run Assessment Projects:** Jordan Head (ADF&G) provided an overview of the assessment projects. He commented that ADF&G research staff had been collecting Chinook salmon genetic samples for the Kuskokwim Chinook Genetics project. *(For more information on the 2017 inseason projects, please see the July 26 Informational Packet).*
- **Bethel Test Fish:** As of July 25, the cumulative CPUE for Chinook salmon was 363. Chinook, chum and sockeye salmon runs were nearing completion. The coho salmon had a cumulative CPUE of 94 on July 25. On average, ~5% of the coho salmon run had passed Bethel to date. Aaron Tiernan commented that BTF had been operating without complications during the 2017 season and had a veteran crew.
- **Aniak Test Fish:** The ATF completed operations on July 15.
- **Sonar:** The sonar project completed operations on July 26. As of July 25, preliminary cumulative point estimates at the sonar project site were ~61,458 Chinook salmon; ~859,000 sockeye salmon; ~625,000 chum salmon; and ~13,000 coho salmon.
- **Radio Tagging Project:** The tagging project completed operations on July 20 with a total of 556 tagged Chinook salmon.
- **Weirs:** All Chinook salmon escapement project goals had been met; the majority of the escapements remained below the historical average. Chum salmon escapement appeared to be above average. Sockeye salmon escapement indicated a strong run with the Kwethluk River escapement being the highest run on record. Coho salmon were beginning to arrive at the Kwethluk and Tuluksak river weirs.
- **Aerial Surveys:** Aaron Tiernan conducted aerial surveys from the Aniak drainage to the headwaters from July 20 through July 22. All goals were met with the exception of the Holitna River.

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2. **Processor:** Aaron Tiernan reported that the commercial buyer, Larry Lang, intended to buy fish from the Kuskokwim region; Mr. Lang estimated that his arrival to the area would be near the beginning of August 2017.
3. **Discussion of ADF&G Management Consideration and Discussion of Possible Alternatives:** (*See Motion 2*).

## **WORKING GROUP MOTIONS:**

1. **Approve the agenda as amended. Passed (Unanimous)**
2. **Support the ADF&G recommendation to remove all restrictions within the mainstem of the Kuskokwim River including Old Kuskokuak and Kuskokuak sloughs while keeping the salmon spawning tributary restrictions in place. Passed (Unanimous)**
3. **Adjourn at 11:38 a.m. Passed (Unanimous)**

## **COMMENTS FROM THE WORKING GROUP:**

- Lisa Feyereisen commented on the need to have consistent messaging regarding management recommendations and actions. She suggested having a later discussion on the role of Working Group members in disseminating information to members of the public.
- Bob Aloysius (YK Delta RAC) commented that the current weir and BTF formats in the Informational Packets were confusing and suggested displaying each year separately within the tables. Mr. Aloysius reported on the fishing regulations in Whitefish Lake. Mr. Aloysius commented that some of his fishing gear had been stolen and requested that people borrow gear if needed.
- James Charles commented that he had traveled to the Kwethluk River weir and that he was amazed by its operation. He learned that weirs did not kill salmon. Mr. Charles commented that weirs were good tools to help count the fish upriver.
- Ray Collins suggested caution when making 2017 commercial fishing decisions because people were relying on the harvest of coho salmon.
- Nick Kameroff (KRITFC) commented on the need to plan ahead for next season with conservation in mind.
- LaMont Albertson commented on the importance of reviewing historical averages when discussing the current season's escapement numbers.
- Charlie Brown (Commercial Fishing) requested access to the final escapement numbers at the end of the 2017 season.

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## WORKING GROUP ATTENDANCE:

<b>MEMBER SEAT:</b>	<b>NAME:</b>
DOWNRIVER ELDER	James Charles
UPRIVER ELDER	<i>Vacant</i>
LOWER RIVER SUBSISTENCE	Mike Williams Sr.*, Mary Peltola
MIDDLE RIVER SUBSISTENCE	Lisa Feyereisen
UPRIVER SUBSISTENCE	Barbara Carlson
HEADWATERS SUBSISTENCE	Daniel Esai**
MEMBER AT LARGE	Charles Guest
WESTERN INTERIOR RAC	Ray Collins
YK DELTA RAC	Bob Aloysius
COMMERCIAL FISHING	Charlie Brown
SPORT FISHING	LaMont Albertson
PROCESSOR	<i>Vacant</i>
KRITFC	Nick Kameroff
ADF&G	Aaron Tiernan
CHAIR	LaMont Albertson

*\*Excused at 10:55 a.m. \*\*Excused at 11:00 a.m.*

## **Other Participants:**

ADF&G Comm. Fish: Aaron Tiernan, Zach Liller, Chuck Brazil, Jordan Head, Nick Smith, Jen Peeks

Sport Fishing: John Chythlook, Tim Viavant

Subsistence Division: Lisa Olson, Chris McDevitt

USFWS: Ken Stahlnecker, Lew Coggins, Ben Staton

OSM: Christine Bremmer, Gary Decossas

Jim Simon (BSFA, KRITFC)	Jeff Sanders (Bethel)	<u>WG Alternates:</u> Greg Hoffman Jr. Mary Peltola Alissa Rogers
Bill Bechtol (KRITFC)	Rex Kawagley (Bethel)	
Avery Hoffman (ONC)	Kate Schaberg (GTC)	
Danielle Lowery (ONC)	Gerald Kameroff (Kalskag)	
Anna Pavila (ONC)	Kevin Wentworth (MTNT)	
Janessa Esquible (ONC)	Dan Gillikin (NVN)	
Tim Andrew (ONC)	Paula Schiefer (Univ. of Aberdeen)	<u>Media:</u> Anna Rose MacArthur
Albert Kawagley (Bethel)	Steven Alexie	

## GLOSSARY OF ABBREVIATIONS:

Alaska Department of Fish and Game (**ADF&G, department, State**), Orutsararmiut Native Council (**ONC**), 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**), Law Enforcement (**LE**), Kuskokwim River Inter-Tribal Fish Commission (**KRITFC**).

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