

ALASKA DEPARTMENT OF FISH AND GAME

DIVISION OF COMMERCIAL FISHERIES

NEWS RELEASE



Sam Cotten, Commissioner
Jeff Regnart, Director



Contact:
Stephanie Schmidt, Area Management Biologist
Sabrina Garcia, Assistant Area Management Biologist
Phone: (907) 949-1320
Fax: (907) 949-1830

Lower Yukon Area Office
P.O. Box 127
Emmonak, Alaska 99581

Date Issued: 07/06/2015

2015 Yukon River Summer Salmon Fishery News Release # 53

Summer Update # 6, Yukon Area Salmon Fishery

Districts Affected: Yukon Area

Assessment

Although Chinook and summer chum salmon entered the river early this year, both salmon runs appear to be tracking closer to their average run timings. The sonar project at Eagle began operations June 30, which is six days earlier than normal, to account for a potentially early run. The early group of Chinook salmon that passed the sonar project near Pilot Station on June 7 is expected to be migrating past the sonar project near the Canadian border over the next few days. To date, approximately 1,400 Chinook salmon have already been counted at the sonar project near Eagle. The first pulse of Chinook salmon should be near Circle by July 7 and the second pulse of Chinook salmon should be near Fort Yukon by July 10. The third and fourth pulses of Chinook salmon, comprising the largest groups of fish to date, are currently migrating through the middle river districts.

As of July 5, the cumulative Chinook salmon passage at the sonar project near Pilot Station was approximately 108,000 fish, which is below the historical cumulative average of 128,000 for this date. For average run timing years, the Chinook salmon run is estimated to be approximately 90% complete at the sonar project near Pilot Station as of July 5. However, run timing assessment has been difficult this year due to the early entry of the first Chinook salmon and then subsequent delayed entry of substantial pulses of Chinook salmon.

Given data uncertainty associated with sonar passage and run timing estimates, the 2015 Chinook salmon run is on track to be near the lower end of the preseason outlook range of 118,000 to 140,000. A Chinook salmon run size of this magnitude is lower than average, but does have the potential to meet escapement goals and objectives. However, given the recent trend of low Yukon River Chinook salmon run sizes, it is still too early to project whether escapement goals will be met until Chinook salmon passage increases at escapement projects. At this point, the department is

hopeful that the conservative management actions and sacrifices made by fishermen to date will result in attaining spawning escapements needed to sustain this Chinook salmon run for future generations.

Genetic mixed stock analysis (MSA) on the early group and first pulse of Chinook salmon past the sonar project near Pilot Station (May 30 to June 17) estimated that 50% of the fish were of Canadian-origin. Genetic MSA on the second pulse of Chinook salmon past the sonar project near Pilot Station (June 18 to June 25) estimated that 38% of the fish were Canadian-origin. The third and fourth pulses of Chinook salmon (June 26 to July 2) were approximately 31% Canadian origin- fish. These results suggest a weaker Canadian run size than 2014. For more information about Yukon River inseason genetic MSA, please visit the ADF&G Gene Conservation Laboratory website at:

http://www.adfg.alaska.gov/index.cfm?adfg=fishinggeneconservationlab.yukonchinook_baseline

A large pulse of approximately 360,000 summer chum salmon started passing the sonar near Pilot Station and should be passing through lower portion of Subdistrict 4A, which includes the communities of Anvik and Grayling, over the next few days. As of July 5, the cumulative summer chum salmon passage at the sonar project near Pilot Station was approximately 1,200,000 fish, which is above the historical cumulative median of 1,150,000 for this date. Based on historical run timing, the summer chum salmon passage is estimated to be approximately 80% complete by July 5 at the sonar project near Pilot Station.

Assessment Projects

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

8.5-Inch Set Gillnet: The LYTF cumulative Catch per Unit Effort (CPUE) for both the Middle Mouth and Big Eddy sites combined as of July 5 is 38.25. Operations have been altered from previous years, so caution should be taken when comparing current catch rates to historical catch rates.

8.25-Inch Drift Gillnet: The Big Eddy Chinook salmon drift test fishery began operations on May 24. The cumulative CPUE as of July 5 is 606.88, which is above the historical average of 364.44 for all years.

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 have been 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. Currently, fewer set net sites are being fished than have been fished historically in an effort to further reduce Chinook salmon mortality in the LYTF program. 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 July 5 is 9,778.22, which is well above the historical median of 3,461.34 for this date.

Sonar Project near Pilot Station/ ADF&G

The sonar project near Pilot Station has been fully operational since May 31. Chinook salmon passage as of July 5 is estimated to be 108,391 fish which is below the historical cumulative average of 128,209 Chinook salmon for this date for normal run timing years.

Summer chum salmon passage as of July 5 is estimated to be 1,202,744 fish which is above the historical cumulative median of 1,149,614 summer chum salmon for this date.

Rapids Video Test Fish / Zuray

The Rapids video test wheel was operational at noon on June 13. However, the Rapids video test wheel was discontinued on June 23 due to the Tozitna fire.

Andreafsky River Weir / USFWS

The Andreafsky River weir began operations on June 17. As of July 5, 399 Chinook salmon were counted at the weir, which is below the historical cumulative average of 727 Chinook salmon for this date. As of July 5, 30,146 summer chum salmon were counted at the weir, which is above the historical cumulative median of 20,149 fish for this date. The Sustainable Escapement Goal (SEG) for the Andreafsky River is 2,100–4,900 for Chinook salmon and greater than 40,000 for summer chum salmon.

Gisasa River Weir / USFWS

The Gisasa River weir began operations on June 17. As of July 5, 49 Chinook salmon have been counted at the weir, which is below the historical cumulative average of 169 fish for this date. As of July 5, 8,975 summer chum salmon have been counted at the weir, which is on par with the historical cumulative median of 8,644 fish for this date.

Henshaw Creek Weir / TCC

The Henshaw Creek weir began operations on June 24. As of July 5, 48 Chinook salmon have been counted at the weir, which is above the historical cumulative average of 14 fish for this date. As of July 5, 9,689 summer chum salmon have been counted at the weir, which is well above the historical cumulative median of 217 fish for this date.

Anvik River Sonar / ADF&G

The Anvik River sonar began operations on June 17. As of July 5, 117,320 summer chum salmon have been counted at the sonar, which is below the historical cumulative median of 164,164 fish for this date. The Biological Escapement Goal (BEG) for summer chum salmon is 350,000–700,000 fish past the sonar project.

Chena River Tower/ADF&G

The Chena River tower began operations on June 30. Thirty-nine Chinook salmon were counted at the tower as of July 2. On July 3, the tower operations were discontinued due to high debris in the river. No summer chum salmon were counted at the tower before operations were pulled. The BEG for the Chena River is 2,800–5,700 for Chinook salmon.

Eagle Sonar/ADF&G

The Eagle sonar project began operations on June 30. As of July 5, 1,423 Chinook salmon have been counted. Due to the early start date for operations, there are no historical averages to compare passage for this date.

Age Composition

The Chinook salmon age composition from drift gillnets in the Pilot Station test fishery through June 25 was 19% age-4, 38% age-5, and 43% age-6 fish. The sample size was 255 fish, of which 33% were female. The proportion of age-5 was below average, while the proportions of age-6 and age-4 were above average, and the proportion of females was below average.

The Chinook salmon age composition from the 8.5-inch LYTF set nets through June 28 was 9% age-4, 21% age-5, 68% age-6, and 2% age-7 fish. The sample size was 455 fish, of which 51% were female. Similar to Pilot Station test fishery, the LYTF proportion of age-5 fish was below average and the proportions of age-6 and age-4 were above average. The proportion of females was slightly above average.

The chum salmon age composition from the 5.5-inch LYTF drift nets through June 29 was less than 1% age-3, 33% age-4, 65% age-5, and 2% age-6 fish. The sample size was 549 fish, of which 52% were female. The proportion of age-4 was below average, the proportion of age-5 was above average, and the proportion of females was average.

The chum salmon age composition from the beach seine and dip net commercial fishery through period 13 was 1% age-3, 32% age-4, 65% age-5, and 2% age-6 fish. The sample size was 600 fish, of which 47% were female.

Yukon River Summer Chum Salmon Radio Telemetry Project/ADF&G

Tagging operations for the summer chum salmon radio telemetry research project began June 12 upriver from the community of Russian Mission. As of July 5, 840 summer chum salmon have been tagged and released. In addition to the radio tag, summer chum salmon will also have a white spaghetti tag located at the base of the dorsal fin. Tagged fish have been identified in the Bonasila, Anvik, Innoko, Hogotza, Koyukuk and Nulato Rivers. Smaller numbers of fish continue to reach our tower past the Hogotza river confluence on the Koyukuk. The first aerial surveys were conducted on June 30th and July 1st, covering the Yukon main stem from Pilot Station to Fairbanks. Further flights covering tributaries are planned over the next week, smoke conditions permitting. If a tagged summer chum salmon is harvested, please note the date, time, and location and return the tag to the address listed on the outside of the radio tag or contact Holly Carroll or Sean Larson with ADF&G (holly.carroll@alaska.gov or sean.larson@alaska.gov). Tagging operations will continue through the summer chum run. This project is funded in large part by the Alaska Sustainable Salmon Fund. For more information visit: <http://www.akssf.org/Default.aspx?id=3368>

Management Strategies

A conservative management approach has been taken early in the summer fishing season given the weak return of Chinook salmon expected in 2015. Gear restrictions and subsequent subsistence fishing closures have been implemented on the mainstem of the Yukon River to

protect an anticipated weak return of Chinook salmon. Similar conservation actions were taken in the Koyukuk and Innoko Rivers.

The Chinook salmon run is currently tracking at the lower end of the preseason outlook of 118,000 – 140,000 total fish. However, current run size projection estimates based on sonar passage and historical run timing suggest the 2015 Chinook salmon run appears strong enough to meet escapement objectives. The Canadian run of Chinook salmon does appear to be weaker than 2014, so management efforts have been conservative to balance summer chum salmon subsistence opportunities and continued protection of Canadian-origin Chinook salmon. Short subsistence openings with gillnets restricted to six-inch or smaller mesh size have been provided in Districts 1 through 4. These openings have been timed to coincide with larger groups of summer chum salmon and lower Chinook salmon abundance. The intent of these short openings has been to provide opportunity for subsistence fishermen to more efficiently meet their subsistence needs for summer chum salmon, while minimizing the impact to the Chinook salmon run.

As the Chinook salmon run winds down in the lower river, gear restrictions are cautiously being relaxed to allow for more efficient harvest of the summer chum salmon still moving through the lower river.

Subsistence salmon fishing is currently closed in District 5 to protect a weak Canadian-origin Chinook salmon run. Unfortunately, conservative management actions in District 5 will continue until there is more confidence in the run assessment at the sonar project near the border that the escapement objective of 42,500 to 55,000 Chinook salmon will be met.

The 2015 season is undoubtedly 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

Subsistence Fishing Schedule:

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):

Currently, subsistence salmon fishing in District 1 is closed.

Effective 3:00 p.m. Tuesday, July 7, subsistence salmon fishing is open concurrently with commercial salmon fishing with 6-inch or smaller mesh size gillnets:

- Tuesday, July 7, from 3:00 p.m. until 11:59 p.m.

Chinook salmon caught in gillnet gear may be retained for subsistence use. Fishermen are reminded that Chinook salmon must be marked by removing both tips of the tail fin. The tips must be removed before concealing the Chinook salmon from plain view or before transferring the salmon from the fishing site.

District 2:

Currently, subsistence salmon fishing in District 2 is closed.

Effective 9:00 p.m. Monday, July 6, subsistence salmon fishing is open concurrently with commercial salmon fishing with 6-inch or smaller mesh size gillnets:

- Monday, July 6, from 9:00 p.m. until 11:59 p.m.

Chinook salmon caught in gillnet gear may be retained for subsistence use. Fishermen are reminded that Chinook salmon must be marked by removing both tips of the tail fin. The tips must be removed before concealing the Chinook salmon from plain view or before transferring the salmon from the fishing site.

An announcement will be made on Tuesday, July 7, regarding further subsistence and commercial salmon fishing openings to target summer chum salmon.

District 3:

Subsistence salmon fishing for summer chum salmon is currently open in District 3 for 24 hours a day, seven days a week with dip net gear only.

Effective 4:00 p.m. Tuesday, July 7, subsistence salmon fishing with dip net gear will close.

Subsistence salmon fishing will reopen in District 3 for one 6-hour period from 6:00 p.m. until 11:59 p.m. Tuesday, July 7, with gillnets restricted to 6-inch or smaller mesh size to target summer chum salmon. Chinook salmon incidentally caught in the 6-inch or smaller mesh size gillnets may be kept for subsistence purposes. Fishermen are reminded that all Chinook salmon caught and retained for subsistence during this opening must be marked by removing both tips of the tail fin. The tips must be removed before concealing the Chinook salmon from plain view or before transferring the salmon from the fishing site.

At 12:01 a.m. Wednesday, July 8, subsistence salmon fishing will continue on the previous schedule of 24 hours a day, seven days per week with dip net gear only. All Chinook salmon caught in dip nets must be released to the water alive.

Innoko River:

Subsistence salmon fishing is open 24 hours a day, seven days per week with 6-inch or smaller mesh size gillnets. This gear restriction is expected to be in place for the remainder of the Chinook salmon run in 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 for summer chum salmon is currently open in Subdistrict 4-A for 24 hours a day, seven days a week with dip net and live-release fish wheels only.

Effective at 5:00 p.m. Monday, July 6, subsistence salmon fishing in the lower portion of Subdistrict 4-A will close.

Effective at 6:00 p.m. Monday, July 6, subsistence salmon fishing will reopen in the lower portion of Subdistrict 4-A for one 4-hour period with gillnets restricted to 6-inch or smaller mesh size and fish wheels to target summer chum salmon. The period is as follows:

- Monday, July 6, from 6:00 p.m. to 10:00 p.m.

Dip nets may not be used during this 4-hour period. Chinook salmon incidentally caught in the 6-inch or smaller mesh size gillnets and fish wheels may be kept for subsistence purposes.

After the close of this four hour subsistence fishing period, subsistence salmon fishing will return to the previous schedule of 24 hours a day, seven days per week with dip net and live-release fish wheels only beginning 11:00 p.m. Monday, July 6, in the lower portion of Subdistrict 4-A. All Chinook salmon caught in dip nets and fish wheels must be released to the water alive.

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 open 24 hours a day, seven days per week with dip nets and live-release fish wheels.

Subsistence dip net fishermen are required to immediately release Chinook salmon alive from these gear types. Fish wheels must be manned at all times of operation, or be equipped with a live box that must be checked at least once every six hours. All Chinook salmon must be released alive from fish wheels.

Subdistrict 4-B (from Cone Point upstream along the north bank of the river to the westernmost edge of Illinois Creek, which includes the mainstem Yukon River communities of Galena and Ruby):

Subsistence salmon fishing is open 24 hours a day, seven days per week with dip nets and live-release fish wheels.

Subsistence dip net fishermen are required to immediately release Chinook salmon alive from these gear types. Fish wheels must be manned at all times of operation, or be equipped with a live box that must be checked at least once every six hours. All Chinook salmon must be released alive from fish wheels.

Subdistrict 4-C (from Cone Point upstream along the south bank of the river to the westernmost edge of Illinois Creek, which includes the main stem Yukon River communities of Kaltag, Nulato, and Koyukuk):

Subsistence salmon fishing for summer chum salmon is currently open in Subdistrict 4-C for 24 hours a day, seven days a week with dip net and live-release fish wheels only.

Effective at 11:00 a.m. Monday, July 6, subsistence salmon fishing in Subdistrict 4-C will close.

Effective at 12:00 p.m. noon Monday, July 6, subsistence salmon fishing will reopen in Subdistrict 4-C for one 8-hour period with gillnets restricted to 6-inch or smaller mesh size and fish wheels to target summer chum salmon. The period is as follows:

- Monday, July 6, from 12:00 p.m. noon until to 8:00 p.m.

Dip nets may not be used during this 8-hour period. Chinook salmon incidentally caught in the 6-inch or smaller mesh size gillnets and fish wheels may be kept for subsistence purposes.

After the close of this eight hour subsistence fishing opening, subsistence fishing will return to the previous schedule of 24 hours a day, seven days per week with dip net and live-release fish wheels only at 9:00 p.m. Monday, July 6, in Subdistrict 4-C. All Chinook salmon caught in dip nets and fish wheels must be released to the water alive.

Koyukuk River:

Subsistence salmon fishing is open 24 hours a day, seven days per week with 6-inch or smaller mesh size gillnets. This gear restriction is expected to be in place for the remainder of the Chinook salmon run in the Koyukuk River.

Subdistricts 5-A, 5-B, and 5-C:

Subsistence salmon fishing in Subdistricts 5-A, 5-B, and 5-C is currently closed until further notice. During subsistence salmon fishing closures, fish wheels may not be operated and 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. If a salmon is caught in this gear type, it is legal to retain it.

Subdistrict 5-D (from an ADF&G regulatory marker two miles downstream of Waldron Creek upstream to the U.S-Canada border including all adjacent tributaries):

Subsistence salmon fishing in Subdistrict 5-D is currently closed until further notice. During subsistence salmon fishing closures, fish wheels may not be operated and 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. If a salmon is caught in this gear type, it is legal to retain it.

Subdistricts 6-A and 6-B:

Subsistence and personal use salmon fishing in Subdistricts 6-A and 6-B is currently open for 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.

The Kantishna River is currently open 24 hours a day, seven days per week for subsistence salmon fishing.

Fishermen in Subdistricts 6-A, including the Kantishna River, and 6-B may use fish wheels or gillnets with mesh size of 6 inches or less. 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 caught in a fish wheel must be released to the water alive.

Old Minto Area:

Subsistence salmon fishing in the Old Minto Area is currently five days per week from 6:00 p.m. Fridays until 6:00 p.m. Wednesdays with 6-inch or smaller mesh size gillnets. Fishermen may use fish wheels, however, 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 to the water alive.

Subdistrict 6-C (from the regulatory marker at the mouth of the Wood River upstream to the downstream mouth of the Salcha River, which includes the communities of Fairbanks, North Pole, and Salcha):

Personal use salmon fishing is closed and will remain closed until further notice to conserve Chinook salmon.

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): 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.

Commercial Fishing Schedule:**Commercial Fishing:**

The Lower Yukon summer chum salmon dip net and beach seine commercial fishery began on Thursday, June 11, in District 1 and on Monday, June 15, in District 2. The preliminary commercial harvest in District 1 through July 5 is approximately 124,253 summer chum salmon with a reported 4,475 Chinook salmon released alive and 715 Chinook salmon kept for subsistence use. The preliminary commercial harvest in District 2 through July 5 is approximately 136,588 summer chum salmon with a reported 5,127 Chinook salmon released alive.

District 1 (including the Black River) Commercial Fishing Schedule:

Concurrent subsistence and commercial summer chum salmon fishing in District 1 will open effective at 3:00 p.m. Tuesday, July 7, on the following schedule with 6-inch or smaller mesh size gillnets:

- Tuesday, July 7, from 3:00 p.m. until 11:59 p.m.

The sale of Chinook salmon is prohibited. Therefore, commercial gillnet fishermen can release live Chinook salmon or use them for subsistence purposes. Chinook salmon retained from commercial gillnet gear must be recorded on a fish ticket as retained but not sold.

Fishermen are reminded that all Chinook salmon caught and retained for subsistence during the commercial gillnet opening must be marked by removing both tips of the tail fin. The tips must be removed before concealing the Chinook salmon from plain view or before transferring the salmon from the fishing site.

District 2 Commercial Fishing Schedule:

Concurrent subsistence and commercial summer chum salmon fishing in District 2 will open effective at 9:00 p.m. Monday, July 6, on the following schedule with 6-inch or smaller mesh size gillnets:

- Monday, July 6, from 9:00 p.m. until 11:59 p.m.

No dip net or beach seine gear commercial or subsistence opportunity will be provided on Monday, July 6.

The sale of Chinook salmon is prohibited. Therefore, commercial gillnet fishermen can release live Chinook salmon or use them for subsistence purposes. Chinook salmon retained from commercial gillnet gear must be recorded on a fish ticket as retained but not sold.

Fishermen are reminded that all Chinook salmon caught and retained for subsistence during the commercial gillnet opening must be marked by removing both tips of the tail fin. The tips must be removed before concealing the Chinook salmon from plain view or before transferring the salmon from the fishing site.

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**. If you have any questions regarding this report, please call the ADF&G office in Emmonak at 949-1320.

-end-