

# ALASKA DEPARTMENT OF FISH AND GAME

## DIVISION OF COMMERCIAL FISHERIES

### NEWS RELEASE



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#### **Kuskokwim River Salmon Fishery Update #8**

#### **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 as of August 10<sup>th</sup>, is 650 Chinook; 1,363 sockeye; 6,315 chum; and 2,723 for coho salmon. The Chinook, chum and sockeye runs are all into the 99-100% complete range, with only a few fish of each species being caught at this time. Coho salmon cumulative CPUE to this point is above average, and average coho salmon run timing indicates the run is 60% complete at Bethel. Recent high daily CPUE values indicate the peak of the coho salmon run is approaching 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 17<sup>th</sup>, 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 10, the crew has counted 3,165 Chinook; 3,458 sockeye; 17,385 chum; and 4,061 coho salmon. The Chinook salmon escapement goal (4,100–7,500) will likely not be achieved as historical run timing indicates that over 99% of the run has passed the weir. Chum salmon escapement appears to be below average, and average run timing indicates the escapement is approximately 98% complete. Sockeye salmon escapement is above average for this date, and average run timing indicates the escapement is over 98% complete. Coho salmon escapement is above average for this date, and average run timing indicates the run is still just beginning (8% complete). Current projections indicate the escapement goal will be met.

#### 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 10, the crew has counted 318 Chinook; 440 sockeye; 8,508 chum; and 1,205 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 99% complete.

Chum salmon escapement is below average for this date, and average run timing indicates the escapement is 96% complete. Coho salmon escapement is above average for this date, and average run timing indicates the run is just beginning (6% 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<sup>th</sup>. The weir was recently out of operation due to high water (August 6–8) and had a partial day of operation on August 9<sup>th</sup>. Estimates for inoperable days will be made at the end of the season. As of August 10<sup>th</sup>, the crew has counted 1,694 Chinook; 661 sockeye; 2,556 chum; 171 coho salmon. There are no escapement goals for this system.

#### 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 16<sup>th</sup>, and has had continuous operations. As of August 10<sup>th</sup>, the crew has counted 2,665 Chinook; 15,978 chum salmon; and 1,212 coho salmon. The Chinook salmon count achieved the lower bound of the escapement goal on July 10<sup>th</sup>, 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 98% complete at this point. Coho salmon escapement is above average for this date, and average run timing indicates the run is just beginning (4% 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 14<sup>th</sup>, with 3.5 days of no operation due to high water. As of August 10<sup>th</sup>, the crew has counted 1,896 Chinook; 11,902 chum; and 1,692 coho salmon. Chinook salmon escapement is above average with only 5 of the 14 years of operation seeing higher escapements. Average run timing indicates the Chinook salmon run is over 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 99% complete. Coho salmon escapement is above average for this date, and average run timing indicates the run is still just beginning (10% complete).

#### 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 20<sup>th</sup>, and has had continuous operations. As of August 10<sup>th</sup>, the crew has counted 3,703 Chinook; 6,519 sockeye; 29,878 chum; and 700 coho salmon. The Chinook salmon count is below average for this date, and average run timing indicates the escapement is 99% complete. Achievement of the escapement goal (4,800 – 8,800) for Chinook salmon is highly unlikely. Chum salmon escapement is below average and average run timing indicates the escapement is 99% complete. The lower bound of the escapement goal for chum salmon (15,000) was achieved on July 20<sup>th</sup>. Sockeye salmon escapement is below average; however, the lower bound of the escapement goal for sockeye salmon (4,400) was met on July 26<sup>th</sup>. Average

run timing indicates that sockeye salmon escapement is 99% complete. Coho salmon escapement is above 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 5<sup>th</sup> 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 2<sup>nd</sup> and end operations today, August 10<sup>th</sup>. The crew has counted 67 Chinook; 23,820 sockeye; and 72 chum salmon to date. 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 rivers 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

The BTF data indicates that the coho salmon run is tracking above the 5-year and 10-year averages. In addition, cumulative BTF index for 2014, to date, is approximately 1,000 index points above three of the last four years. As of August 9, the BTF cumulative coho salmon index was 2,338 of which 1,265 or 54% of the 2014 coho salmon return, to date, has passed by Bethel in the last seven days.

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 (George River), while the others will likely be below the lower end (Kogrukluuk and Kwethluk rivers). 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 all within the historical ranges, and although it appears below average, achievement of the Kogrukluuk 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 project 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.