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

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Kuskokwim River Salmon Fishery Update #7
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.

2014 Kuskokwim River Inseason Assessment

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 (CPUE) as of August 4, is 650 Chinook; 1,362 sockeye; 6,272 chum; and 1,391 for coho salmon. The cumulative Chinook value is higher than 5 of the last 6 years. The decreasing daily values are indicating the Chinook salmon run is coming to an end, average run timing indicates it is over 99% complete past Bethel. No Chinook have been caught since July 29th. Chum salmon cumulative CPUE is below average as of this date. The counts have dropped off in the last week indicating the chum salmon run is coming to an end. The run timing indicates that the chum salmon run is 99% 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. Coho salmon cumulative CPUE to this point is above average, and average coho salmon run timing indicates the run is 40% complete at Bethel. Peak passage of coho salmon is usually observed during the first week of August at Bethel.

Lower Kuskokwim River Chinook Salmon Tagging

In an effort to understand the migration speed of Chinook salmon through the lower Kuskokwim River, ADF&G conducted a new pilot project below Johnson River. This project used 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, in collaboration 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 August 4, the crew has counted 3,136 Chinook; 3,346 sockeye; 16,359 chum; and 894 coho salmon. The Chinook salmon escapement goal (4,100-7,500) will likely not be achieved as historical run timing indicates that approximately 98% of the run has passed the weir. Chum salmon escapement appears to be below average, and average run timing indicates the escapement is approximately 90% complete. Sockeye salmon escapement is above average for this date, and average run timing indicates the escapement is over 95% complete. Coho salmon

escapement is about average for this date, and average run timing indicates the run is just beginning (3% 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 August 4, the crew has counted 315 Chinook; 423 sockeye; 8,021 chum; and 364 coho salmon. Chinook salmon escapement is higher than 3 of the past 7 years as of this date and escapement is below average. Average run timing indicates the Chinook escapement is over 95% complete. Chum salmon escapement is below average for this date, and average run timing indicates the escapement is 90% complete. Coho salmon escapement is above average for this date, and average run timing indicates the run is just beginning (2% 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 with the exception of a few partial days of counts. As of August 4, the crew has counted 1,679 Chinook; 614 sockeye; 2,464 chum; 61 coho salmon. There are no escapement goals for this system, and all of the escapements this year are within the range of previous years with the exception of chum salmon, which is lower than historical 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 August 4, the crew has counted 2,657 Chinook; 15,197 chum salmon; and 130 coho salmon. The Chinook salmon count achieved the lower bound of the escapement goal on July 10th, and average run timing indicates the escapement is 99% complete. Chum salmon escapement is below average for this date in past years, and average run timing indicates the escapement is 95% complete at this point. Coho salmon escapement is above average for this date, and average run timing indicates the run is just beginning (1% complete).

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 August 4, the crew has counted 1,891 Chinook; 11,558 chum; and 245 coho salmon. Chinook salmon escapement is above average on this day with only 4 of 14 years seeing higher escapements to date. Average run timing indicates the Chinook salmon run is 99% complete. Chum salmon escapements are below average with only 2 of 14 years having seen fewer fish at this point. Average run timing indicates the chum salmon escapement is 97% complete. Coho salmon escapement is about average for this date, and average run timing indicates the run is just beginning (2% complete).

Kogrukluk 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 August 4, the crew has counted 3,668 Chinook; 6,329 sockeye; 28,647 chum; and 108 coho salmon. The Chinook salmon count is below average for this date, and average run timing indicates the escapement is 98% complete. Achievement of the escapement goal for Chinook salmon is unlikely and currently projecting to be below the lower bound of the goal of 4,800. Chum salmon escapement is below average at this point, and average run timing indicates the escapement is 96% complete. The lower bound of the escapement goal for chum salmon (15,000) was achieved on July 20th. Sockeye salmon escapement is below average for this date; however, the lower bound of the escapement goal for sockeye salmon (4,400) was met on July 26th. Average run timing indicates that sockeye salmon escapement is 99% complete. Coho salmon escapement is about average for this date, and average run timing indicates the run is just beginning (<1% complete).

Telaquana River Weir; ADF&G, NPS

This weir is located in the Telaquana River drainage and monitors salmon passage to spawning areas, as well as historically serving as a recapture site for tagged sockeye salmon. This is the 5th year of operations at this project. Sockeye salmon are the only salmon species observed in high quantities at this weir. This project became operational on July 2nd. As of August 4, the crew has counted 52 Chinook; 23,463 sockeye; and 65 chum salmon. Escapement and run timing to date is similar to historical years.

Aerial Surveys

As of August 4, all of the escapement aerial surveys of the Kuskokwim River drainage have been completed. The Aniak, Holitna, and Pitka Fork Salmon River have exceeded the upper bound of their respective Chinook escapement goal range. The Kisaralik, Salmon, Gagarayah, and Cheeneetnuk Rivers have exceeded the lower bound of their respective Chinook escapement goal range. The Kisaralik, Aniak, and Salmon Rivers reached their highest Chinook escapements since 2008. Pitka Fork Salmon River has achieved its highest Chinook escapement since 1992.

Summary

Achievement of escapement goals for Chinook salmon is unlikely at several projects, and uncertain for the Kuskokwim River. One escapement project has achieved the escapement goal, while the others will likely be below 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 Kogrukluk was achieved.

Sockeye salmon escapements are all within the historical ranges, and although it appears below average, achievement of the Kogrukluk escapement goal was achieved. Sockeye salmon escapement at other projects appears at or above average.

Coho salmon have started to reach the escapement projects. It is too 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 Bethel at 543-2433 or toll free at 1-855-933-2433.