

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 9, 2012

Called to order at 10:00 at ADF&G in Bethel and adjourned at 10:45 am. Four of thirteen members (5 with ADF&G) were present and a quorum was not established. The purpose of the meeting was to discuss non-Chinook directed commercial fishing on the Kuskokwim River.

AGENDA ITEMS:

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

WORKING GROUP ACTION ITEMS: none

MEETING ACTION ANNOUNCEMENT:

The next KRSMWG meeting will be at the Call of the Chairs.

ADF&G RECOMMENDATION:

ADF&G needed to further assess data before having the first non-Chinook directed commercial salmon opening on the Kuskokwim River.

WORKING GROUP MOTIONS: none

PEOPLE TO BE HEARD:

- 1.) Casie Stockdale (AVCP) shared AVCP's stance on commercial fishing:
 - "This has been a very difficult year on the river. People have made significant sacrifices to protect the king run." Even though commercial fishing this year will be controversial, AVCP recognized that the "local fishermen depend on the income that they get from commercial fishing."
 - AVCP "would like to ensure that a minimal number of kings are taken incidentally if there is a commercial opening, and ask that they be retained for food purposes and not sold."
 - Casie then asked Stuart Currie (Processor) if he could distribute Chinook to upriver communities if commercial fishermen do not need to keep them for subsistence purposes. Stuart replied that "would not be a problem." In the past, he has also distributed Chinook locally to elders.

CONTINUING BUSINESS:

LOWER RIVER SUBSISTENCE REPORTS:

James Charles (Downriver Elder) gave a report from Tuntutuliak:

- People there have enough chums. When he fished recently he caught 100 chums, very few reds, and a couple of Chinook.

- Even though he saw some Chinook backbones hanging, “law abiding people don’t have kings.” James said that they were waiting for the lifting of gear restrictions because some Chinook were still in the river.
- James did not agree with commercial fishing at this point of the season. He referenced the letter from Gene Peltola, Jr. (USFWS), to Travis Elison (ADF&G) discussed at the May 30, 2012, meeting (*see the May 31 Information Packet*) in which USFWS discussed the importance of meeting Chinook escapement goals. James felt that a commercial period at this time would catch too many Chinook salmon. People fishing illegally in the lower river were catching over 10 per drift.

Mike Williams reported that Akiak residents were finished with subsistence fishing. When fishing the day before, Mike had caught 4 Chinook, which indicated that “the kings are still running,” along with many chum and sockeye.

MIDDLE RIVER SUBSISTENCE REPORT: none

KNA INSEASON MIDDLE RIVER SUBSISTENCE REPORT:

Mike Thalhauser (KNA) reported that about half the people participating in the KNA inseason surveys were finished fishing. Those who did not harvest as many Chinook as usual supplemented with more chum and sockeye. He said that about half of the people had full smokehouses. One concern was that some Chinook have 8-inch net marks.

UPPER RIVER SUBSISTENCE REPORT:

Evelyn Thomas (Upriver Subsistence) reported that Crooked Creek and Sleetmute had not met their subsistence needs. She said, “Please, please keep commercial fishing closed” because people need more chum salmon. Her family had been fishing hard since July 4, and only had 40 chums to share among four families.

HEADWATERS SUBSISTENCE REPORT: none

DISCUSSION OF RUN ASSESSMENT DATA:

Kevin Schaberg (ADF&G) reported high water at the Crooked Creek gauge because of heavy rains upriver. Water temperature had warmed up to average. Water clarity remained low.

The 2012 Chinook Bethel Test Fish cumulative CPUE was approaching that of 2010. However, Kevin noted that “we still might fall a little short of our management objective.” Due to late run timing, ADF&G will continue to fish the 8-inch net for Chinook even though this size mesh has normally been discontinued on July 10 in past years.

The chum salmon cumulative CPUE indicated average to slightly late run timing and abundance was still climbing. The sockeye salmon cumulative CPUE indicated slightly late run timing but that the run was coming in strong.

WEIRS/MARK-RECAPTURE/AERIAL SURVEYS/OTHER:

Brittany Blain (ADF&G) reported that the Salmon River weir had become inoperable that morning due to extremely high water. The Kogrukluuk River weir had become inoperable on June 8 at 5:00 pm because the water was over the top of the weir.

COMMERCIAL CATCH REPORT: none

PROCESSOR REPORT:

Stuart Currie had nothing to report.

SPORT FISH REPORT: none

WEATHER FORECAST:

A chance of rain was forecasted for the next week. Upriver was already seeing much rain.

RECOMMENDATION:

ADF&G needed to further assess data before having the first non-Chinook directed commercial salmon opening on the Kuskokwim River.

- Travis Elison stated that the first commercial opening could potentially be Thursday, June 12, if Chinook abundance continued to decrease.
- If Chinook abundance were to remain steady or increase, commercial fishing would be further delayed.
- A decision would be made on Wednesday, June 11 by 12:00 pm.

Kevin Schaberg clarified that ADF&G would need to see daily Chinook CPUE in the single digits and showing a continuing decline, in order to commence commercial fishing,. He and Travis Elison had recently witnessed Chinook bouncing off smaller mesh nets in the Bethel Test Fishery, and downriver subsistence reports indicated that there were still Chinook in the river.

- Tom Doolittle (USFWS) stated, "We agree with Kevin's assessment" on the need to show clearly declining trends. USFWS did not wish to identify a specific date on which fishing might begin.
- Travis Elison pointed out that processors needed notification and specific dates in order to plan logistically.

COMMENTS:

James Charles was glad to hear that commercial fishing would be delayed. He is a commercial fisher, but wants upriver subsistence fishermen like Evelyn Thomas to catch all that they need, prior to any opening. James reiterated the need to think about the future, and though the run may be late, Chinook were still in the district, as evidenced by known illegal fishing activity.

Mike Williams concurred with James and Evelyn, noting that there were still Chinook in the Akiak area. He thanked ADF&G for the recommendation because he agreed that it was prudent to wait.

Evelyn Thomas thanked ADF&G for listening to the needs of her community.

Stuart Currie concurred that we need to wait to commercial fish because Chinook were still in the river. On another point, he also commented that even though there had been 12 days of subsistence closures in 2012, in past years, commercial openings and the associated subsistence closures had equated to 20 days of closures to subsistence fishing in some years.

Tom Doolittle (USFWS) agreed with ADF&G that further evaluation of data was necessary before a commercial opening.

WORKING GROUP ATTENDANCE:

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

Other Participants:	
ADF&G Comm. Fish : Travis Elison, Alice Bailey, Doug Bue, Kevin Schaberg, Brittany Blain, Chris Shelden, Jan Conitz Subsistence Division: Jeff Park	
USFWS: Dan Gillikin, Robert Sundown, Tom Doolittle, Steve Miller, Alex Nick OSM: Don Rivard, George Papas	
Mike Thalhauser (KNA) Alexandra Waska (KNA) LaDonn Robbins (KNA) Dave Cannon	Casie Stockdale (AVCP) Maridon Boario (Senator Hoffman's office) Angela Denning-Barnes (KYUK) Carl Berger (Lower Kuskokwim Economic Development Council)

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**)