

Kuskokwim River Salmon Management Working Group

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

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

June 16, 2021

This meeting of the Kuskokwim River Salmon Management Working Group was called to order at approximately 10:01 a.m. and adjourned at approximately 12:45 p.m. A quorum was established with 10 full voting members present at the start of the meeting. LaMont Albertson (Sportfishing) chaired the meeting.

AGENDA ITEMS

A. USFWS/KRITFC UPDATE: *Audio for this update begins at 09:30 – Meeting Audio – 06/16/21*

- Boyd Bilhovde (USFWS) gave a summary of the effort and harvest in the previous set and drift gillnet openers. He stated that there has been good cooperation between state and federal law enforcement and that they had reported great compliance.

A. ADF&G MANAGEMENT ACTIONS UNDER CONSIDERATION: *Audio begins at 13:08 – Meeting Audio - 06/16/21*

- Nick Smith (ADF&G) stated that assessment data supported announcing another 12-hour subsistence opener in Subsistence Sections 1-3 and that he was looking at Tuesday, June 22 as the date for the next opener. He stated that this follows the salmon management plan of one period per week while the king salmon run is expected to be returning within the escapement goal. This would also allow for the chum/sockeye ratios to build and alleviate pressure on the group of king salmon that were fished on during the June 15 opener. Spreading out fishing opportunities would also reduce the possibility of subsistence users waiting for a long period between the proposed and future openings.
- Mary Peltola (2nd Member at Large, KRITFC) stated that the KRITFC inseason management team would be meeting June 17 to review the harvest estimates from the June 15 opener prior to announcing the next opener and that they would likely want to have an opener sooner than Tuesday.
- Kevin Whitworth (Western Interior RAC; KRITFC) began a conversation regarding household permits in Subsistence Section 5. *Please see the Motions section below for this discussion.*

B. PEOPLE TO BE HEARD: *Non-Working Group Members: Audio begins at 49:58 – Meeting Audio – 06/16/21*

- Liz Phillip (Kwethluk) had a question about the household permits. Nick Smith (ADF&G) clarified that the permits were only valid upstream of Aniak. Liz Phillip stated that she had not gotten the fish she needed yet.
- Some discussion was had between Working Group members during this people to be heard section and can be accessed via the audio file.

C. CONTINUING BUSINESS: *Audio for subsistence reports begins at 57:45 – Meeting Audio – 06/16/21*

- Subsistence Reports: Lowest River, ONC Inseason Subsistence Report, Lower River, Middle River, Upper River, Headwaters
 - – Lowest River
 - Adolph Lupie (Tuntutuliak) stated that during the June 15 opener he had drifted 8 times and caught 10 mostly smaller kings. He wanted to have another opener occur on Saturday, June 19 so that fish could dry and not be affected by flies.
 - ONC Inseason Subsistence Report: *Audio for the ONC report begins at 1:02:00 – Meeting Audio – 06/16/21*
 - Katie Russel (ONC) and Avery Hoffman (KRITFC) presented the ONC Inseason Subsistence Report. Please see the *Information Packet pages 3–5* and meeting audio for this presentation.
 - Lower River
 - John Andrew (Kwethluk; Downriver Elder / YK Delta RAC) stated that during the June 15 opener people that fished down near Napaskiak were catching up to 20 fish. He observed that deeper nets were working better. He also stated that most fish caught were being shared with elders.
 - Mary Peltola (Bethel; 2nd Member at Large) stated that she had fished down near the Johnson

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River during the June 15 opener and had done well around the slack tide. Most fish were caught near the bottom of the net. She said that James Nicori (Kwethluk, KRITFC) had done well around the Kwethluk “Y” area as well.

- Albert Kawagley (Bethel; 1st Member at Large) stated that his family had harvested some kings in the past openers.
- Robert Lekander (Bethel) stated that he had started late and that he had heard reports that it was crowded down near Napakiak and Napaskiak. He stated that he caught 14 kings and 3 reds, but no chums yet. He said that he was hoping for another opening before the weather changed and the flies started coming out.
- Middle River
 - Allen Simeon (Aniak, Upriver Elder) stated that he has observed that there is still some snow in the Kuskokwim mountains and that the runoff from the mountains has kept the water cold. He stated in the past openers he has fished a setnet deep in an eddy and has been catching fish near the bottom of the net. He said that some of the larger fish moving upriver were probably swimming below his net. They have not been catching many chums or reds up near Aniak yet. He agreed that an opening on Tuesday, June 22 would be better for his area.
 - Walter Morgan (Lower Kalskag; Middle River Subsistence) said that he had caught 10 kings during the June 15 opener, 5 were small and 5 were medium-sized. He had seen about 14 boats fishing between Lower Kalskag and Aniak. Average catch was about 10 kings per boat and most of those were smaller, jack kings. Sheefish were being caught as well. He noted that not many people fished between Tuluksak and the Kalskags.
- Upper River
 - Ruby Egrass (Red Devil; Upriver Subsistence) stated that as of June 16, 5 household permits had been issued and that 5 king salmon had been harvested.
- Headwaters
 - Kevin Whitworth (McGrath, Western Interior RAC) said that most people were trying to catch pike and whitefish at this time. He had some concerns about the household permits in Section 5. *For more on this, please see Motion 2 below.*
- Inseason Harvest Report (ONC/KRITFC): *Audio for the ONC report begins at 1:35:46 – Meeting Audio – 06/16/21*
 - Kevin Whitworth (Western Interior RAC, KRITFC) presented information on the ONC/KRITFC Inseason Harvest Reports from the June 12 drift and set gillnet periods. For further information on this presentation, please refer to *pages 6-9 of the Information Packet and the meeting audio.*
- Overview of Kuskokwim River salmon run assessment: *Audio for this presentation begins at 1:41:04 – Meeting Audio - 06/16/21*
 - Test Fisheries (Bethel and Aniak):
 - Sonar/Weirs/Aerial Surveys/Other:
 - Sean Larson (ADF&G) gave an update on the status of ADF&G assessment programs. He presented the assessment packet for June 14 (see *Informational Packet pages 11-21*). Notably, at this point in the season king salmon were making up a higher proportion of the BTF catches than has been observed, on average, meaning BTF is pointing to fewer reds and chums in the river than have been observed in the past at this point. He stated that data were pointing towards this not being a large king run like that seen in 2019, but closer to that seen in 2018 and 2020 where although smaller runs, escapement goals were met.
 - LaMont Albertson (Sportfishing) asked a question about pooling fish count data at the sonar project. Sean Larson and Keegan Birchfield (ADF&G) provided an explanation of this method (*Please refer to 1:48:00 of the Meeting Audio*)
 - Weir installs are currently underway and aerial surveys will take place in late-July.

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- Subsistence Division Project update: *Audio begins at 2:15:15 – Meeting Audio - 06/16/21*
 - Chris McDevitt (ADF&G) gave an update on the non-salmon spawning tributaries project. On June 9 and 12 two trips had been made to the Gweek River, on June 14 a trip was made to the Johnson River, and on June 15 a trip had been made to the Tuntutuliak River. A few interviews had been made with not many reports of fish being caught.
- NVN Report:
 - Dan Gillikin (NVN) stated that Aniak Test Fish had started picking up some king salmon. They caught 8 kings on June 15, but no chum or red salmon yet.
- Working Group KRITFC Representative Report
 - LaMont Albertson (Sportfishing, KRITFC) spoke about the recent gillnet opener and said there would be some data coming from those soon. He said a meeting between KRITFC inseason managers would take place on June 17.
 - Boyd Bilhovde (USFWS) asked an open question to those with traditional knowledge of the 2018 salmon runs and how it compared to what was being seen now. Some discussion was had between Boyd Bilhovde, Robert Lekander, Mary Peltola, and Albert Kawagley regarding this question and *can be accessed at 2:02:20 in the meeting audio*.
- Sport Fish Report: *No further information presented.*
- Trawl Bycatch Report
 - Sean Larson (ADF&G) presented a weekly trawl bycatch report and there was discussion that followed. *Please see the Information Packet – 06/16/21 page 22 for more information. Audio begins at 2:23:00 - Meeting Audio – 06/16/21*
- Discussion of ADF&G Management considerations and discussion of possible alternatives (recommendations from the Working Group): *Audio for begins at 2:27:40 – Meeting Audio - 06/16/21*
 - ***Refer to bullet point above for summary the ADF&G Management considerations***
 - Boyd Bilhovde (USFWS) said it was important to consider the traditional knowledge held by the inseason managers at the KRITFC and stated that it would be good to listen to what they have to say in the June 17 meeting prior to announcing the next opener. Also, he stated he would like to see the harvest estimates from the June 15 opener.
 - Mary Peltola (2nd Member at Large, KRITFC) agreed that announcing an opener should not occur until after the June 17 KRITFC meeting and stressed the importance of traditional knowledge in making management decisions.
 - Further discussion on this topic led to Motion 5.
- Motion for Discussion and Action.
 - See below summary of Working Group motions.

D. OLD BUSINESS: None at this meeting

E. NEW BUSINESS: None at this meeting

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WORKING GROUP MOTIONS:

Meeting Motions:

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

Motion 2: For Subsistence Section 5 to not be required to use the household permits in 2021. Passed (7 yes, 1 no)

- **The motion was made by Mary Peltola and seconded by Kevin Whitworth. Mr. Whitworth questioned the need of a permit to fish in section 5 due to very few king salmon in the area and because most people were currently fishing for pike and whitefish. He also had concerns over people in McGrath being able to obtain a permit due the ADF&G office being closed at various times during the upcoming week. Discussion of these issues led to this motion to not require permits in section 5.**

Motion 3: To extend the meeting until 12:30 p.m. Passed (Unanimous)

Motion 4: To extend the meeting until 12:45 p.m. Passed (Unanimous)

Motion 5: For the state not to announce any subsistence opportunity in sections 1-3, for the following week. Passed (Unanimous)

- **This motion was made by Mary Peltola and seconded by Kevin Whitworth. Nick Smith had proposed a drift and setnet opener for Tuesday, June 22 to allow for some king salmon to move upriver and to give more time for chum and sockeye numbers to build. Discussion was had between Boyd Bilhovde, Mary Peltola, and others about wanting to see the harvest estimates from the June 15 opener and have a meeting between USFWS and KRITFC on June 17 prior to setting a date, and that the date might be earlier.**

Motion 5: To adjourn. Passed (Unanimous)

COMMENTS FROM THE WORKING GROUP:

There were no further comments from the Working Group at this meeting.

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WORKING GROUP ATTENDANCE:

MEMBER SEAT:	NAME:
DOWNRIVER ELDER	Absent
UPRIVER ELDER	Allen Simeon
LOWER RIVER SUBSISTENCE	Alissa Rogers
MIDDLE RIVER SUBSISTENCE	Walter Morgan
UPRIVER SUBSISTENCE	Ruby Egrass
HEADWATERS SUBSISTENCE	Absent
1 st MEMBER AT LARGE	Absent
2 nd MEMBER AT LARGE	Mary Peltola
WESTERN INTERIOR RAC	Kevin Whitworth
YK DELTA RAC	John Andrew
COMMERCIAL FISHING	Charles Guest
SPORT FISHING	LaMont Albertson
KRITFC	Avery Hoffman
ADF&G	Nick Smith
CHAIR	LaMont Albertson

Other Participants:		
<u>ADF&G Comm. Fish:</u> Ben Gray, Sean Larson, Keegan Birchfield <u>Sport Fish:</u> <u>Subsistence Division:</u> Chris McDevitt		
<u>USFWS:</u> Boyd Bilhovde, Aaron Moses, Frank Harris, Chris Tulik <u>OSM:</u>		
Janessa Esquible (ONC)	Jim Simon (KRITFC)	<u>Media:</u> Greg Kim (KYUK)
Danielle Lowery (ONC)	Dan Gillikin (NVN)	
Katie Russel (ONC)		<u>WG Alternates:</u> Albert Kawagley (1 st Member at Large)
Jaden Andrew (ONC)		
Robert Lekander (ONC)		
Terese Schomogyi (KRITFC)		

GLOSSARY OF ABBREVIATIONS:

Alaska Department of Fish and Game (**ADF&G, department, State**), Orutsararmiut Traditional Native Council (**OTNC**), 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**), Native Village of Napaimute (**NVN**), Yukon Kuskokwim Health Corporation (**YKHC**), Alaska State Troopers (**AST**), University of Alaska Fairbanks (**UAF**)

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