

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

July 7, 2012

Called to order at 2:00 pm at ADFG in Bethel and adjourned at 4:30 pm. Seven of thirteen members (8 members with ADF&G) were present and a quorum was established.

AGENDA ITEMS:

- 1.) Continuing Business
- 2.) Old Business
- 3.) New Business

WORKING GROUP ACTION ITEMS: N/A

MEETING ACTION ANNOUNCEMENT:

The next KRSMWG meeting will be June 9 at 10:00 am at ADF&G in Bethel.

ADF&G RECOMMENDATIONS:

- 1.) Starting Monday, July 9, the entire Kuskokwim River will be open to 6-inch or less mesh. ADF&G recommended to continue to allow subsistence salmon fishing with 6-inch or smaller mesh until further sections of the Kuskokwim River. Subsistence fishing with hook and line would remain closed.
- 2.) ADF&G also recommended opening Commercial Fishing Subdistrict 1-B to commercial salmon fishing on Tuesday, July 10, for four hours from 12:00 pm to 4:00 pm.

WORKING GROUP MOTIONS:

- 1.) Approval of the agenda. Motion passes unanimously.
- 2.) To accept the ADF&G recommendation to continue to allow subsistence fishing on the Kuskokwim River with 6-inch or smaller mesh until further notice. Subsistence fishing with hook and line would remain closed. Motion passed.
- 3.) To support ADF&G's recommendation of opening commercial fishing in Subdistrict 1-B on Tuesday, July 10, from 12:00 pm until 4:00 pm. Motion failed.

PEOPLE TO BE HEARD:

- 1.) Nathan Underwood emailed Bev Hoffman to tell the KRSMWG that he was against commercial fishing because he believed that every Chinook should get up the river. Bev Hoffman reported that she talked to four more people that shared the same sentiment.
- 2.) Travis Elison talked to a commercial fisherman on the phone, who wanted the KRSMWG to know that he supported commercial fishing because it was his only income.

3.) Stuart Currie said that many commercial fishermen came by his processing plant because they want to fish.

4.) Douglas Kernak reported that people in the lower river had full smokehouses and were mostly finished fishing.

CONTINUING BUSINESS:

LOWER RIVER SUBSISTENCE REPORTS:

Fritz Charles (Member at Large) reported that his family was finished fishing.

Charlie Brown (Commercial Fisher) from Eek reported that his family harvested enough for this year.

Bev Hoffman (Sport Fish) reported that she had not acquired any salmon until July 5. At the time of the meeting, she had 25 chums and 18 sockeye and she was "a much happier person." She also commented that she saw quite a few people cutting and drying fish in the sunshine on the Kwethluk River.

Mike Williams (Lower River subsistence) in Akiak reported that everyone finished subsistence fishing in the 3-day opening, and were now preparing for commercial fishing. He still needed to fish for his dog team, after which he would also be finished.

ONC IN-SEASON LOWER RIVER SUBSISTENCE REPORT:

Please see July 7 Information Packet for ONC's full report.

Alissa Joseph (ONC) reported that only one family surveyed had met their subsistence harvest needs to date.

Regarding Chinook salmon, 75% of fishermen surveyed commented that fish caught were smaller than sockeye and chum. Chinook were starting to turn red most likely because they were headed to lower river tributaries. The white-nosed Chinook caught recently were large, bright, and silver.

MIDDLE RIVER SUBSISTENCE REPORT:

Lamont C. Albertson (son of Sport Fish member) reported that people in Aniak were filling up their smoke racks. This year they caught a higher percentage of chums than normal. Most Chinook caught were smaller than the biggest sockeye.

KNA INSEASON MIDDLE RIVER SUBSISTENCE REPORT: none

UPPER RIVER SUBSISTENCE REPORT:

Dave Cannon reported that in Napaimute one woman was putting up quite a few chums, some sockeye, and 2 Chinook. Most people were catching a majority of chum.

HEADWATERS SUBSISTENCE REPORT:

Nick Petruska (Headwaters Subsistence) reported that Section 5 was closed to subsistence salmon fishing so no one had been out.

DISCUSSION OF RUN ASSESSMENT DATA:

Kevin Schaberg reported that water temperature remained slightly lower than average and water clarity was a record low. Water level was higher than previous years.

The 2012 Bethel Test Fish Chinook CPUE was approaching 2010 for this date. Kevin pointed out that the numbers were conservative because they did not take into account restrictions above the BTF site.

According to the Chinook salmon Late Run Timing Projection Model, 2012 indicators of Chinook salmon abundance were not projecting to meet the lower point of the Management Objective. However, Kevin predicted that 2012 could come close to the Management Objective, especially if 6-inch mesh restrictions remained in place.

Chum salmon appeared to be exhibiting average run timing and average run strength.

Sockeye salmon were a little late, but run abundance was climbing steadily. Currently the sockeye run was better than the same dates in 2002 and 2010.

WEIRS/MARK-RECAPTURE/AERIAL SURVEYS/OTHER:

All escapement projects were in the water and counting fish.

Kevin Schaberg commented that it was promising to see systems like the Kwethluk River showing decent numbers of fish already. Some stocks were showing up late and other stocks were on time.

Chinook salmon:

- The Kwethluk River weir was well below historical averages for Chinook counts, but this year the run is late and more fish will likely show up.
- The Tuluksak River weir currently had counts better than 2008, 2009, 2010, and 2011. Chinook were showing up on time at this weir.
- The Salmon River weir crew had not yet observed any Chinook.
- The George River weir was tracking similar to 2010 and 2011, and well above 2008.
- The Kogrukuk River weir had better Chinook counts than 2008, 2010, and 2011, years that met escapement goals.
- Tatlawiksuk River weir Chinook counts were currently better than 2008.

Chum salmon:

- Kwethluk River weir counts were currently behind past years
- Tuluksak River weir counts were well above all years except 2012
- Weir crews reported that many chum salmon were exhibiting multiple net marks, fungus, and other injuries that appeared to be consistent with fishing.

Sockeye salmon:

- The sockeye run was behind schedule at Kwethluk River weir.
- Kogrukuk River weir counts were above 2008, 2010, and 2011.

COMMENTS:

Stuart Currie (Processor) asked some questions regarding Bethel Test Fish, which were clarified by ADF&G staff:

- Regarding the duration of BTF drifts, Doug Bue (ADF&G) explained that the crew was fishing the 5 3/8-inch, two drifts per night and 10 minutes each drift. The duration of the drifts were shortened because of high chum abundance. The 8-inch net was fished twice for 20 minutes each drift.
- It was explained that cpue is standardized to 60 minutes for 100 fathoms. Kevin Schaberg added, "The CPUE numbers that come from BTF are standardized so they are directly comparable across all years, no matter the duration of the drift."
- Stuart was concerned that some species could be under-reported in shorter drifts. Kevin replied that it's a possibility that you could saturate your net with chum salmon, which is one of the reasons BTF fishes the 8-inch net for Chinook salmon.
- Stuart then asked if there was a correlation between late run timing at the BTF site and run timing at the weirs, or if the fish accelerate after they pass Bethel. Kevin said that this year is a good example of how some tributaries show returns early, on time and late returns, but do not necessarily correlate directly with BTF. Kevin explained that the "degree day" that fish put their eggs in the water is based on water temperature, not calendar days.

COMMERCIAL CATCH REPORT:

There was no commercial catch report for the Kuskokwim River.

Travis Elison gave a report from the recent commercial opening in Districts 4 and 5 on July 4:

- In District 4 (Quinhagak), 201 permit holders had fished during the opening, which represented potential record for that time of year. Chum and sockeye catches were above average. The Chinook was far below average at less than 2,000 fish.
- In District 5, (Goodnews Bay) commercial harvest of sockeye was above average. Travis noted that over 15,000 sockeye had already passed the Goodnews River weir, which has an escapement goal of 18,000. The run appeared to be past the 50% point. Very few Chinook had been harvested in Goodnews Bay. Very few Chinook had been counted at the Goodnews River weir. It was suggested that the run might be late, like in 2009, 2010, and 2011.

PROCESSOR REPORT:

Stuart Currie stated that he and Nick Souza (CVS Processor) agreed to abstain from buying Chinook salmon from commercial fishermen. Both processors were ready for a commercial opening on the Kuskokwim River.

Stuart hoped that this year would be better than the last two years; otherwise it might be the demise of Kuskokwim Seafoods and upriver commercial fishing. He explained to the KRSWMG that there are 225 fishermen upriver who earned a total of \$250,000 last year. Furthermore, Kuskokwim Seafoods provides many jobs in the area.

When asked about the market, Stuart said that he had developed a new relationship with Orca Bay Seafoods, a company that distributes to grocery stores that target people who care about buying wild Alaska salmon, fair-trade, fair-value, and helping local economies. However, "salmon remains a commodity," and the market had collapsed since Chile and Norway had

boosted their production. Wholesale Chilean coho was recently selling in Miami for \$3.50 per fillet. This year Kuskokwim Seafoods would be lucky to get \$3.00 for a chum fillet. He explained that labor, transportation, and fuel costs create "no great profit for being a salmon processor anywhere in the state of Alaska."

SPORT FISH REPORT:

John Chythlook reported that Chinook salmon sport fishing had been closed in the Kuskokwim River drainage since June 22. He had no reports of Chinook sport fishing on the Kanektok or Goodnews Rivers.

Bev Hoffman commented that a sport fisherman she talked to on the Kwethluk River reported "slow catching of mostly trout."

Lamont Albertson reported slow sport fishing [any species] in the Aniak River.

WEATHER FORECAST:

The weather was forecasted to be partly sunny for the next few days.

RECOMMENDATION:

1.) Starting Monday, July 9, the entire Kuskokwim River will be open to 6-inch or less mesh. ADF&G recommended to continue to allow subsistence salmon fishing with 6-inch or smaller mesh until further notice. Subsistence fishing with hook and line to remain closed.

2.) Opening Commercial Fishing Subdistrict 1-B to commercial salmon fishing on Tuesday, July 10, for four hours from 12:00 pm to 4:00 pm.

- There would not be a 2-hour extension in the lower section of Subdistrict 1-B.
- Subsistence salmon fishing would be closed from 6:00 am until 7:00 pm on Tuesday, July 10 in section 1-B.
- ADF&G to continue to assess Chinook salmon abundance and make a final decision regarding this commercial period on Monday, July 9. The assessment and decision would be based on minimizing incidental harvests of Chinook salmon.

Travis stated that, based on historic run timing, by July 9 sockeye passage has typically been between 60 and 90 percent of the run and chum passage has typically been between 60 and 80 percent of the run. *(Please see page 24 of the July 7 Information Packet for commercial catch reports.)*

Clarifications in response to questions about the recommendation:

- The boundaries for Subdistrict 1-B: from the bottom tip of Eek Island to just below Bethel at the mouth of Steamboat Slough.
- Processors will not buy Chinook salmon.
- The commercial fishery is not Chinook directed. Commercial fishers must use 6-inch or smaller mesh, which target chum and sockeye.
- By regulation, the commercial fishery in District 1 is always limited to 6" mesh drift gillnet.

WORKING GROUP MOTIONS:

MOTION 1: Approval of the agenda. Motion passes unanimously (7 yeas).

MOTION 2: To accept the ADF&G recommendation to continue to allow subsistence fishing on the Kuskokwim River with 6-inch or smaller mesh until further notice. Subsistence fishing with hook and line would remain closed. Motion passed unanimously (7 yeas).

MOTION 3: To support ADF&G's recommendation of opening commercial fishing in Subdistrict 1-B on Tuesday, July 10, from 12:00 pm until 4:00 pm. Motion failed (2 yeas, 5 nays).

COMMENTS FOR MOTION 3:

Bev Hoffman was concerned about having a commercial fishery because she was concerned about incidental Chinook harvests.

- Travis explained that the state is mandated by regulation to provide economic opportunity on harvestable surpluses of fish, "which can be a tough balance."
- Chinook abundance was predicated to drop in the next few days, which is why ADF&G wanted to wait until Monday to make a final decision about the opener.
- Abundances of chum and sockeye appeared to be more than adequate for escapement and subsistence and harvestable surpluses of these species were available for commercial fishermen.
- Tom Doolittle (USFWS) stated that USFWS was in agreement with ADF&G's recommendation because:
 - USFWS agreed with non-Chinook directed commercial fishing once 95% of the Chinook was past Bethel.
 - Chinook harvested can be used for subsistence.
 - USFWS agreed to commercial fishing on the condition that fewer than 1,000 Chinook salmon be harvested in the entire 2012 season. If at any time it appeared that commercial harvest of Chinook was approaching this threshold, USFWS would rescind support for commercial fishing.

Fritz Charles disagreed with Motion 3. As the main harvester for five families (30-40 people), he did not approve of commercial fishing until Coho season. He stated earlier in the meeting that while he recognized that people want the money, commercial fishing "wouldn't be [prudent] because we were shut down for 12 days." Commercial fishing also seemed inappropriate because AVCP asked Senator Begich to consider declaring a Fisheries Disaster on the Kuskokwim River.

Mike Williams agreed with the motion. After assessing the statistics, he agreed that there was a harvestable surplus of chum and sockeye salmon. Commercial fishing in Subdistrict 1-B was a "win-win" opportunity because of some economic gain for fishermen and because incidentally caught Chinook would be used for subsistence.

John Andrew (YK Delta RAC) left a message prior to the meeting. He said that the older men in Kwethluk who were not commercial fishermen did not want a commercial opening. They were concerned about chum being targeted by commercial fishermen, after the above average chum harvests by subsistence fishers this year. John questioned Chinook salmon abundance because of this year's late run timing. He preferred to wait until Coho arrive for commercial fishing.

James Charles disagreed with Motion 3 even though he is a commercial fisherman. He preferred "...to save the kings."

Mike Williams commented, "It's been a tough couple of months and it's going to get tougher down the road."

Charlie Brown agreed with Motion 3 because people were done with subsistence fishing.

Stuart Currie supported Motion 3:

- He believed that 1,000 Chinook potentially harvested incidentally, out of a run of about 133,000 (less than 1%) would have a negligible effect on future years. However, discontinuing commercial fishing on the Kuskokwim River would have a large impact on the economic viability of the area.
- Stuart said he "believes in science." He feels that he is "blessed to have such a good group of scientists" at both ADF&G and USFWS managing the fishery.

Lamont Albertson stated that even though he has much respect for ADF&G, 2012 commercial fishing "... goes against common sense..." in light of the poor and "atypical" run in 2012.

Travis Elison commented that ADF&G would take the KRSMWG's vote into consideration.

OLD BUSINESS:

1.) Old business items were tabled until a later meeting.

NEW BUSINESS:

1.) KRMSWG members congratulated Travis Elison for officially taking the position of Kuskokwim Area Manager for ADF&G.

GENERAL COMMENTS FROM WORKING GROUP MEMBERS: none

WORKING GROUP ATTENDANCE:

MEMBER SEAT:	NAME:
UPRIVER ELDER	<i>vacant</i>
DOWNRIVER ELDER	James Charles
COMMERCIAL FISHER	Charlie Brown
LOWER RIVER SUBSISTENCE	Mike Williams
MIDDLE RIVER SUBSTENCE	<i>absent</i>
UPPER RIVER SUBSISTENCE	<i>absent</i>
HEADWATERS SUBSISTENCE	Nick Petruska
PROCESSOR	Stuart Currie
MEMBER AT LARGE	Fritz Charles
SPORT FISHER	Bev Hoffman
WESTERN INTERIOR RAC	<i>absent</i>
Y-K DELTA RAC	<i>absent</i>
ADF&G	Travis Elison
CHAIR	Bev Hoffman

Other Participants:	
<u>ADF&G Comm. Fish :</u> John Linderman, Travis Elison, Kevin Schaberg, Doug Bue, Alice Bailey, Zach Liller, Brittany Blain <u>Sport Fish :</u> John Chythlook <u>Subsistence Division:</u> Lisa Olsen, Hiroko Ikuta	
<u>USFWS:</u> Dan Gillikin, Robert Sundown, Steve Miller, Tom Doolittle <u>OSM:</u> Don Rivard, George Papas	
Casie Stockdale (AVCP) Alissa Joseph (ONC) Doug Molyneaux	Mark Erhardt (KYUK) Dave Cannon Lamont C. Albertson

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