

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



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**Kuskokwim River Salmon Fishery Update #9  
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 19, is 650 Chinook; 1,365 sockeye; 6,336 chum; and 4,121 for coho salmon. The Chinook, chum and sockeye runs are 100% complete, with only a few fish of each species being caught at this time. Coho salmon cumulative CPUE to this point is above historical average, and average coho salmon run timing indicates the run is 88% complete at Bethel. BTF will cease operations on August 25 for the 2014 season.

**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, 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 18, the crew has counted 3,177 Chinook; 3,623 sockeye; 17,723 chum; and 10,156 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 while sockeye salmon escapement appears above average for this date. Run timing indicates that both chum and sockeye escapement has wrapped up. Coho salmon escapement is above average for this date, and average run timing indicates approximately 25% of the run has escaped thus far. 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 18, the crew has counted 319 Chinook; 482 sockeye; 8,653 chum; and 3,686 coho salmon. Chinook salmon escapement is higher than 3 of the past 7 years as of this date; however, escapement is below average compared to all years. Chum salmon escapement is below average

for this date, and average run timing indicates the escapement is over 99% complete. Coho salmon escapement is above average for this date. Only 2 years have seen higher escapements to date. Average run timing indicates the coho run is approximately 30% 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. The weir was recently out of operation due to high water (August 6–8) and had a partial day of operation on August 9. Estimates for inoperable days will be made at the end of the season. As of August 18, the crew has counted 1,697 Chinook; 741 sockeye; 2,661 chum; 1,092 coho salmon. Coho salmon escapement is similar to previous years of operation. 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, and has had continuous operations. As of August 18, the crew has counted 2,672 Chinook; 16,351 chum salmon; and 5,647 coho salmon. The Chinook salmon count achieved the lower bound of the escapement goal on July 10, and average run timing indicates the escapement is over 99% complete. Chum salmon escapement is below average for this date in past years, and average run timing indicates the escapement is over 99% complete at this point. Coho salmon escapement is above average for this date, and average run timing indicates that 18% of the run has escaped. Only 2 of the 16 complete years of operation have seen higher cumulative escapements for coho salmon to date.

#### 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, with 3.5 days of no operation due to high water. As of August 18, the crew has counted 1,896 Chinook; 12,019 chum; and 8,938 coho salmon. Chinook and chum salmon escapement has wrapped up at this monitoring site. Chinook salmon escapement is above average with only 5 of the 14 years of operation seeing higher escapements. Chum salmon escapements appear to be below average with only 2 of 14 years having seen fewer fish at this point. Coho salmon escapement is above average for this date, and average run timing indicates 32% of the run has escaped. Thus far, the cumulative escapement observed is the highest on record in the 11 complete years of operation.

#### 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 20<sup>th</sup>, and has had continuous operations until August 16 when the weir went out of operation due to high water. As of August 16, the crew has counted 3,714 Chinook; 6,585 sockeye; 30,567 chum; and 2,941 coho salmon. Chinook, chum and sockeye salmon escapement has wrapped up. Chinook salmon escapement appears below average and achievement of the escapement goal (4,800–8,800) for Chinook salmon is highly unlikely. The lower bound of the escapement goal for chum salmon (15,000) was achieved on July 20. Escapement to date for

chum salmon is below average compared to all historical years. Sockeye salmon escapement appears below average; however, the lower bound of the escapement goal for sockeye salmon (4,400) was met on July 26. Coho salmon escapement is above average for this date, and average run timing indicates the run is just beginning (5–10% complete). Only 4 of 29 years have seen higher coho salmon escapements to date. This weir will be out of operation for a minimum of 4 more days.

#### 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 fifth year of operation for this project. Sockeye salmon are the only salmon species observed in high quantities at this weir. This project became operational on July 2 and end operations on August 10. The crew counted 67 Chinook; 23,820 sockeye; and 72 chum salmon to date. Escapement and run timing to date is similar to historical years.

#### Summary

The BTF data indicates that the coho salmon run is tracking above 5-year and 10-year averages. In addition, cumulative BTF index for 2014, to date, is the fifth highest on record.

Achievement of escapement goals for Chinook salmon is unlikely at several ground based escapement monitoring projects (weirs), 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 (KogrukluK and Kwethluk). All of the aerial survey escapement goals were wither met or exceeded in 2014. Escapements of Chinook salmon 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, 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 still 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.