

# **ALASKA DEPARTMENT OF FISH AND GAME**

## **DIVISION OF COMMERCIAL FISHERIES**

### **NEWS RELEASE**



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#### **2015 Yukon River Summer Salmon Fishery News Release # 6**

#### **Summer Update # 1, Yukon Area Salmon Fishery**

Districts Affected: Yukon Area

#### **Assessment**

The 2015 salmon season is underway on the Yukon River. Ice out occurred at Alakanuk on May 18–19, and subsistence fishing efforts began shortly thereafter. The first subsistence chum salmon of the year was reportedly caught on May 23. Additionally, the first subsistence Chinook salmon harvested on the Yukon River was reported to have been caught on May 27. Subsistence fishermen have reported that a few additional Chinook salmon have been caught prior to the May 30 subsistence salmon closure, thus indicating that the 2015 Chinook salmon run is just beginning to migrate upriver.

The department would like to extend gratitude to the Lower Yukon subsistence fishermen who have shared harvest information. These reports have been instrumental in directing management actions during the early part of the season. The department is reminding fishermen to track their harvest on their subsistence calendars and encourages them to continue calling the ADF&G office in Emmonak to provide harvest reports.

The Lower Yukon cooperative 8.25-inch drift test fishery program has been in operation at the Big Eddy location since May 25. Catch rates have been low for both Chinook and summer chum salmon. A single 8.5-inch set net has been fishing at a supplemental site in the South Mouth since May 28, and an additional set net site is likely to be in place in Middle Mouth on June 3. The 5.5-inch summer chum drift test fishery has been operational at the Big Eddy site since May 24. Given the need to conserve Chinook salmon, the department plans to adjust the Lower Yukon monitoring program operations in order to reduce the test fishery harvest. Any Chinook salmon healthy enough to be released from test nets will be released alive immediately. Any Chinook salmon caught in the test nets that are unable to be released are being distributed to village elders by the Tribal Councils.

Sonar staff arrived in Pilot Station and have been conducting test fishing and initial sonar operations. It is anticipated that counting by sonar will begin by June 1.

## **Management Strategies**

A precautionary management approach has been taken early this season given the weak return of Chinook salmon expected in 2015. Following ice out on the lower river, gillnets were restricted to 6-inch or smaller mesh size in the Coastal District and in Districts 1 and 2. The intent was to have a gear restriction already in place as Chinook salmon began their spawning migration while still providing an opportunity to fish for non-salmon species traditionally harvested in the Lower Yukon immediately following break-up.

Following subsistence reports and test fishery indices that Chinook salmon were entering the river, further conservative management actions were implemented in the Coastal District and Districts 1–3. Effective at 12:00 p.m. noon Saturday, May 30, subsistence fishing for salmon closed in the Northern Portion of the Coastal District and in Districts 1 and 2. Additionally, District 3 was restricted to 6-inch or smaller mesh size. These gear restrictions and subsequent closures will be similarly implemented in upriver fishing districts and subdistricts based on historical migratory timing. Closures are expected to be in place for most of the Chinook salmon run. However, management strategies may change based on inseason run assessment information.

Fortunately, the 2015 summer chum salmon run is expected to be average to above average. Fishing opportunities to harvest summer chum salmon with dip nets will be provided in Districts 1–3 when summer chum salmon abundance increases. Catch rates in the Lower Yukon Test Fishery are being monitored to determine when this fishing opportunity will begin. However, Lower Yukon fishermen should be prepared for liberal subsistence and commercial opportunity using selective fishing gear to harvest summer chum salmon.

The 2015 season will undoubtedly be another challenging year for Yukon River fishermen. ADF&G and USFWS would like to extend thanks and appreciation to the fishermen of the Yukon River for their continuing efforts to conserve Chinook salmon.

## **Current Management**

**Coastal District:** As in recent years, the Coastal District is being further subdivided into two management areas to allow for more management precision and flexibility. Fishermen are reminded that all marine waters between 1 and 3 miles offshore of District 1 are included in the Coastal District.

In the **Northern Portion of the Coastal District**, from 62 degrees North latitude to Point Romanof, subsistence salmon fishing is currently closed in marine waters until further notice. Management actions taken in the **Northern Portion of the Coastal District** will be coordinated with actions taken in District 1 to provide protection to Chinook salmon prior to entering the river.

In the **Southern Portion of the Coastal District**, from the Naskonat Peninsula north to 62 degrees North latitude, subsistence salmon fishing is open 24 hours a day, seven days per week with gillnets restricted to 6-inch or smaller mesh size.

**District 1 (including the Black River) and District 2:** Subsistence fishing is currently closed to conserve Chinook salmon as they enter and migrate through these districts. All gillnets greater than 4-inches in mesh size must be removed from the water in these districts.

Non-salmon species may be harvested using 4-inch or smaller mesh size gillnets not exceeding 60-feet in length. However, this opportunity to harvest non-salmon may be reduced or discontinued if this gear is used to target Chinook salmon. Fishermen are strongly encouraged to avoid fishing where Chinook salmon may be encountered.

**District 3:** Subsistence fishing is currently open 24 hours a day, seven days per week with gillnets restricted to 6-inch or less mesh size. Fishermen in District 3 should anticipate further fishing restrictions when Chinook salmon start moving into District 3.

**Innoko River:** Subsistence fishing is currently open 24 hours a day, seven days per week with 7.5-inch or smaller mesh size gillnets. Fishermen should be prepared for management actions that will close subsistence salmon fishing when the first pulse of Chinook salmon is expected to migrate into the Innoko River.

**Subdistrict 4-A Lower** (from  $\frac{3}{4}$  miles downstream of Old Paradise Village upstream to Stink Creek, which includes the mainstem Yukon River communities of Anvik and Grayling):

Subsistence fishing is currently open 24 hours a day, seven days per week and fishermen may use fish wheels or gillnets with a mesh size of 7.5 inches or less.

Effective 8:00 p.m. Wednesday, June 3, subsistence fishing will be open 24 hours a day, seven days per week with gillnets restricted to 6-inch or less mesh size. Fishermen may use fish wheels, however fish wheels must be manned at all times of operation and Chinook salmon must be released alive immediately.

**Subdistrict 4-A Upper** (from Stink Creek upstream to Cone Point, which includes the mainstem Yukon River communities of Kaltag, Nulato, and Koyukuk):

Subsistence fishing is currently open 24 hours a day, seven days per week and fishermen may use fish wheels or gillnets with a mesh size of 7.5 inches or less.

Effective 8:00 p.m. Saturday, June 6, subsistence fishing will be open 24 hours a day, seven days per week with gillnets restricted to 6-inch or less mesh size. Fishermen may use fish wheels, however fish wheels must be manned at all times of operation and Chinook salmon must be released alive immediately.

**Subdistricts 4-B and 4-C** (from Cone Point to Illinois Creek, which includes the mainstem Yukon River communities of Galena and Ruby):

Subsistence fishing is currently open 24 hours a day, seven days per week and fishermen may use fish wheels or gillnets with mesh size of 7.5 inches or less. Fishermen should anticipate fishing restrictions as Chinook salmon begin to migrate through their area.

**Koyukuk River:** Subsistence fishing is currently open 24 hours a day, seven days per week and fishermen may use gillnets with a mesh size of 7.5 inches or less. Fishermen should be prepared for management actions that will close subsistence salmon fishing when the first pulse of Chinook salmon migrates into the Koyukuk River.

**Subdistricts 5-A,B,C, and D:** Subsistence fishing is currently open 24 hours a day, seven days per week and fishermen may use fish wheels or gillnets with a mesh size of 7.5 inches or less. Fishermen should anticipate fishing restrictions when Chinook salmon start moving into Subdistricts 5-A,B,C, and D.

**District 6:** By regulation, the subsistence salmon fishing schedule consists of two 42-hour fishing periods per week from 6:00 p.m. Mondays until 12:00 noon Wednesdays and from 6:00 p.m. Fridays until 12:00 noon Sundays and fishermen may use fish wheels or gillnets with a mesh size of 7.5 inches or less. Fishermen should anticipate fishing restrictions when Chinook salmon start moving into the Tanana River.

**Old Minto Area:** Subsistence salmon fishing is open 5 days per week from 6:00 p.m. Fridays until 6:00 p.m. Wednesdays and fishermen may use fish wheels or gillnets with a mesh size of 7.5 inches or less. Fishermen should anticipate fishing restrictions when Chinook salmon start moving into the Old Minto area.

**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): This area includes the communities of Healy Lake, Dot Lake, Tanacross, Northway, and the Tok area. Subsistence fishing is open 24 hours a day, seven days per week. Fishermen may use fish wheels or gillnets with a mesh size of 7.5 inches or less.

The subsistence fishing schedule and recorded fishery announcements will be available 24 hours a day at **1-866-479-7387** (toll free outside of Fairbanks); in Fairbanks, call **(907) 459-7387**. The Emmonak ADF&G office is open. If you have any questions regarding this report, please call the ADF&G office in Emmonak at 949-1320.

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