

# **ALASKA DEPARTMENT OF FISH AND GAME**

## **DIVISION OF COMMERCIAL FISHERIES**

### **NEWS RELEASE**



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#### **2015 Yukon River Summer Salmon Fishery News Release # 13**

#### **Summer Update # 2, Yukon Area Salmon Fishery**

Districts Affected: Yukon Area

#### **Assessment**

The 2015 Chinook and summer chum salmon runs are slowly starting to build on the Yukon River as indicated by assessment information at the Lower Yukon Test Fishery (LYTF) program. The first summer chum salmon and Chinook salmon were caught in the LYTF program on May 24 and May 28, respectively. Based on historical migration timing, the first summer chum salmon and Chinook salmon should be near Kaltag on June 8. While catch rates have been relatively low for both Chinook and summer chum salmon in the LYTF program since the first salmon were caught, favorable winds over the weekend appear to have started pushing groups of fish into the river.

Additionally, reports from subsistence fishermen along the coast in the villages of Hooper Bay and Scammon Bay indicate that the Yukon River summer chum salmon run is building, but that incidental catches of Chinook salmon have been relatively low. Dip net fishermen in Nunam Iqua have reported good catches of summer chum salmon with incidentally caught Chinook salmon being released alive immediately to the river.

The sonar project near Pilot Station has been operational since May 31 and daily sonar counts for both Chinook salmon and summer chum salmon have been relatively low. The groups of Chinook salmon and summer chum salmon that entered the lower river over the past weekend should be passing by the sonar project over the next day or two.

The department would like to extend gratitude to the Yukon River 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.

## **Assessment Projects**

### Lower Yukon Test Fishery (LYTF)/ ADF&G, YDFDA

8.5-Inch Set Gillnet: The LYTF program began operations on May 28 in the Big Eddy area of South Mouth. An additional set net site started fishing in the Middle Mouth on June 6. The cumulative Catch per Unit Effort (CPUE) for both sites combined as of June 7 is 4.57, which is above the historical average (1998 to 2011) of 1.24.

8.25-Inch Drift Gillnet: The Big Eddy Chinook salmon drift test fishery began operations on May 24. The cumulative CPUE as of June 7 is 10.77, which is below the historical average of 48.21 for all years. However, drifting operations have been hindered by high wind and debris in the river.

Given the need to conserve Chinook salmon, the department has adjusted the LYTF program operations in order to reduce the test fishery harvest of Chinook salmon. 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. Additionally, fewer set net sites are currently being fished than historical LYTF program operations to further reduce Chinook salmon mortality. These adjustments were recommended by fishermen at various pre-season planning meetings.

### Summer Chum Drift Test Fishery/ ADF&G, YDFDA

5.5-Inch Drift Gillnet: The summer chum drift test fishery began operations on May 24 in the Big Eddy area of the South Mouth. The cumulative CPUE as of June 7 is 165.41, which is above the historical median of 46.74 for this date.

### Sonar Project near Pilot Station/ ADF&G

The sonar project near Pilot Station has been fully operational since May 31. The first Chinook and summer chum salmon were counted at the sonar site on May 31. Chinook salmon passage as of June 7 is estimated to be 3,074 fish which is slightly above the historical cumulative average of 2,585 Chinook salmon for this date.

Summer chum salmon passage as of June 7 is estimated to be 11,569 fish which is above the historical cumulative median of 886 summer chum salmon for this date.

## **Management Strategies**

A conservative management approach has been taken early in the summer fishery season given the weak return of Chinook salmon expected in 2015. Gear restrictions have been implemented in the Coastal District up through Districts 4-B and 4-C and are being implemented in Subdistricts 5-A, 5-B, and 5-C prior to the arrival of Chinook salmon passing through each area. The intent is to have a gear restriction already in place as Chinook salmon began their spawning migration while still providing an opportunity to fish for early summer chum salmon and non-salmon species traditionally harvested prior to the arrival of Chinook salmon.

The gear restrictions were followed with subsistence salmon fishing closures, when subsistence reports and test fishery catch rates indicated that Chinook salmon were entering the river. Those closures are being implemented in upriver districts based on historical migratory timing of Chinook salmon. Restrictions are expected to be in place for most of the Chinook salmon run. However, management strategies may change based on inseason run assessment information. It is still too early in the season to assess the strength of the 2015 Chinook salmon run. Therefore, current management actions are being based on the preseason Chinook salmon outlook.

The 2015 summer chum salmon run is expected to be average to above average with a projected run size of 1.8 to 2.4 million fish. Catch rates of summer chum salmon in LYTF have been increasing, and liberal summer chum salmon subsistence fishing time with selective gear types is being provided in Districts 1 and 2 with dip nets only. Based on historical migration timing of summer chum salmon, dip net subsistence salmon fishing will open in District 3 later this week. All Chinook salmon are required to be released alive and immediately while using this selective gear type. Fishermen should be aware that catches may be low. Fishermen in District 4 should be prepared for subsistence opportunity using selective fishing gear that allows the safe and immediate release of Chinook salmon, such as dip nets and live-release fish wheels, to harvest summer chum salmon as their abundance continues to increase.

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 **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.

In the **Northern Portion of the Coastal District**, from 62 degrees North latitude to Point Romanof, including all marine waters, subsistence salmon fishing is currently closed until further notice.

**District 1 (including the Black River) and District 2:** Subsistence salmon fishing is currently open 24 hours a day, seven days per week with dip net gear only. Fishermen are reminded that Chinook salmon caught in dip nets must be released alive immediately. The requirement to release Chinook salmon from dip nets will be strictly enforced. Commercial fishermen should be prepared for initial dip net commercial fishing opportunity if summer chum salmon catch rates continue to build in the Lower Yukon Test Fishery program.

**District 3:** Subsistence salmon fishing is currently closed to conserve Chinook salmon as they enter and migrate through this district. All gillnets greater than 4-inch mesh size must be removed from the water. Gillnets 4-inch or smaller mesh size not exceeding 60-feet in length may be used during the closure to harvest non-salmon species. However, this opportunity to harvest non-salmon species 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.

Effective at 8:00 p.m. Wednesday, June 10, subsistence fishing for summer chum salmon in District 3 will be open 24 hours a day, seven days per week with dip net gear only.

Subsistence dip net fishermen are required to immediately release Chinook salmon alive from this gear type. This requirement to release Chinook salmon will be strictly enforced.

Subsistence fishermen unfamiliar with this gear type are encouraged to communicate with fishermen that used this gear type during the 2014 season. Great care must be taken to assure Chinook salmon are released unharmed so that they can swim the long distance upriver and spawn successfully. Fishermen are also strongly encouraged to avoid fishing where Chinook salmon may be encountered.

**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 salmon fishing is currently closed to conserve Chinook salmon as they enter and migrate through this district. All gillnets greater than 4-inch mesh size must be removed from the water. Gillnets 4-inch or smaller mesh size not exceeding 60-feet in length may be used during the closure to harvest non-salmon species. However, this opportunity to harvest non-salmon species 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.

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

Subsistence salmon fishing is currently closed to conserve Chinook salmon as they enter and migrate through this district. All gillnets greater than 4-inch mesh size must be removed from the water. Gillnets 4-inch or smaller mesh size not exceeding 60-feet in length may be used during the closure to harvest non-salmon species. However, this opportunity to harvest non-salmon species 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.

**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 with fish wheels or gillnets restricted to 6-inch or smaller mesh size. Fish wheels must be manned at all times of operation or be equipped with a live box that is checked at least once every six hours. All Chinook salmon must be released alive from fish wheels.

Effective 6:00 p.m. Wednesday, June 10, subsistence salmon fishing will be closed until further notice to conserve Chinook salmon. All gillnets greater than 4-inch mesh size must be removed from the water. Gillnets 4-inch or smaller mesh size not exceeding 60-feet in length may be used during the closure to harvest non-salmon species. However, this opportunity to harvest non-salmon species 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.

Additionally, use of drift gillnet fishing gear in Federal public waters of Subdistricts 4-B and 4-C will not be allowed during the summer season subsistence salmon fishing closures.

**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, 5-B, and 5-C:** 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 6:00 p.m. Wednesday, June 10, subsistence salmon fishing will be open 24 hours a day, seven days per week with fish wheels or gillnets restricted to 6-inch or less mesh size. Fish wheels must be manned at all times of operation or be equipped with a live box that is checked at least once every six hours. All Chinook salmon must be released alive from fish wheels.

**Subdistrict 5-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.

**District 6:** By regulation, the subsistence and personal use salmon fishing schedule consists of two 42-hour fishing periods per week. Fishing periods are open from 6:00 p.m. Mondays until 12:00 noon Wednesdays and from 6:00 p.m. Fridays until 12:00 noon Sundays. Fishermen may use fish wheels or gillnets with a mesh size of 7.5 inches or less, but 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.

For questions concerning drift gillnet fishing in Federal public waters of Subdistrict 4-B and 4-C, please contact the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service at 1-800-267-3997 or in Emmonak at 949-1798.

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