

ALASKA DEPARTMENT OF FISH AND GAME

DIVISION OF COMMERCIAL FISHERIES

NEWS RELEASE



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2015 Yukon River Summer Salmon Fishery News Release # 68

Summer Update # 7, Yukon Area Salmon Fishery

Districts Affected: Yukon Area

Assessment

Based on the assessment information to date, the 2015 Chinook salmon run size is on track to be above the lower end of the preseason outlook range of 118,000 to 140,000 fish. The Chinook salmon run is nearly over in the Lower Yukon River and as of July 12, the cumulative sonar passage at the sonar project near Pilot Station is approximately 114,000 fish, which is below the historical cumulative average of 138,000 for this date. For average run timing years, the Chinook salmon run is estimated to be approximately 96% complete at the sonar project near Pilot Station as of July 12.

To date, approximately 10,000 Chinook salmon have already been counted at the sonar project near Eagle, which is above the historical average of approximately 3,000. Initial counts at the Eagle sonar project are encouraging; however, additional data are necessary before it can be determined with more certainty that the escapement objective at the border will be met. The longer, more sustained second pulse of Chinook salmon is migrating through the upper part of Subdistrict 5-D and should reach the Canadian border by July 16. The third pulse of Chinook salmon should be passing by Fort Yukon July 16 and the fourth pulse (approximately 28,000 fish) should be passing Stevens Village July 15.

Meanwhile, initial passage estimates through July 12 at the escapement projects operated in the Alaska portion of the drainage are encouraging. The escapement goal at East Fork Andreafsky River has been met for Chinook salmon and Henshaw Creek weir counts are well above average for this date. Unfortunately, high water conditions have hindered operations at the escapement monitoring projects on the Salcha and Chena rivers. Sonar was implemented on the Chena River during high water conditions to provide supplemental counts and an aerial survey is currently being conducted on the Salcha River to provide an estimate of Chinook salmon passage to date.

As of July 12, the cumulative summer chum salmon passage at the sonar project near Pilot Station was approximately 1,300,000 fish, which is below the historical cumulative median of 1,500,000 for this date. Based on historical run timing, the summer chum salmon passage is estimated to be approximately 96% complete by July 12 at the sonar project near Pilot Station. The escapement goal of at least 40,000 summer chum salmon at East Fork Andreafsky River was achieved on July 9 and the project had an estimated passage of approximately 44,000 salmon through July 12. Summer chum passage at Anvik River sonar is currently 288,000 and is on track to meet the escapement goal of 350,000 to 700,000 for this river.

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 12 is 39.58. Operations have been altered from previous years, so caution should be taken when comparing current catch rates to historical catch rates. Given that the Chinook salmon run is nearly over in the lower river, the Middle Mouth set net site will be pulled the evening of July 13.

8.25-Inch Drift Gillnet: The cumulative CPUE as of July 12 is 609.95, which is above the historical average of 373.85 for all years. The drift gillnet test fishery will continue until the end of the summer season (July 15).

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. Fewer set net sites were fished in 2015 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 12 is 10,744.20, which is well above the historical median of 3,784.43 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 12 is estimated to be 113,836 fish which is below the historical cumulative average of 138,108 Chinook salmon for this date for normal run timing years. Summer chum salmon passage as of July 12 is estimated to be 1,330,614 fish which is below the historical cumulative median of 1,540,295 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 12, 3,040 Chinook salmon were counted at the weir, which is above the historical cumulative average of 2,605 Chinook salmon for this date. As of July 12, 43,710 summer chum salmon were counted at the weir, which is above the historical cumulative median of 37,043 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. Both of these escapement goals were met on July 9.

Gisasa River Weir / USFWS

The Gisasa River weir began operations on June 17. As of July 12, 328 Chinook salmon have been counted at the weir, which is below the historical cumulative average of 860 fish for this date. As of July 12, 20,937 summer chum salmon have been counted at the weir, which is below the historical cumulative median of 22,349 fish for this date.

Henshaw Creek Weir / TCC

The Henshaw Creek weir began operations on June 24. As of July 12, 636 Chinook salmon have been counted at the weir, which is above the historical cumulative average of 233 fish for this date. As of July 12, 45,234 summer chum salmon have been counted at the weir, which is well above the historical cumulative median of 13,394 fish for this date.

Anvik River Sonar / ADF&G

The Anvik River sonar began operations on June 17. As of July 12, 288,484 summer chum salmon have been counted at the sonar, which is below the historical cumulative median of 329,831 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. Tower operations were suspended for five days from July 3–July 7 due to high debris in the river. Tower counts for Chinook and summer chum salmon resumed on July 8. As of July 12, 885 Chinook salmon were counted at the tower, which is below the historical cumulative average of 1,289 fish for this date. As of July 12, 123 summer chum salmon were counted at the tower, which is above the historical cumulative median of 14 fish for this date. The BEG for Chinook salmon on the Chena River is 2,800–5,700 fish.

Eagle Sonar/ADF&G

The Eagle sonar project began operations on June 30. As of July 12, 10,169 Chinook salmon have been counted. The average cumulative passage of Chinook salmon from 2005–2014 is 3,085. Please note that the sonar project started five days earlier in 2015 relative to previous years.

Age Composition

The Chinook salmon age composition from drift gillnets in the Pilot Station test fishery through July 5 was 21% age-4, 34% age-5, and 44% age-6 fish. The sample size was 376 fish, of which

35% 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 July 5 was 9% age-4, 18% age-5, 72% age-6, and 1% age-7 fish. The sample size was 580 fish, of which 53% 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 near average.

The chum salmon age composition from the 5.5-inch LYTF drift nets through July 8 was less than 1% age-3, 37% age-4, 60% age-5, and 2% age-6 fish. The sample size was 741 fish, of which 53% were female. The proportion of age-4 was below average, the proportion of age-5 was above average, and the proportion of females was below average.

The chum salmon age composition from the beach seine and dip net commercial fishery through was 1% age-3, 35% age-4, 62% age-5, and 2% age-6 fish. The sample size was 710 fish, of which 47% were female.

The chum salmon age composition from the restricted gillnet commercial fishery in District 1 through period 23 (July 7) was 1% age-3, 54% age-4, 43% age-5, and 2% age-6 fish. The sample size was 240 fish, of which 43% 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 12, 1,048 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 in the Bonasila, Anvik, Innoko, Melozitna, Nulato, and Tanana rivers. Tagged fish continue to pass Gisasa, Hogotza, and the Upper Koyukuk on the Koyukuk River. Further flights covering lower river 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

The majority of the Chinook salmon run has migrated out of the Lower Yukon River and subsistence salmon fishing restrictions are being relaxed in the lower river districts. Districts 1 through 3 have been put on their regulatory subsistence fishing schedules and the use of dip nets and live-release fish wheels have been discontinued. Similar actions are being taken in Subdistrict 4-A later this week. During these regulatory subsistence salmon fishing openings, gear is restricted to 6-inch or smaller mesh gillnets to target summer chum salmon still moving through the districts, while minimizing the incidental harvest of Chinook salmon.

Genetic analyses and sonar counts near Pilot Station indicated a weaker than anticipated Canadian-origin Chinook salmon run. Due to the uncertainty associated with the Canadian-origin Chinook salmon run assessment to date, the subsistence salmon fishing closures continue to be in effect in the Upper Yukon as the majority of the Canadian-origin Chinook salmon stocks are migrating through District 5. While initial passage estimates at the Eagle sonar project are encouraging, the first pulse is just now passing by the project. As the second pulse begins migrating past the sonar project later this week, we expect to gain more confidence in the projection estimates that will guide management actions in the upper river. If and when confidence is gained that the escapement objective will be met, fishing opportunities may be considered in District 5.

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:

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):

Subsistence salmon fishing is currently open with 6-inch or smaller mesh size gillnets 24 hours a day, seven days per week except for six hours before, during, and six hours after a commercial fishing period. Based on the commercial period on July 15, subsistence salmon fishing will be closed on the following times:

- 6:00 a.m. Wednesday, July 15, until 6:00 a.m. Thursday, July 16.

District 2:

Subsistence salmon fishing is currently open with 6-inch or smaller mesh size gillnets 24 hours a day, seven days per week except for six hours before, during, and six hours after a commercial fishing period. Based on the commercial periods on July 14, July 16, and July 18, subsistence salmon fishing will be closed on the following times:

- Tuesday, July 14, from 8:00 a.m. until 5:00 a.m. Wednesday, July 15
- Thursday, July 16, from 8:00 a.m. until 5:00 a.m. Friday, July 17
- Saturday, July 18, from 8:00 a.m. until 5:00 a.m. Sunday, July 19

District 3:

Subsistence salmon fishing for summer chum salmon is currently open in District 3 for two 36-hour periods per week from 8:00 p.m. Sundays to 8:00 a.m. Tuesdays and from 8:00 p.m. Wednesdays until 8:00 a.m. Fridays with 6-inch or smaller mesh size gillnets.

Innoko River:

Subsistence salmon fishing is open 24 hours a day, seven days per week with 6-inch or smaller mesh size gillnets.

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

Currently, subsistence salmon fishing in the lower portion of Subdistrict 4-A is open 24 hours a day, seven days per week with dip net gear and live-release fish wheels only. Any Chinook salmon caught in dip net gear and fish wheels must be released to the water alive.

Effective 6:00 p.m. Wednesday, July 15, subsistence salmon fishing will be open for two 48-hour periods per week from 6:00 p.m. Wednesdays until 6:00 p.m. Fridays and from 6:00 p.m. Sundays to 6:00 p.m. Tuesdays with 6-inch or smaller mesh size gillnets and fish wheels. Chinook salmon caught in gillnet gear and fish wheels may be retained for subsistence use.

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

Currently, subsistence salmon fishing in the upper portion of Subdistrict 4-A is open 24 hours a day, seven days per week with dip net gear and live-release fish wheels only. Any Chinook salmon caught in dip net gear and fish wheels must be released to the water alive.

Effective 6:00 p.m. Sunday, July 19, subsistence salmon fishing will be open for two 48-hour periods per week from 6:00 p.m. Sundays to 6:00 p.m. Tuesdays and from 6:00 p.m. Wednesdays until 6:00 p.m. Fridays with 6-inch or smaller mesh size gillnets and fish wheels. Chinook salmon caught in gillnet gear and fish wheels may be retained for subsistence use.

A new regulation passed at the Board of Fisheries meeting in March 2015 allows the use of drift gillnets to harvest summer chum salmon for subsistence purposes from June 10 through August 2 in the upper portion of Subdistrict 4-A.

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 community of Galena):

Subsistence salmon fishing in Subdistrict 4-B 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. 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. The requirement to release Chinook salmon alive from these gear types will be strictly enforced.

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 community of Ruby):

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 5:00 p.m. Wednesday, July 15, subsistence salmon fishing in Subdistrict 4-C will close.

Effective at 6:00 p.m. Wednesday, July 15, subsistence salmon fishing will reopen in Subdistrict 4-C for one 24-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:

- 6:00 p.m. Wednesday, July 15, until 6:00 p.m. Thursday, July 16

Dip nets may not be used during this 24-hour period. Chinook salmon incidentally caught in 6-inch or smaller mesh size gillnets and fish wheels may be kept for subsistence purposes.

After the close of this 24-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 7:00 p.m. Thursday, July 16, 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.

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 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 p.m. noon Wednesdays and from 6:00 p.m. Fridays until 12:00 p.m. 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 directed commercial fishery began on June 11 in District 1 and June 15 in District 2 with beach seine and dip net gear only. From July 2–July 5 fishermen in District 1 used 5.5-inch gillnets limited to 30 meshes deep to harvest summer chum salmon while minimizing the incidental harvest of Chinook salmon. As of July 6, fishermen in Districts 1 and 2 have used 6-inch or smaller mesh size gillnets to harvest summer chum salmon. The preliminary commercial harvest in District 1 through July 11 is approximately 165,989 summer chum salmon with a reported 4,572 Chinook salmon released alive from dip nets and beach seines and 1,441 Chinook salmon kept from restricted gillnets for subsistence use. The preliminary commercial harvest in District 2 through July 12 is approximately 170,759 summer chum salmon with a reported 4,941 Chinook salmon released alive from dip nets and beach seines and 1,029 Chinook salmon kept from restricted gillnets for subsistence use.

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

Effective 12:00 p.m. noon Wednesday, July 15, commercial salmon fishing will open for one period with 6-inch or smaller mesh size gillnets:

- Wednesday, July 15, from 12:00 p.m. noon until 11:59 p.m.

District 2 Commercial Fishing Schedule:

Effective 2:00 p.m. Tuesday, July 14, commercial salmon fishing will open on the following schedule with 6-inch or smaller mesh size gillnets:

- Tuesday, July 14, from 2:00 p.m. until 11:00 p.m.
- Thursday, July 16, from 2:00 p.m. until 11:00 p.m.
- Saturday, July 18, from 2:00 p.m. until 11:00 p.m.

The sale of Chinook salmon is prohibited. Commercial gillnet fishermen in Districts 1 and 2 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 gillnet openings 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.

Subdistricts 6-A, 6-B, and 6-C Commercial Fishing Schedule:

Effective 6:00 p.m. Monday, July 13, commercial fishing will open for two 42-hour fishing periods with live-release, fish friendly fish wheels:

Period #1: 6:00 p.m. Monday, July 13, until 12:00 p.m. noon Wednesday, July 15

Period #2: 6:00 p.m. Friday, July 17, until 12:00 p.m. noon Sunday, July 19

Commercial fishermen should coordinate with the buyer on a daily basis regarding scheduling deliveries. All salmon harvested during commercial fishing operations must be recorded on a fish ticket at the time of sale. All Chinook salmon caught in a fish wheel must be released to the water alive. All Chinook salmon released must also be recorded on the fish ticket. Other fish species caught but not sold must also be recorded on the fish ticket. These commercial fishing periods do not affect current Personal Use management actions and fishing schedules.

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.

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