

**ALASKA DEPARTMENT OF FISH AND GAME
DIVISION OF COMMERCIAL FISHERIES
NEWS RELEASE**



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**Kuskokwim River Salmon Fishery Update #5
Kuskokwim River Inseason Assessment and Run Status**

This is an announcement from the Alaska Department of Fish and Game in Bethel for subsistence fishermen in the Kuskokwim Area.

All Bethel Test Fishery and escapement numbers can be found online at:
<http://www.adfg.alaska.gov/index.cfm?adfg=commercialbyareakuskokwim.salmon#/fishcounts>

Bethel Test Fishery

Bethel Test Fishery continues to operate on schedule. The cumulative Catch Per Unit Effort as of July 21, is 648 Chinook; 1,323 sockeye; 5,832 chum; and 90 for coho salmon. The cumulative Chinook value is higher than 5 of the last 6 years, and indicates it is likely we will achieve escapement goals. The decreasing daily values are indicating the Chinook salmon run is coming to an end, average run timing indicates it is 99% complete past Bethel. Chum salmon cumulative CPUE is about average as of this date. The counts have dropped off in the last week, now indicating the chum salmon is coming to an end a bit earlier than anticipated, and run timing indicates the run is 88-94% complete. Sockeye salmon cumulative CPUE is similar to the average, indicating an average size run, and the recent decreases in daily CPUE, and average run timing indicate the run is 99% complete past Bethel. This is the earliest coho salmon have been caught in the test fishery, and the total CPUE is average as of this date. It is still early in the coho run with anticipated peak abundances being around the first week of August.

Lower Kuskokwim River Chinook Salmon Tagging

In an effort to understand the migration speed of Chinook salmon through the lower Kuskokwim River, ADF&G is conducting a new pilot project below Johnson River. This project uses 7.5" & 8" drift gillnets to capture and live release Chinook salmon with tags attached to monitor their migration upriver. This project completed the tagging portion on July 9. The crew deployed 92 tags throughout the season.

Preliminary results indicate tags have successfully moved upriver in the mainstem Kuskokwim River, and have been located in the Kwethluk River. Travel speed was about 3 days on average from Johnson River to Bethel. 10 of the tags deployed have been identified passing the Kwethluk River weir, and these tags were well distributed throughout the run, indicating Kwethluk River Chinook salmon arrive in the Kuskokwim River throughout the run. It took tagged fish around 19 days to go from the tagging location to the weir.

These fish are identifiable by a plastic tag attached to their back, and a metal antennae coming out of their mouth. If you find one of these tagged fish, please call the number on the plastic tag, and you will be entered into a monthly cash drawing of \$200, and a seasonal cash drawing of \$500.

Kalskag Area Fish wheels /Drift Gillnet Tagging; ADF&G, KNA

Similar to other years this project has operated, we are cooperating with Kuskokwim Native Association to tag Chinook salmon using fish wheels and drift gillnets near Kalskag. Tagged fish that are later recovered at weir projects, allow for ADF&G to estimate the total abundance of Chinook salmon in the middle and upper Kuskokwim River. This project ended tagging operations on July 17th, and deployed 295 tags in Chinook salmon.

Preliminary information shows that several of these tagged fish have passed upriver weirs. Aerial survey flights will be conducted August 26-30, to identify final tag locations in the mainstem. These fish are identifiable by a plastic tag attached to their back, and a metal antennae coming out of their mouth. If you find one of these tagged fish, please call the number on the plastic tag, and you will be entered into a monthly cash drawing of \$200, and a seasonal cash drawing of \$500.

Kuskokwim River Sonar Investigation

ADF&G staff surveyed the lower Kuskokwim River from the Kwethluk “Y” to Johnson River looking for potential sites for a main stem sonar site. Potentially useable sites were identified upriver of Bethel, and sonar tests indicated fish were identifiable with the sonar. ADF&G will continue to pursue feasibility of these identifiable sites as inseason monitoring projects.

Kwethluk River Salmon Monitoring; USFWS

This monitoring station is located on the Kwethluk River and monitors salmon passage to spawning areas, as well as serving as a recapture site for tagged Chinook salmon. This project became operational on the evening of June 25, which is earlier than 3 of the past five years. As of July 21, the crew has counted 2,922 Chinook; 3,152 sockeye; 10,353 chum; and 31 coho salmon. The Chinook salmon escapement goal is becoming less likely to be achieved, as the run slows. Average run timing indicate the escapement is 84% complete for Chinook salmon. Chum salmon escapement is below average at this point, and average run timing indicates the escapement is about 60% complete. Sockeye salmon escapement is above average for this date, and average run timing indicates the escapement is 87% complete for sockeye salmon. Coho salmon escapement is about average for this date, and average run timing indicates the run is just beginning (<1% complete).

Tuluksak River Salmon Monitoring; USFWS

This monitoring station is located in the Tuluksak River drainage and monitors salmon passage to spawning areas, as well as serving as a recapture site for tagged Chinook salmon. This project became operational on June 30, which is a few days later than the past few years. As of July 21, the crew has counted 279 Chinook; 339 sockeye; 4,942 chum; and 6 coho salmon. Chinook salmon escapement is higher than 5 of the past 7 years as of this date. Average run timing indicates the Chinook escapement is 74% complete. Chum salmon escapement is below average for this date, and average run timing indicates the escapement is 51% complete. Sockeye salmon escapement is above average for this date, and average run timing indicates the escapement is 60% complete. Coho salmon are arriving a little earlier than in past years, but the escapement is just starting, with average run timing being <1% complete.

Salmon River Weir; ADF&G, KNA

This weir is located in the Aniak River drainage and monitors salmon passage to spawning areas, as well as serving as a recapture site for tagged Chinook salmon. This project became operational on the evening of June 26, and has had continuous operations. As of July 21, the crew has counted 1,334 Chinook; 37 sockeye; and 1,229 chum salmon. There are no escapement goals for this system, and all of the escapements this year are within the range of previous years.

George River Weir; ADF&G, KNA

This weir is located in the George River drainage and monitors salmon passage to spawning areas, as well as serving as a recapture site for tagged Chinook salmon. This weir began operations on June 16th, and has had continuous operations. As of July 21, the crew has counted 2,518 Chinook; and 10,712 chum salmon. The Chinook salmon count achieved the lower bound of the escapement goal on July 10th, and average run timing indicates the escapement is 88% complete. Chum salmon escapement is below average for this date in past years, and average run timing indicates the escapement is 73% complete at this point.

Tatlawiksuk River Weir; ADF&G, KNA

This weir is located in the Tatlawiksuk River drainage and monitors salmon passage to spawning areas, as well as serving as a recapture site for tagged Chinook salmon. This weir began operations on June 14th, with 3.5 days of no operation due to high water. As of July 21, the crew has counted 1,849 Chinook; 9,030 chum; and 1 coho salmon. Chinook salmon escapement is above average on this day with only 4 years seeing higher escapements to date. Average run timing indicates the Chinook salmon run is 86% complete. Chum salmon escapements are below average with only 2 years having seen fewer fish at this point. Average run timing indicates the chum salmon escapement is 73% complete. Coho salmon arrival at this project is about average.

Kogruklu River Weir; ADF&G

This weir is located in the Holitna River drainage and monitors salmon passage to spawning areas, as well as serving as a recapture site for tagged Chinook salmon. This weir began operations on June 20th, and has had continuous operations. As of July 21, the crew has counted 3,049 Chinook; 2,194 sockeye; and 17,142 chum salmon. The Chinook salmon count is below average for this date, and average run timing indicates the escapement is 75% complete. Achievement of the escapement goal for Chinook salmon is uncertain, but it will likely be close to the lower bound. Chum salmon escapement is below average at this point, and average run timing indicates the escapement is 72% complete. The escapement goal for chum salmon was

achieved on July 20th. Sockeye salmon escapement is below average for this date, and average run timing indicates the escapement is 74% complete. It is uncertain if the lower bound of the escapement goal will be achieved, the run timing might be later than average which would indicate achievement of the lower end of the escapement goal is possible.

Summary

Achievement of escapement goals for Chinook salmon is uncertain at several projects, and the Kuskokwim River. One escapement project has achieved the escapement goal, while the others will likely be close to the lower end. Escapements are higher than the past few years, showing that the restrictions were necessary and were successful at increasing escapement.

Chum salmon escapements are below average for all projects, but all projects are within the historical ranges, and the escapement goal at Kogrukluuk was achieved.

Sockeye salmon escapements are below average, but all projects are within the historical ranges, and achievement of the Kogrukluuk escapement goal is uncertain, but possible, at this point.

Coho salmon have started to reach the escapement projects, which is on the early side, but not unusually early. It is early to estimate escapement outcomes.

Further announcements will be made from the Bethel Fish and Game office, on the State of Alaska web site (<http://www.adfg.alaska.gov/index.cfm?adfg=cfnews.main>), and local radio stations. News releases will be faxed to area villages and local fish processing companies. For additional information or questions regarding Kuskokwim Area fisheries, contact the Alaska Department of Fish and Game office in the Bethel at 543-2433 or toll free at 1-855-933-2433.