

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



*Sam Cotten, Commissioner
Jeff Regnart, Director*



Contact:
Aaron Poetter, Area Management Biologist
Aaron Tiernan, Asst. Area Management Biologist
Phone: (907) 543-2433
Toll Free: (855) 933-2433
Fax: (907) 543-2021

Anchorage Area Office
333 Raspberry Rd
Anchorage, AK 99518

Date Issued: August 19, 2015
Time: 1:00 p.m.

2015 Kuskokwim River Salmon Fishery Update #10

The Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ADF&G) works cooperatively with U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), National Park Service, and various Tribal or community groups to monitor the health of Kuskokwim Area salmon stocks and provide data for inseason management.

ADF&G ensures that all assessment data are publicly available inseason. Detailed project summaries are prepared each week and presented to the Kuskokwim River Salmon Management Working Group. Management meetings are held each Wednesday at the ADF&G office in Bethel. Working Group meetings are open to the public, in person or via teleconference. Project summaries and associated meeting materials are available online by 5:00 PM Tuesday during the salmon season. In addition, select data are available daily by 10:00 AM.

Working Group Information Packets:

<http://www.adfg.alaska.gov/index.cfm?adfg=commercialbyareakuskokwim.kswg>

Inseason Bethel Test Fish and Escapement Monitoring Data:

<http://www.adfg.alaska.gov/index.cfm?adfg=commercialbyareakuskokwim.salmon#fishcounts>

Assessment Overview

Coho salmon are the most abundant species in the lower portion of the Kuskokwim River, and ADF&G has shifted toward coho salmon management. The historical average midpoint of the coho salmon run past Bethel is August 8. Daily CPUE in the Bethel Test Fishery (BTF) has increased over the past week, indicating an increase in coho salmon abundance. Cumulative CPUE is below average for this time of year, indicating the coho salmon run is either late, weak, or both. Coho salmon are continuing to arrive in consistent numbers at tributary escapement monitoring projects; however, it is still early in the coho salmon escapement. Escapement is

average to below average at monitored locations. There was commercial harvest opportunity for coho salmon on August 10 and August 17, downriver from Bethel. Total harvest and CPUE from the commercial opportunities were above average for this time of year. Inseason projections of run strength suggest that coho salmon abundance is adequate to meet escapement needs, provide for subsistence harvest compared to recent years, and allow for limited commercial harvest.

Bethel Test Fishery

Bethel Test Fishery (BTF) is the primary inseason run assessment tool for Kuskokwim River salmon and is operated the same way each year. The daily Catch Per Unit Effort (CPUE) is used to index run timing and relative abundance of Chinook, chum, sockeye, and coho salmon. These data have only limited utility for estimating total run size or escapement. *The 2015 Chinook salmon, chum salmon, and sockeye salmon data is not directly comparable to prior years due to subsistence fishing restrictions.* The Bethel Test Fishery continues to operate on schedule.

Coho salmon are the most abundant species in the lower river. As of August 17, cumulative CPUE of coho salmon is 2,214, which is below the recent 5-year average of 2,683 and recent 10-year average of 3,126. The historical midpoint of the coho salmon run is August 8. Coho salmon run timing appears to be late. Inseason projections based on both average and late run timing suggest the end of season cumulative CPUE could be below average; however, as of August 15th BTF exceeded the “performance benchmark” of 2,000 fish. In prior years when BTF cumulative CPUE for coho salmon exceeded 2,000, escapement goals at the Kogruklu and Kwethluk rivers were achieved, amounts necessary for subsistence (27,400–57,600) were met, and modest commercial harvest opportunity was allowed.

The Chinook salmon, chum salmon, and sockeye salmon runs through the lower river are effectively over. As of August 17, Chinook salmon cumulative CPUE is 625, chum salmon is 2,913, and sockeye salmon is 2,174. Cumulative CPUE is above average for Chinook salmon and sockeye salmon, and below average for chum salmon.

Kwethluk River Weir

The Kwethluk River weir is operated by USFWS and used to index salmon escapement to the lower Kuskokwim River tributaries. As of August 17, a total of 8,113 Chinook salmon, 22,712 chum salmon, 8,873 sockeye salmon, and 1,604 coho salmon have been counted past the weir. The Chinook salmon escapement is considerably larger compared to recent years at this location. Chum salmon escapement is similar to the long-term average. Sockeye salmon escapement is the largest on record for this location. It is still early in the coho salmon escapement. On average, the midpoint of the coho salmon escapement is August 26. Cumulative coho salmon escapement to date is one of lowest on record for this location.

Escapement goals have been established by ADF&G for Chinook salmon (4,100–7,500) and coho salmon (>19,000). The upper bound of the Chinook salmon escapement goal has been exceeded. Inseason projections currently indicate that the coho salmon escapement goal may not be met.

Tuluksak River Weir

The Tuluksak River weir is operated by USFWS. As of August 17, a total of 660 Chinook salmon, 5,969 chum salmon, 731 sockeye salmon, and 1,152 coho salmon have been counted past the weir. Chinook salmon escapement is larger than the recent 5-year average but smaller than the long-term historical average for this date. Chum salmon escapement is the lowest on record for this date. It is still early in the coho salmon escapement. Cumulative coho salmon escapement to date is similar to the 5-year average but below the historical average. On average, the midpoint of the coho salmon escapement is August 26.

No salmon escapement goals have been established by ADF&G for this river.

Salmon River (Aniak River) Weir

The Salmon River (Aniak) weir has been operated by ADF&G and used to index salmon escapement to the Aniak River drainage. Operations at this weir ended on August 15.

As of August 15, a total of 2,285 Chinook salmon, 5,392 chum salmon, 1,461 sockeye salmon, and 267 coho salmon were counted past the weir. Chinook salmon and sockeye salmon escapements were similar to the long-term average for this location. Chum salmon escapement is greater than 2014, but is the second lowest on record of the seven years this project has successfully observed chum salmon. All species were still being observed passing the weir when operations ended for the season. No weir-based salmon escapement goals have been established by ADF&G for this river.

George River Weir

The George River weir is operated by ADF&G and used to index salmon escapement to middle Kuskokwim River tributaries. As of August 17, a total of 2,275 Chinook salmon, 16,934 chum salmon, and 1,708 coho salmon have been counted past the weir. Chinook salmon and chum salmon escapements are similar to what was observed in 2014, but below the historical average. It is still early in the coho salmon escapement at this location. However, cumulative escapement to date is tracking slightly higher than the 5-year average but below the historical average across all years. On average, the midpoint of the coho salmon escapement is August 28.

A sustainable escapement goal of 1,800–3,300 Chinook salmon has been established by ADF&G for this river. The lower bound of the Chinook salmon escapement goal was achieved on July 15.

Tatlawiksuk River Weir

The Tatlawiksuk River weir is operated by ADF&G and used to index salmon escapement to middle Kuskokwim River tributaries. Operations were interrupted on July 19 due to high water and normal operations were resumed on July 20. As of August 17, a total of 2,092 Chinook salmon, 9,912 chum salmon, and 3,701 coho salmon have been counted past the weir. Chinook salmon escapement is above average, and chum salmon escapement is below average. The majority of these species have passed the weir. Cumulative coho salmon escapement to date is

tracking above the historical average. On average, the midpoint of the coho salmon escapement is August 23.

No salmon escapement goals have been established by ADF&G for this river.

Kogrukluk River Weir

The Kogrukluk River weir is operated by ADF&G and used to index salmon escapement to the Holitna River drainage. Operations were interrupted on July 17 due to high water and normal operations were resumed on July 20. As of August 17, a total of 7,582 Chinook salmon, 30,498 chum salmon, 6,283 sockeye salmon, and 754 coho salmon were counted past the weir. It is still early in the coho salmon escapement at this location. On average, the midpoint of the coho salmon escapement is September 1. Cumulative coho salmon escapement to date is below average.

Sustainable escapement goals have been established by ADF&G for Chinook salmon (4,800–8,800), chum salmon (15,000–49,000), sockeye salmon (4,400–17,000), and coho salmon (13,000–28,000). The lower bound of the Chinook salmon, chum salmon, and sockeye salmon goals were achieved on July 23, July 29, and August 1 respectively. The likelihood of achieving the coho salmon goal is uncertain at this time.

Telaquana Lake Weir

The Telaquana Lake weir was operated cooperatively by ADF&G and National Park Service. The weir is used to index escapement for lake-spawning sockeye salmon. Operations ended on August 11.

As of August 11, a total of 91,090 sockeye salmon were observed past the weir. Escapement was the largest on record for this location and is nearly three times the historical average.

Salmon River (Pitka Fork) Weir

The Salmon River (Pitka Fork) weir was successfully operated by ADF&G and MTNT (McGrath, Takotna, Nikolai, Telida) and used to index Chinook salmon escapement to the headwaters upriver from McGrath. Operations ended on August 15.

As of August 15, a total of 6,257 Chinook salmon and 52 chum salmon were counted passing the weir. This was the first year that this weir has operated since 1982. The location of the weir has changed since that time, and no comparable data exists.

Kuskokwim River Chinook Salmon Aerial Surveys

Aerial surveys of peak Chinook salmon spawning abundance have been completed for select tributaries in the upper, middle, and lower portions of the Kuskokwim River drainage. Aerial surveys are an index of escapement to a very broad geographic area – meaning not all fish are counted, but the number of fish observed is related to the number of fish that escaped.

A total of 10 tributaries were successfully surveyed. Of the tributaries surveyed, ADF&G has established aerial survey escapement goals on the Salmon River Pitka Fork (470–1,600), Holitna River mainstem (970–2,100), Gagarayah River (300–830), and Kisaralik River (400–1,200). The escapement goal was exceeded on the Salmon River Pitka Fork, achieved on the Kisaralik River, and not achieved on either the Holitna or Gagarayah rivers.

District W1 – Commercial Harvest

The first commercial harvest opportunity in District W1 was August 10. Total harvest was 3 Chinook salmon, 100 sockeye salmon, 366 chum salmon, and 23,335 coho salmon. Coho salmon harvest and CPUE was average. A second commercial harvest opportunity took place on August 17. Total harvest on August 17 was 27,535 coho, 100 chum, and 4 sockeye salmon.

District W4 – Kuskokwim Bay

The Kanektok River weir is used to monitor escapement to District W4. Operations ended on August 15.

As of August 15, total passage through the weir was 10,416 Chinook salmon, 106,751 sockeye salmon, 15,048 chum salmon, and 2,493 coho salmon. Chinook salmon escapement was above average while the escapement of sockeye salmon, chum salmon, and coho salmon were below average. No weir-based salmon escapement goals have been established by ADF&G for this river.

ADF&G has established aerial survey escapement goals for Chinook salmon (3,500–8,000) and sockeye salmon (14,000–34,000) in the Kanektok River. Air surveys have been completed. The Chinook salmon goal was achieved, and the sockeye salmon goal was exceeded.

There have been a total of 14 commercial openers in District W4. Total harvest to date is 7, 505 Chinook salmon, 15,793 chum salmon, 30,083 sockeye salmon, and 47,435 coho salmon. Harvest is below average for Chinook salmon, chum salmon, and sockeye salmon. Coho salmon harvest is average.

District W5 – Kuskokwim Bay

The Middle Fork Goodnews River weir is used to monitor escapement to District 5. As of August 17, total passage through the weir is 1,386 Chinook salmon, 54,143 sockeye salmon, 10,698 chum salmon, and 110 coho salmon. Sockeye salmon escapement is above average. Chinook salmon, chum salmon, and coho salmon escapements are below average for this location.

ADF&G has established weir-based escapement goals for Chinook salmon (1,500–2,900), chum salmon (>12,000), sockeye salmon (18,000–40,000), and coho salmon (>12,000). Escapement has exceeded the upper bound of the sockeye salmon goal. Chinook salmon and chum salmon goals have not been achieved. Coho salmon escapement at the weir is the lowest on record.

ADF&G has established aerial survey escapement goals for Chinook salmon (640–3,300) and sockeye salmon (5,500–19,500) in the North Fork Goodnews River. Air surveys have been completed. The Chinook salmon goal was achieved, and the sockeye salmon goal was exceeded. There have been a total of 13 commercial openers in District W5. Total harvest to date is 705 Chinook salmon, 4,510 chum salmon, 25,861 sockeye salmon, and 7,030 coho salmon. Harvest is below average for all species.

Chinook Salmon Tagging

ADF&G is conducting a Salmon Tag Lottery through September 2015. Tagged Chinook salmon are identifiable by a brightly colored plastic tag attached to their back, and a metal antennae coming out of their mouth. *It is okay if you harvest one of these tagged fish.* Please call 1-800-267-2104 and return the radio tag to the ADF&G office in Bethel. In appreciation, you will be entered into the monthly Lottery and eligible for a cash prize of \$200 and a seasonal cash prize of \$500.

-end-