

Kuskokwim River Salmon Management Working Group

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

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

November 18, 2020

The post-season KRSMWG meeting was called to order on Wednesday, November 18, 2020 at 9:06 am, recessed for lunch at 12:15 p.m., and reconvened at approximately 1:00 p.m. The meeting adjourned at 3:46 p.m. Meeting time was approximately 6 hours. A quorum was established and kept with 6 full voting members and 1 Alaska Department of Fish and Game representative. Barbara Carlson (Upriver Subsistence) chaired the meeting.

AGENDA ITEMS:

PEOPLE TO BE HEARD: *Non-Working Group Members*

CONTINUING BUSINESS

- A. End of Season Subsistence Reports: Lowest River, Lower River, Middle River, Upper River, Headwaters**
- B. Kuskokwim River Sonar (ONC/ADF&G)**
- C. 2020 Preliminary Kuskokwim River Season Summary (ADF&G)**
 - **Assessment Overview**
 - **Subsistence Overview**
- D. Overview of the three-system index (Kuskokwim, Yukon, Unalakleet) of inriver adult Chinook salmon run sizes and how it applies to Bering Sea Bycatch**
- E. Update on 2020 Chinook salmon run reconstruction and 2021 Preseason forecast**
- F. 2021 Board of Fish Update**
- G. 2021 Chum salmon management**

WORKING GROUP BUSINESS:

- A. Recognition of the 2020 Hunter/Fisher Award presented by AVCP to the Working Group**
- B. Letters of Support for OSM projects**
- C. Meeting attendance and vacant seats**

WORKING GROUP ACTION ITEMS:

- **For ADF&G and the Working Group to discuss developing additional chum salmon escapement goals (ADF&G / Working Group)**
- **For ADF&G to follow up with Dave Cannon (Aniak) regarding the next steps for the Rainbow Smelt resolution once it is fully signed by 2019 co-chairs (ADFG / Dave Cannon)**

WORKING GROUP MOTIONS:

Motion 1: Approve the agenda as amended. *Passed (Unanimous)*

Motion 2: For the Working Group to write a letter of support for OSM funding for the ONC/ADF&G fisheries resource monitoring program. *Passed (Unanimous)*

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- Motion 3:** For the Working Group to write a letter of support for OSM funding so that the George River Weir (ADF&G) may continue operations for the next four years. *Passed (Unanimous)*
- Motion 4:** For the Working Group to write a letter of support for OSM funding so that the ADF&G Subsistence Division and ONC may continue their annual postseason household harvest surveys for the next four years. *Passed (Unanimous)*
- Motion 5:** For Charles Guest (Member at Large, alternate) to have dual alternate status so that he may also be a Commercial Fishing alternate. *Passed (Unanimous)*
- Motion 6:** For Allen Simeon (Aniak) to be a member of the Upriver Elder seat. *Passed (Unanimous)*
- Motion 7:** For Kevin Whitworth (McGrath) to be a Headwaters Subsistence alternate. *Passed (Unanimous)*
- Motion 8:** For Mary Peltola (Lower River Subsistence, Alternate) to have dual alternate status so that she may also be a Member at Large alternate. *Passed (Unanimous)*
- Motion 9:** To create a second Member at Large seat to replace the Processor seat, with the stipulation that a processor could hold this seat in the future. *Passed (Unanimous)*
NOTE: The creation of this position requires changing the bylaws and another vote will occur at a future meeting.
- Motion 10:** Motion to adjourn. *Passed (Unanimous).*

PEOPLE TO BE HEARD: *There were no people to be heard at this meeting.*

CONTINUING BUSINESS

A. END OF SEASON SUBSISTENCE REPORTS: LOWEST RIVER, LOWER RIVER, MIDDLE RIVER, UPPER RIVER, HEADWATERS) (Beginning at 40:25 in Meeting Audio Part 1 – 11.18.2020)

- **Lowest River Subsistence Reports**
 - **Fritz Charles (Member at Large; Bethel)** Reported that he did well catching Chinook salmon and other salmon species. He was able to put away more silver salmon than in past years.
 - **Mary Peltola (Lower River Subsistence; Bethel)** reported her family had met their needs and that they fished for three other families. The Chinook salmon her family harvested was given to elders. Ms. Peltola further commented that it was a poor year for chums.
 - **Charles Guest (Member at Large; Bethel)** reported that he did not do as well subsistence fishing as he did last year. Mr. Guest commented that after restrictions were lifted the traffic on the river was much lighter.
- **Lower River Subsistence Reports**
 - **John Andrew (Lower River Elder; Kwethluk)** commented that fish were much smaller than in past years. Mr. Andrew noticed more jack chinook and small sockeye. He commented that those who used smaller-mesh gear did better than those who used larger-mesh gear. He said that humpback whitefish fishing was better in the lake areas and people that caught them shared with the village. Mr. Andrew further commented that some people did not meet subsistence needs, that there were fewer

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chum salmon this year than in the past, that there were white spots in the meat of some of the fish, and that all fish species were late this summer.

- **Mike Williams (Lower River Subsistence; Akiak)** commented that the three drift openers in June were good, but some people were unable to participate because their boats and gear were not operable. Some people were anxious and felt like they needed more fishing opportunities than the three drift openers. Mr. Williams stated that the Chinook returns were fair but still needed to be monitored. He commented that there were not as many chums as in the past and that sockeye numbers were like those in past years. Similar to what Mr. Guest had stated, after the river was opened fulltime to drifting, Mr. Williams did not see as many people fishing on the river when compared to the effort during the 12-hour openers.
- **Middle River Subsistence Report**
 - **Lisa Feyereisen (Middle River Subsistence; Aniak)** reported that people had met their needs but felt restricted and that they had to put in noticeably more effort to harvest the fish they needed. She further commented that whitefish were not as abundant as in the past and that people who were fishing for whitefish mostly caught small silvers. Ms. Feyereisen commented that people in Kalskag felt similar in that they were satisfied with fish caught but that it took a much longer time to harvest the fish they needed.
 - **Allen Simeon (Aniak)** echoed Ms. Feyereisen's statement about it taking more effort this season to harvest the amount of fish needed. He further commented that Chinook salmon ran late this year but that he did well harvesting them. He stated that he caught primarily jacks with fewer, larger Chinook harvested. Most of the Chinook caught were shared with other families. Mr. Simeon noticed fewer chums and fewer large humpback whitefish this year, however, there was a good supply of sockeye. Mr. Simeon also noted that he caught a lot of pink salmon this year. He did not drift for silver salmon but did fish with rod and reel. Mr. Simeon ended his report with an observation about snowpack and how when there is more snow on the northwestern side on the mountain range that the Kuskokwim almost always has a good king salmon return.
- **Upper River Subsistence Report**
 - **Barbara Carlson (Upriver Subsistence; Sleetmute)** agreed with the middle river reports in that people were happy with what they harvested but that they fished much harder this year to get what they needed. She noted that there were fewer Chinook, chum, and silver salmon and that most of the sockeye caught were the smaller lake type. Ms. Carlson commented that she and others were fishing before the fish were there, which ultimately was a waste of fuel and time. Once the runs picked up people did well, and the quantity and quality of fish was good although most salmon were smaller than in past years. She stated that relative to past years the fish wheel did well for humpback whitefish although there were not many broad whitefish or ciscoes.
- **Headwaters Subsistence Report**
 - **Dan Esai (Headwaters; Nikolai)** stated that all fish species were low in quantity this year but that his family was able to get what they needed. Effort was lower in Nikolai this year and only a couple of families fished near Pitka Fork and Blackwater. Due to COVID-19, those that did fish stayed at their fish camps longer this year. Like other middle and upriver reports, Mr. Esai observed fewer whitefish this year.

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- **Kevin Whitworth (Headwaters; McGrath)** stated that he did not meet needs for Chinook, chum, or silver salmon. Similar to other reports, Mr. Whitworth stated that chum salmon were not as abundant this year. Mr. Whitworth was given chums by those who went silver fishing so that he could feed his dog team. People he knew that went silver fishing caught fewer silvers than in past years. Mr. Whitworth commented that he caught very few sockeyes and that most are in bad shape when they are that far upriver. He also stated that he caught fewer whitefish this year.

B. KUSKOKWIM RIVER SONAR (ONC/ADF&G) (Beginning at 1:20:53 in Meeting Audio Part 1 – 11.18.2020) Matthew Kapsner (ONC) with support from Keegan Birchfield (ADF&G) presented an overview of the Kuskokwim River Sonar Project. This presentation included information about sonar methodology and how it has been applied on the Kuskokwim River near Bethel since 2014. Mr. Kapsner’s overview additionally explained how the sonar apportionment fishery operates and how it and sonar technology is used together to generate daily and cumulative salmon passage estimates. There was some discussion at the end of Mr. Kapsner’s presentation between Lisa Feyereisen (Middle River Subsistence) and Mr. Birchfield regarding the accuracy of the sonar and apportionment fishery in generating chum salmon passage estimates. Further discussion occurred between Barbara Carlson (Upriver Subsistence) and Mr. Birchfield regarding sonar operations during the 2020 silver salmon season. *(For more information on the Kuskokwim River Sonar overview, please see the November 18, 2020 Informational Packet, Pages 3–9, or refer to the meeting audio).*

C. 2020 PRELIMINARY KUSKOKWIM RIVER SEASON SUMMARY (ADF&G)

- **Assessment Overview (Beginning at 1:58:50 in Meeting Audio Part 1 – 11.18.2020)**
 - **Sean Larson (ADF&G Research Biologist)** provided an overview on Chinook, sockeye, chum, and silver salmon assessment during the 2020 season. Generally, Chinook and chum salmon returns were lower than expected but still met most escapement goals. Sockeye and silver salmon runs were average. Mr. Larson’s presentation primarily followed the tables from the 2020 Preliminary Kuskokwim Area Salmon Season Summary. During and after the presentation, there was some discussion primarily between Barb Carlson, Mary Peltola, Lisa Feyereisen, and Mr. Larson regarding assessment operations and Chinook and chum salmon concerns.
 - **Ben Gray (ADF&G, Assistant Area Management Biologist)** gave an overview of the District 4 and 5 commercial fishery during the 2020 season. He stated that there was record low participation in the fishery most likely due to COVID-19 and limited processing capacity. Even with low participation, fishermen in both districts landed near-record amounts of sockeye, with Chinook, chum, and silver salmon being caught in fewer numbers. Mr. Gray stated that all Chinook and sockeye salmon aerial escapement goals had been either met or exceeded. *(For further discussion and information on the Assessment overview, please see the November 18, 2020 Informational Packet, Pages 10–23, or refer to the meeting audio)*
- **Subsistence Overview (Beginning at 2:38:49 in Meeting Audio Part 1 – 11.18.2020)**
 - **Dave Runfola (ADF&G Subsistence)** gave an overview of ADF&G subsistence projects. Mr. Runfola spoke about the subsistence Chinook harvest project that was

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intended to take place during 2020 in the lower river tributaries that are left open to fishing during mainstem closures. The project was delayed due to COVID-19 and the earliest it will operate is summer 2021. The project aims to better understand the potential harvests in these locations when the mainstem is closed and to get an idea of how many people fish these tributaries and the gear types they use. Mary Peltola commented that collaboration between the KRITFC, ONC, and ADF&G would be helpful to all agencies and stakeholders. Lisa Feyereisen commented on the need for subsistence surveys to be conducted in the middle river areas, a topic echoed by Fritz Charles.

- **Chris McDevitt (ADF&G Subsistence)** gave an overview of the post-season surveys and how they are operating during the COVID-19 pandemic. So far, the subsistence division has received about 1,100 completed subsistence surveys from outlying villages using a combination of telephonic, self-administered, and online avenues. This year, due to COVID-19, the subsistence surveyors attempted to contact all individuals in all outlying villages no matter the size. Mr. McDevitt also spoke about the Bethel portions of surveys. ONC hired eight technicians for the Bethel work and between ONC, ADF&G, and the Bethel City Council, determined that they could still do door-to-door surveys by following protocols. There was discussion about survey methods and food security (along with the use of the term) between Barbara Carlson, Mary Peltola, Lisa Feyereisen, Fritz Charles, and Janessa Esquible (ONC) *(For further discussion and information on the Subsistence Overview, please see the November 18, 2020 Informational Packet, Pages 24–25, or refer to the meeting audio).*

D. OVERVIEW OF THE THREE-SYSTEM INDEX (KUSKOKWIM, YUKON, UNALAKLEET) OF INRIVER ADULT CHINOOK SALMON RUN SIZES AND HOW IT APPLIES TO BERING SEA BYCATCH *(Beginning at 17:40 in Meeting Audio Part 2 – 11.18.2020)* Sean Larson (ADF&G) provided an overview of the three-system index which is used as a means to limit Chinook salmon bycatch by the Bering Sea pollock trawling fishery. In general, if the sum of the total runs of Chinook salmon in three river systems is less than 250,000 then the trawl fleet's bycatch limits of Chinook salmon are reduced. Since the combined total run was less than 250,000 in 2020, there will be reductions in bycatch allowed for 2021. Mr. Larson suggested visiting the North Pacific Marine Fisheries Council website for further information. (<https://www.npfmc.org/bsai-salmon-bycatch/>)

E. UPDATE ON 2020 CHINOOK SALMON RUN RECONSTRUCTION AND 2021 PRESEASON FORECAST *(Beginning at 21:45 in Meeting Audio Part 2 – 11.18.2020)* Sean Larson (ADF&G) reported that both the 2020 Chinook Salmon run reconstruction and preseason forecast should be available by March 2021.

F. 2021 BOARD OF FISH UPDATE *(Beginning at 24:05 in Meeting Audio Part 2 – 11.18.2020)* Sean Larson (ADF&G) gave an update on the escapement goal review process occurring ahead of

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the 2021 Arctic-Yukon-Kuskokwim BOF meeting. He stated that internal meetings were ongoing between ADF&G staff and that their recommendations would be made available prior to the April 9, 2021 BOF proposal deadline. There were questions and discussions between Lisa Feyereisen, Mary Peltola, and Barb Carlson about the status of any ACR's this year, along with the status and what kind of input the Working Group might have on Chinook and chum salmon escapement goals. *(For further discussion on this topic, please refer to the meeting audio)*

- G. 2021 CHUM SALMON MANAGEMENT** *(Beginning at 51:57 in Meeting Audio Part 2 – 11.18.2020)* Nick Smith (ADF&G Area Management Biologist) stated that 2021 chum salmon management will remain the same as it has in past years. ADF&G will rely on inseason assessment (Bethel Sonar and Test Fishery) and input from stakeholders to manage the 2021 chum salmon run. There were discussions between Lisa Feyereisen, Mary Peltola, Fritz Charles, Barb Carlson, and Mr. Smith related to chum salmon escapement and management. Ultimately an action item came from this discussion (please see Action Item #1 for more information). *(For further discussion on this topic, please refer to the meeting audio)*

WORKING GROUP BUSINESS

- A. RECOGNITION OF THE 2020 HUNTER/FISHER AWARD PRESENTED BY AVCP TO THE WORKING GROUP** *(Beginning at 1:03:46 in Meeting Audio Part 2 – 11.18.2020)*
- Jennifer Hooper (AVCP) explained the significance of the 2020 Hunter/Fisher Award and formally recognized the Working Group as the recipient of this year's award.
- B. LETTERS OF SUPPORT FOR OSM PROJECTS** *(Beginning at 1:10:08 in Meeting Audio Part 2 – 11.18.2020)*
- The Working Group supported drafting three letters of support. *(See Motions 2–4 below for more detail)*
- C. MEETING ATTENDANCE AND VACANT SEATS** *(Beginning at 1:38:37 in Meeting Audio Part 2 – 11.18.2020)*
- Strategies for increasing meeting attendance and filling current vacancies on the Working Group were discussed and voted upon. *(Please see Motions 5–9 below for more detail)*

WORKING GROUP MOTIONS:

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

Motion 2: For the Working Group to write a letter of support for OSM funding for the ONC/ADF&G fisheries resource monitoring program. Passed (Unanimous)

The Working Group voted in favor of a letter of support for OSM funding for the continuation of the ONC/ADF&G fisheries resource monitoring program. This funding would allow for the continuation or harvest surveys in the Bethel area and surrounding fish camps, along with ASL sampling program.

Motion 3: For the Working Group to write a letter of support for OSM funding so that the George River Weir (ADF&G) may continue operations for the next four years. Passed (Unanimous)

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The Working Group voted in favor of continuing OSM funding for the ADF&G George River Weir for an additional four years because it offers important information about Kuskokwim River salmon escapement.

Motion 4: For the Working Group to write a letter of support for OSM funding so that the ADF&G Subsistence Division and ONC may continue their annual postseason household harvest surveys for the next four years. Passed (Unanimous)

The Working Group voted in favor of a letter of support for an additional four years of OSM funding for the annual postseason household harvest survey project.

Motion 5: For Charles Guest (Member at Large, alternate) to have dual alternate status so that he may also be a Commercial Fishing alternate. Passed (Unanimous)

Charles Guest was nominated to be an alternate to the commercial fishing seat (and to retain his Member at Large alternate status) because he meets the seat requirements through owning a commercial fishing permit for the Kuskokwim Area.

Motion 6: For Allen Simeon (Aniak) to be a member of the Upriver Elder seat. Passed (Unanimous)

Allen Simeon was nominated for the Upriver Elder seat. Lisa Feyereisen contacted Mr. Simeon about this position and stated that he was well qualified and had years of experience subsistence fishing in the region.

Motion 7: For Kevin Whitworth (McGrath) to be a Headwaters Subsistence alternate. Passed (Unanimous)

Kevin Whitworth was nominated to be a Headwater Subsistence alternate. In previous meetings, Mr. Whitworth had stated his qualifications and interest in being an alternate to Dan Esai.

Motion 8: For Mary Peltola (Lower River Subsistence, Alternate) to have dual alternate status so that she may also be a Member at Large alternate. Passed (Unanimous)

Mary Peltola was nominated to be an alternate to the Member at Large seat (and to retain her alternate Lower River Subsistence alternate status). Lise Feyereisen stated that it would benefit the group for Ms. Peltola to be an alternate to this seat because she has a wealth of knowledge and years of service on the Working Group.

Motion 9: To create a second Member at Large seat to replace the Processor seat, with the stipulation that a processor could hold this seat in the future. Passed (Unanimous)
NOTE: The creation of this position requires changing the bylaws and another vote will occur at a future meeting.

The Working Group voted to replace the Processor seat with a second Member at Large seat since there is no active commercial fishery in the river. The intent of creating this seat is to increase participation of voting members in future meetings. The creation of this position will require bylaw changes and another vote at a future meeting.

Motion 10: Motion to adjourn. Passed (Unanimous).

COMMENTS FROM THE WORKING GROUP: *No additional comments were provided from the Working Group members.*

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WORKING GROUP ATTENDANCE:

MEMBER SEAT:	NAME:
DOWNRIVER ELDER	John Andrew
UPRIVER ELDER	Absent
LOWER RIVER SUBSISTENCE	Mike Williams Sr.
MIDDLE RIVER SUBSISTENCE	Lisa Feyereisen
UPRIVER SUBSISTENCE	Barbara Carlson
HEADWATERS SUBSISTENCE	Dan Esai
MEMBER AT LARGE	Fritz Charles
WESTERN INTERIOR RAC	<i>Vacant</i>
YK DELTA RAC	<i>Absent</i>
COMMERCIAL FISHING	Charles Guest (<i>Voted in as alternate during WG Business</i>)
SPORT FISHING	Absent
PROCESSOR	<i>Vacant</i>
ADF&G	Nick Smith
CHAIR	Barbara Carlson
Other Participants:	
<u>ADF&G Comm. Fish:</u> Ben Gray, Chuck Brazil, Sean Larson, Zach Liller, Keegan Birchfield, Bobette Dickerson <u>Sport Fish Division:</u> John Chythlook <u>Subsistence Division:</u> David Runfola, Chris McDevitt, Dave Koster	
<u>USFWS:</u> Ray Born, Gary Decossas, Aaron Moses, Corey Graham, Frank Harris <u>OSM:</u> Dave Cannon (Aniak), Dan Gillikin (NVN), Janessa Esquible (ONC), Katie Russel (ONC), Matthew Kapsner (ONC)	
<u>Media:</u>	Jennifer Hooper (AVCP), Paige Jones (AVCP) Curry Cunningham (UAF), Daniel Schindler (UW)
<u>WG Alternates</u> Mary Peltola (Lower River Subsistence) Alissa Rodgers (Lower River Subsistence) Charles Guest (Member at Large / Commercial Fishing) Darren Deacon (Middle River Subsistence)	Allen Simeon (Aniak / elected Upriver Elder) Kevin Whitworth (KRITFC / elected Headwaters Alterate) Jim Simeon (KRITFC)

GLOSSARY OF ABBREVIATIONS:

Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ADF&G), 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), ADF&G Subsistence Division (SD), 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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