



Advisory Announcement

Released: September 14, 2021

CONTACT:

Christy Gleason, Acting Area Management Biologist
Bonnie Borba, Fall Season Research Biologist
(907) 459-7274
Toll free fishing schedule and counts: (866) 479-7387
In Fairbanks fishing schedule hotline: 459-7387

2021 Yukon River Salmon Fall Fishery Announcement # 20

Fall Update # 8, Yukon Area Salmon Fishery

Districts Affected: Yukon Area

The Yukon River fall chum and coho salmon runs are the lowest on record, see Figures 1 and 2. The fall chum salmon run is approximately 99,000 fish compared to a historical run size of 870,000 fish based on median timing. The coho salmon run is approximately 37,000 fish compared to a historical run size of 240,000 fish. Both the fall chum and coho salmon runs are nearly done entering the Yukon River. According to the Fall Chum Salmon Management Plan, the run size did not meet the threshold of 300,000 fish needed to allow subsistence, personal use or commercial fishing. The drainagewide escapement goal of 300,000-600,000 fall chum salmon, tributary escapement goals and Canadian treaty objectives are not expected to be achieved.

Fall chum salmon typically take 39 days to migrate from the mouth of the Yukon River to the U.S./Canada border, with estimated travel rates of 35 miles per day. The last identified fall chum salmon group that entered the Yukon River on September 3 should be approaching the U.S./Canada border around October 12. Monitored lower Yukon River and tributary water levels and water temperatures are near average most of the season and should not adversely affect salmon migration. Some of the upper Yukon River water levels in Canada are still above average for this time of year but are dropping. As the waters flow into Alaska, the Eagle area water levels on the mainstem Yukon River are only slightly above average currently.

The coho salmon run came in late and was extremely weak (Figure 2). Coho salmon are smaller fish than fall chum salmon and typically travel about 30 miles per day. Small numbers of coho and fall chum salmon will continue to enter the Yukon River in September.

Fall Assessment Projects

All projects that handle fish (LYTF; Mt. Village Drift Test Fishery; Pilot Station and Eagle sonars) are making efforts to reduce salmon mortality and distribute test fish catches to community members. Any salmon healthy enough will be released alive from the test nets. Injured salmon and mortalities will be distributed to community members by Tribal councils or on a first come first-served basis from a public dock.

Lower Yukon Test Fishery / ADF&G, Yukon Delta Fisheries Development Association

This project concluded operations September 10, 2021. The fall chum salmon cumulative catch per unit effort (CPUE) was 125.75 which is well below the average of 1,588.86 for this date. The coho salmon cumulative CPUE was 14.09 which is well below the average of 414.56 for this date. This year’s run timing for both fall chum and coho salmon are late compared to median timing at this project.

Mountain Village Drift Test Fishery / Asacarsarmiut Tribal Council

This project concluded operations September 12, 2021. The fall chum salmon cumulative CPUE was 450.29 which is well below the average of 2,038.58 for that date. The coho salmon cumulative CPUE was 117.00 which is well below the average of 1,084.58 for this date. This year’s run timing for both fall chum and coho salmon are late compared to median timing at this project.

Sonar Project near Pilot Station / ADF&G

This project concluded operations September 7, 2021. The preliminary cumulative passage estimate of chum salmon from July 19 through September 7 was 146,172 fish, which is well below the median passage of 723,413 fish for this date. The estimated fall chum salmon component of this count was approximately 99,000 fish after the application of preliminary genetic stock proportions. The run timing for fall chum salmon was near median. The preliminary cumulative passage estimate of coho salmon is 37,257 fish through September 7, which compares to the median cumulative passage of 147,456 coho salmon for this date. This year’s run timing for coho salmon is 5 days late compared to median timing at this project.

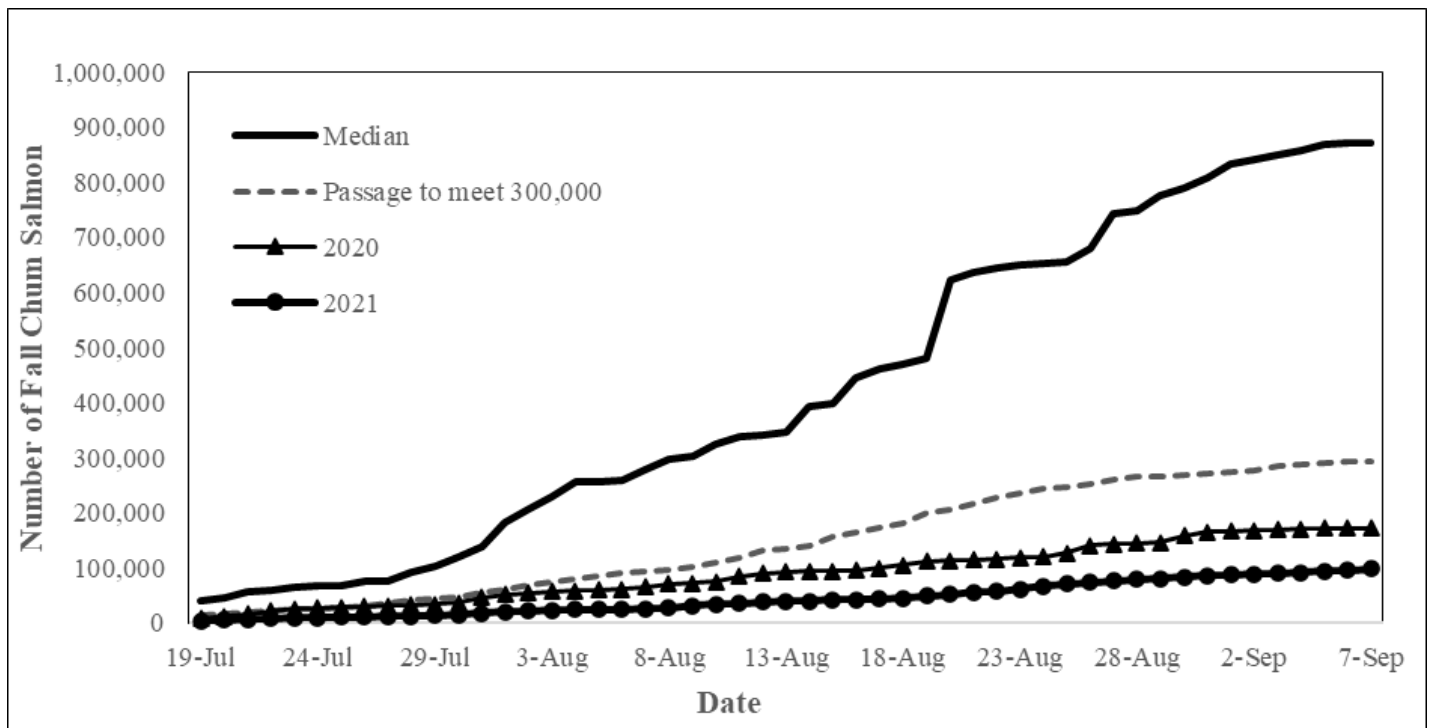


Figure 1. Cumulative passage of fall chum salmon at the mainstem Yukon River sonar project (Pilot Station) compared to median and 2020–2021. The dashed line is the passage required to meet the minimum management requirement of 300,000 fish to allow subsistence fishing.

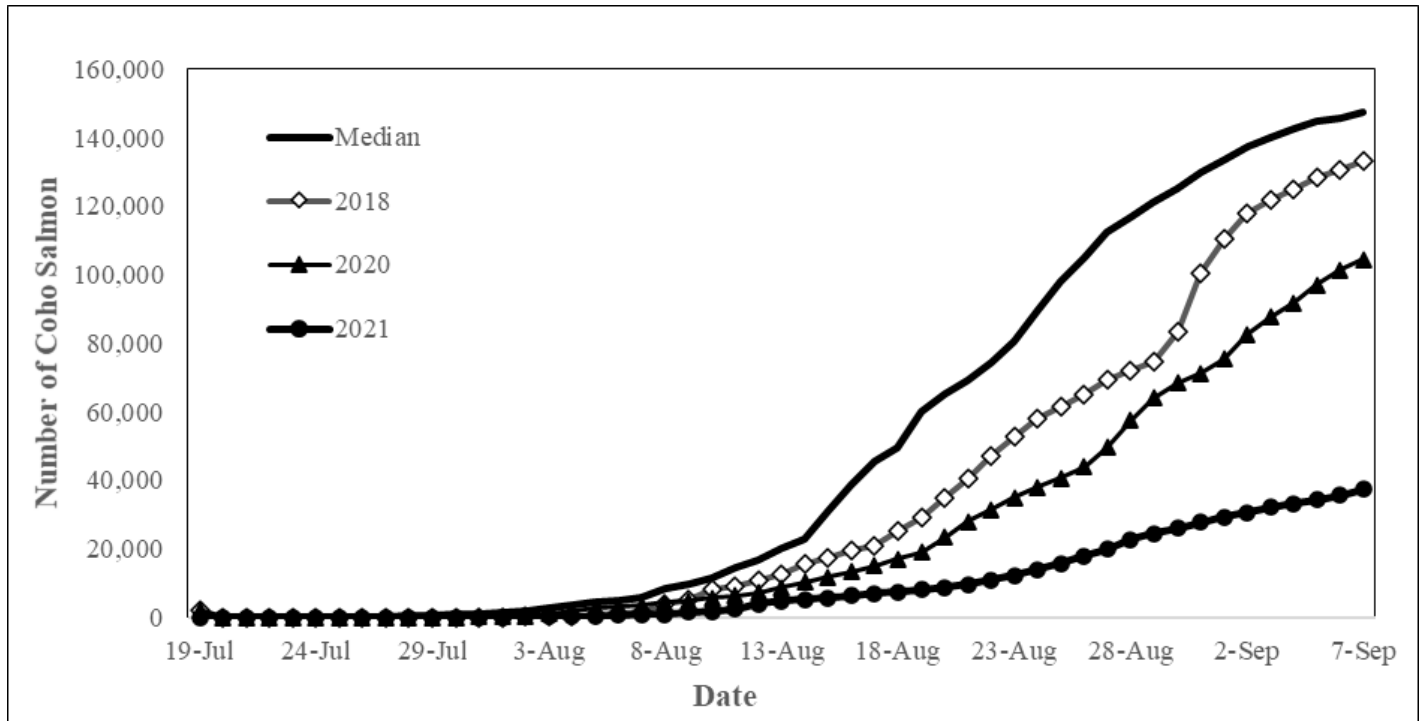


Figure 2. Cumulative passage of coho salmon at the mainstem Yukon River sonar project (Pilot Station) compared to median, 2018, and 2020–2021.

Teedriinjik (Chandalar River) sonar / United States Fish and Wildlife Service

The sonar project began counting fall chum salmon on August 22. As of September 13, the cumulative passage estimate is 11,209 fish which is well below the historical median of 109,824 fish for this date. This estimate includes a preseason expansion from the normal start date of August 8 through August 21. This expansion plus the sonar passage estimates is used to compare the historical cumulative for the same date. The midpoint of the fall chum salmon run at this project is September 14 based on median timing.

Eagle Sonar / Alaska Department of Fish and Game and Department of Fisheries and Oceans

The transition from counting Chinook to fall chum salmon occurred on September 1. As of September 13, the cumulative passage is 3,704 fall chum salmon which is well below the median of 27,453 fish for this date. The first quarter point of the fall chum salmon run at this project is September 16 based on median timing. The Interim Management Escapement Goal for Canadian-origin fall chum salmon is 70,000-104,000 fish. The goal is assessed post-season using the Eagle sonar count minus the estimated U.S. and Canadian harvest of fall chum salmon above the sonar. Based on overall run size as determined by the assessment projects in the lower river, the escapement objective is unlikely to be met.

Porcupine River Sonar / Yukon Territory Canada / Department of Fisheries and Oceans

This project transitioned to counting fall chum salmon on August 15. The cumulative passage of fall chum salmon as of September 12 is 2,031 fish, which is well below the average passage of 14,949 fish for this date. The midpoint of the fall chum salmon run at this project is September 14 based on median timing.

Fishing Branch River Weir/Sonar / Yukon Territory Canada / Department of Fisheries and Oceans

The project became operational on September 7 and the cumulative fall chum salmon passage estimate through September 13 is 157 fish, which is below the median passage of 5,236 for this date. The first quarter point of the fall chum salmon run at this project is September 14 based on median timing.

Age, Sex, and Length Composition

The preliminary chum salmon age composition of the fish sampled (n=123) from the LYTF 6-inch drift gillnets through August 24 is 86% age-4 and 10% age-5, compared to the 1983–2020 average of 66% age-4 and 31% age-5. Females represent 53% of the fish sampled (n=133), which is below the average of 58%, through September 9. The average length is 563 mm from a sample of 133 chum salmon, which is well below the 1981–2020 average of 592 mm.

Coho salmon length is based on the catches in all drift gillnet mesh sizes operated in the test fishery at the mainstem Yukon River sonar project at Pilot Station. The average length, from a sample of 411 coho salmon, was 519 mm which was well below the 1995–2020 average of 558 mm.

Stock Identification

Genetic mixed stock analysis on chum salmon that passed the mainstem sonar from July 19–August 5, indicates approximately 64% summer chum and 36% fall chum salmon. The summer chum salmon stocks were primarily Lower River stocks at 37%, while the Middle River and Tanana stocks together represented 27%. The fall chum salmon stocks consisted of 22% Border/US (Teedriinjik/Sheenjek/Draanjik), 9% Canadian, and 5% Tanana Fall stocks. For fall chum salmon this represented 76% U.S.-origin and 24% Canadian-origin stocks. The next two strata are at the laboratory being analyzed at this time, the results will be reported in next week's advisory announcement and in the Yukon River daily update <http://list.state.ak.us/mailman/listinfo/yukonriverdailyupdate>.

Fall Season Management Strategy

The 2021 fall chum salmon is critically low, and well below the 300,000 fish threshold in the Fall Chum Salmon Management Plan to allow any subsistence, personal use, sport or commercial fishing in the Yukon Area. The fall chum and coho salmon runs are the lowest on record. Preliminary data from assessment projects indicate that both species have the smallest fish lengths observed in their respective datasets. Due to extremely weak runs of both species, the need to allow salmon passage to spawning grounds, and the higher probability of encountering small-bodied salmon in 4-inch gillnets, the nonsalmon subsistence fishing schedule was adjusted to provide additional protection for migrating salmon. In all districts, there is a reduced schedule for subsistence fishing with 4-inch gillnets to target nonsalmon. Additional manned fish wheel opportunity for nonsalmon is being provided during daylight hours for subsistence fishing in all districts. While using dip nets and manned fish wheels, all fall chum salmon must be released alive and coho salmon are also recommended to be released alive given the historic low run size. Other nonsalmon legal gears remain open, see details below.

Lower Yukon subsistence fishermen should plan for continued salmon fishing closures to conserve fall chum and coho salmon through the end of September. In the Middle and Upper Yukon, fishermen should plan for continued closures at this time.

Current Management Actions

The following management actions and gear listed apply to the lakes, sloughs and tributaries within the districts and subdistricts of the Yukon River drainage.

Fishing Gear

All districts may use the following gear for subsistence fishing on the following schedules to target nonsalmon:

Nonsalmon gear (excluding 4-inch gillnets): open 24 hours per day, 7 days per week:

Legal gear to take nonsalmon species includes hand line, longline, fyke net, dip net and spear. A hook and line with a rod or pole may only be used in the Coastal District up to the Nulato River mouth and including the Nulato River drainage (in Subdistrict 4-A Upper). Subsistence fishermen may use dip nets to target

nonsalmon but all fall chum salmon must be released alive immediately. The live release of coho salmon from dip nets is also strongly recommended for conservation given the historic low run size.

Fish wheels (manned):

Subsistence fishermen may use **manned fish wheels to target nonsalmon from 8 a.m. to 9 p.m., 7 days per week**. All fall chum salmon must be released alive immediately and must bypass any livebox structure. The live release of coho salmon is also strongly recommended for conservation given the low run size.

Gillnets 4-inch and smaller:

Coastal District (Chevak, Hooper Bay and Scammon Bay):

Subsistence fishing with 4-inch or smaller mesh gillnets (60 feet in length or shorter) for nonsalmon is on following schedule: Two 48-hour periods per week from **Saturdays 8 p.m. to Mondays 8 p.m. and from Wednesdays 8 p.m. to Fridays 8 p.m.**

Districts 1-3 (Emmonak, Nunam Iqua, Alakanuk, Kotlik, Mountain Village, Pitkas Point, St. Mary's, Pilot Station, Marshall, Russian Mission, Shageluk and Holy Cross):

Subsistence fishing with 4-inch or smaller mesh gillnets (60 feet in length or shorter) for nonsalmon is on the following schedule: Two 36-hour periods per week from **Saturdays 8 p.m. to Mondays 8 a.m. and from Wednesdays 8 p.m. to Fridays 8 a.m.**

Subdistrict 4-A Lower (Grayling and Anvik):

Subsistence fishing with 4-inch or smaller mesh gillnets (60 feet in length or shorter) for nonsalmon is on the following schedule: Two 48-hour periods per week from **Saturdays 8 p.m. to Mondays 8 p.m. and from Wednesdays 8 p.m. to Fridays 8 p.m.**

Subdistricts 4-A Upper, 4-B and 4-C and the Koyukuk River (Kaltag, Nulato, Koyukuk, Huslia, Hughes, Alatna, Allakaket, Bettles, Wiseman, Galena and Ruby):

Subsistence fishing with 4-inch or smaller mesh gillnets, (60 feet in length or shorter) is on the following schedule: Two 48-hour periods per week from **Sundays 8 p.m. to Tuesdays 8 p.m. and from Wednesdays 8 p.m. to Fridays 8 p.m.**

In the subsistence permit area of South Fork and the Middle Fork of the Koyukuk River, gillnet gear may only be used from August 20 to June 30 and must be 3½ inches or smaller mesh size.

District 5 (Tanana, Rampart, Stevens Village, Beaver, Birch Creek, Arctic Village, Fort Yukon, Venetie, Chalkyitsik, Fort Yukon, Central, Circle and Eagle):

Subsistence fishing with 4-inch or smaller mesh gillnets, (60 feet in length or shorter) is reduced to the following schedule: Two 48-hour periods per week from **Sundays 8 p.m. to Tuesdays 8 p.m. and from Wednesdays 8 p.m. to Fridays 8 p.m.**

In Birch Creek and the subsistence area portion of Beaver Creek, gillnet mesh size may not exceed 3 inches.

Subdistricts 6-A and 6-B, including the Kantishna River (Manley, Minto, Nenana, Healy, Cantwell, and Lake Minchumina) and the **Upper Tanana Area** (the Tanana River from the confluence with the mouth of Volkmar River on the north bank and the mouth of the Johnson River on the south bank upstream to the Tanana River headwaters, which includes Dot Lake, Tanacross, Tetlin, Tok, Northway and Nabesna):

Subsistence fishing with 4-inch or smaller mesh gillnets, (60 feet in length or shorter) is on the following schedule: Two 42-hour periods per week from **Mondays 6 p.m. to Wednesdays 12 p.m. and from Fridays 6 p.m. to Sundays 12 p.m.**

Personal Use Salmon Fishing

Subdistrict 6-C (from the regulatory markers at the mouth of the Wood River upstream to the downstream mouth of the Salcha River, which includes the communities of Fairbanks, North Pole and Salcha):

Personal Use salmon fishing is currently closed.

Personal Use Whitefish and Sucker Fishing

Fairbanks Nonsubsistence Area (a portion of the Tanana River drainage from the Wood River upstream to the mouth of the Volkmar River on the north bank and the mouth of the Johnson River on the south bank, which includes Fairbanks, North Pole, Salcha and Delta Junction):

Personal Use whitefish and sucker fishing in Subdistrict 6-C with gillnets and fish wheels follows the Subdistrict 6-C salmon fishing schedule and is closed until further notice. Fishing with other gear for whitefish and suckers in the Fairbanks Nonsubsistence Area remains open 7 days per week, 24 hours per day, subject to permit stipulations.

A personal use whitefish and sucker permit is required for this area.

Subsistence harvest calendars are available from the Alaska Department of Fish and Game Fairbanks office (459-7274). Subsistence and Personal Use permits are available at www.adfg.alaska.gov/store.



This is an announcement by the ADF&G in cooperation with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

To reach the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Yukon River Subsistence Fishery Manager,

Holly Carroll, please call 907-351-3029.



Announcements will be shared on Facebook at www.facebook.com/YukonRiverFishingADFG

COVID-19

Under Alaska's Health Advisories 1, 2, 3, and 4, subsistence and commercial fishing is considered essential and is part of Alaska's Essential Services and Critical Infrastructure. Commercial fishermen should ensure that all travel and other activities in support of commercial fishing operations follow protocols in Alaska COVID-19 Health Advisories. COVID-19 Health Advisories may be found here: <https://covid19.alaska.gov/health-advisories/>.