

Kuskokwim Subsistence Salmon Panel
August 24–25, 2015, Yupiit Piciryarait Cultural Center, Bethel

Attendees:

Panel: Tom Kluberton, Board of Fisheries/Chair, John Jensen, Board of Fisheries, Fritz Johnson, Board of Fisheries, Bob Aloysius, At-large member, James Charles, Lower Kuskokwim Advisory Committee, Tim Andrew, Association of Village Council Presidents, Mike Williams, co-chair, Kuskokwim Inter-tribal Fisheries Commission, Lisa Feyereisen, Central Kuskokwim Advisory Committee, Mark Leary, Kuskokwim River Salmon Management Working Group, Ray Collins, McGrath Advisory Committee, Barbara Carlson, Stoney-Holitna Advisory Committee, Greg Roczicka, Orutsarmiut Native Corporation.

ADF&G: Lisa Olson, Hiroko Ikuta, John Linderman, Aaron Poetter, Zach Liller, Aaron Tiernan, Colton Lipka, Tom Taube, John Chythlook, Jennifer Peeks, Glenn Haight

USFWS OSM: George Pappas, Dr. Jennifer Harding, Stewart Cogswell.

Alaska Wildlife Troopers: Marc Cloward.

Alaska Department of Law: Seth Beausang.

6–10 members of public.

Monday, August 24

Review of panel mission, results to date, expected outcomes:

- a. March 2015 Board of Fisheries (board) actions regarding Kuskokwim subsistence salmon fishing:
 - ACR became Proposal 272. Board established Kuskokwim Subsistence Salmon Panel (panel) to seek public input for equitable distribution of salmon resource (king salmon in particular) in Kuskokwim River drainage communities.
 - First panel meeting in Bethel in January 2015 with Orville Huntington, Mr. Kluberton, and Mr. Johnson.
 - Proposal 278 – board adopted to allow use of fish wheels if king salmon released. (March 2015 board meeting) and gave ADF&G (department) authority to limit length of setnets in time of conservation.
 - MrHuntington and Mr. Kluberton (board members) traveled to river communities during fishing season in June. Observed limited subsistence fishing activity and near empty smokehouses.
- b. Kuskokwim River subsistence salmon fishing proposals received:
 - Nine proposals submitted for 2016 Board of Fisheries’ Arctic-Yukon-Kuskokwim meeting were presented to the panel.
 - Proposal 92: amend Kuskokwim River Salmon Management Plan to manage based on Bethel Test Fishery (BTF), 50% of run past test fishery when king salmon outlook is less than 150K. Greg Roczicka—this proposal is a placeholder for plan; may be unrealistic for current management; they’ll likely request withdrawal of support.
 - Proposal 93: establish inriver goal for king salmon of 95K above BTF. Dan Gillikin—this proposal

- is an attempt to pass more fish past Bethel to provide more harvest opportunity in communities upstream and increase escapement. Based on confidence interval around BTF and additional 20K fish, based on historical harvest of lower villages and midpoint of current escapement goal range. Does fall within existing sustainable escapement goal (SEG) range, so presumably sustainable. Department would manage for inriver goal based on test fishery model and catch-per-unit-effort (CPUE) indices.
- Proposal 94: establish inriver goal which includes historical median escapement (1976–2013) plus the proposed amount reasonably necessary for subsistence (ANS) for communities in the upper third of Kuskokwim River (above Bethel). Barbara Carlson - Discussed in a group with proposals 96 and 97. All three proposals may help to ensure equitable king salmon harvest upriver and downriver. All three would be applicable both in times of shortage and times of abundance, and would allow management of various stocks of king salmon in the river.
 - Proposal 95: manage Kuskokwim River king salmon fishing under Tier II. [no direct discussion, proponent not in attendance]. Tuntutuliak has been against Tier II from the beginning: right now, when the river is closed, it is closed for everybody. Under Tier II, it would be open for some and not others.
 - Proposal 96: create “nested” ANS. Ms. Carlson - Divide existing ANS into thirds: one-third below Bethel, one-third for Bethel, and one-third above Bethel. Would provide a measure for department postseason to see if management provided for the 3 ANS groupings, assuming fishing normally.
 - Proposal 97: Ms. Carlson - create permitting system for king salmon subsistence fishery. Of the three proposals, this is the focus. The proponent was not supportive of how community permits were provided under federal management because upriver communities had an allocation but very difficult access. There were also problems in communities with dividing up fish. Household permits would give department a number of fishery participants. In times of shortage, harvest would be limited through a permit system, at department discretion. Permit would require end of season reporting – would capture those households that might leave the area and are not captured by subsistence surveys, and provide other data. This proposal made more sense [than community permits] to upriver people because there was too much favoritism under the federal community permit, and some were hoarding fish. Anyone could apply for a household permit, and that makes sense.
 - Proposal 98: establish sections of Kuskokwim River for management during king salmon shortages. [Little discussion, but generally supportive.]
 - Proposal 99: limit 4-inch gillnets to one net per household. Mr. Roczicka - Protects whitefish and other species because many households purchased multiple nets to target salmon with 4-inch nets. Suggestion to use 4-inch nets before and after the salmon season. Not enough enforcement.
 - Proposal 100: establish specifications for subsistence beach seines in the Kuskokwim Area. Currently no specifications for beach seines leaving it open for fishermen to operate nets as a beach seine, which may be inappropriate.
- c. 2015 Kuskokwim River king salmon season summary:
- Sonar update: feasibility work still ongoing, site location, duration of operation (species covered), evaluation ongoing this winter.
 - Run reconstruction data look good: very preliminary escapement estimate of 137K king salmon (better than previous 5 years, exceeded drainagewide goal, almost double 2001 run), expect king subsistence harvest to fall between 15–25K but the department will not have clarity until post season survey results. This year was a weak chum run, but the sockeye salmon run was good; coho salmon run lagging but expected to meet escapement based on BTF; the runs were lower than average for all species. Some limited commercial fishing opportunity provided on coho salmon.
 - Lots of restrictions on subsistence fishery because of weak king and chum salmon runs. Commercial and sport fisheries closed/restricted on these species as well.
 - US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) Yukon-Delta Wildlife Refuge cultural harvest permit:

- 7,000 allocation plus harvest upstream of Aniak = approximately 20K in harvest, with range 17,000–25,000, including incidental harvest.
- BTF expected to continue for several years, even if sonar used, to validate sonar.
 - Pitka Fork weir counts higher, but weir has been moved to capture both forks so not comparable to previous years.
 - There was commercial fishing for king salmon in the past; prices were \$0.65 - \$4.00 per fish.
- d. Considerations from state subsistence program:
- Overview of salient points of subsistence law (harvestable surplus, reasonable opportunity, ANS), considerations for the board when reviewing proposals 92–100.
- e. Panel member ideas for additional board-generated proposals:
- Kuskokwim River Salmon Management Working Group (KRSMWG)-requested proposal for using dip net as legal subsistence gear – KRSMWG representative and group discussion:
 - Trying to align federal and state regulations with the same type of gear.
 - Traditionally used in headwaters area for king salmon.
 - Works on Yukon River because allowed for commercial fishing, plus there is a higher fish density.
 - Akiak only used for smelt, not salmon – not accepted in Kuskokwim.
 - The Association of Village Council Presidents (AVCP) is sending out 3 dip nets to each community for testing use.
 - OK as a tool to conserve king salmon.
 - Customary and traditional subsistence salmon fishing conditions during times of shortage – Orutsarmiut Native Corporation (ONC) representative and group discussion [ONC handout]:
 - This is a Tier I permit that sets conditions for participation.
 - Harvest occurred out of desire, not due to need.
 - Limited opportunity for harvest, provides opportunity for harvest by those with customary and traditional practices based on a thousand-year-old pattern, vs those in Bethel who work for the government. No change to gear types.
 - Moratorium on king salmon – group discussion:
 - Strategy used to rebuild moose population in Kuskokwim Area.
 - Household or individual harvest limits – group discussion:
 - [no direct discussion at this time in the agenda].
 - Community subsistence salmon permits – group discussion:
 - [no direct discussion at this time in the agenda].
 - Additional ideas – individuals or groups:
 - [no direct discussion at this time in the agenda].

Public testimony session on king salmon conservation and management:

- Phillip Peter – talked about this season’s king salmon closure, fished June 10 using federal community permit for 500 salmon. Limited openings with restrictive gear, 4-inch gear kills all fish, not protecting king salmon. If need to protect king salmon should close entire river. Community people (Kwethluk) want to reconsider using permit. Only got 3 fish [under community permit]. Fishes for six families, sent 4-5 gallons down to the coast.

- Nick Kameroff – Think of a three-legged stool: department, federal managers, Intertribal Fish Commission. Upriver users had hardships getting their fish this past season. Resource is for all people on the river. Permit system in 2015 worked pretty well, except for those people that had to travel to fish in federal waters. Elders’ fishery may be a viable option.
- Jeff Sanders – does not support Area M proposal (Proposal 181) to close June Area M fishery. There’s not a lot of attention paid to sockeye salmon.
- James Paul – Napaskiak Tribal Council – Choke point, traditional fishing spot for local villages – 4-inch mesh a problem. Permit system (federal) was good for communities – could also work under state system.

Tuesday, August 25

a) Public testimony session on king salmon conservation and management:

- Michael Martin – Kasigluk, Nunapitchuk, Atmautluak – federal permits this past season, villages did not like permitting process, many residents did not achieve goal for king salmon (limits set by permits not enough – village of Kasigluk had a limit of 308 king salmon, about 3 per household). Each village may have different needs and setting permit limits does not address the individual household needs. Some are heavily reliant on salmon, especially king salmon, for dry fish. Costs \$100 in gas just to get to the Kuskokwim River [traveling down via Johnson River]; traditional council provided some funds for gas. Communication is Number One to any community anywhere. Educating the area would help with concerns on low abundance and helping people understand they cannot take as much as they need. Harvest timing is important: coho salmon season is the worst for drying. They rely on the elders’ knowledge and teachings: when it is healthy you take what you can – each has its own cycle. Speaking in Yupik needs to happen in the villages. Household permits are a way for everyone to get fish – it would not be as much as they want, but more than 3 fish. People in Bethel can go whenever they want; people in tundra villages used to have fish camps nearby but not any more.
- Marvin Kiokun – limit trawler bycatch, Bristol Bay runs are good, harvesting Kuskokwim River king salmon. Until this is reduced, king salmon numbers will not increase and will continue to cause reduced runs to the Kuskokwim River.
- Nicolia Alexie – Kwethluk – They are willing to conserve but there should not be a rush to set up a permit system. They do not like regulations telling when, what, and how to fish. Came to this meeting to be part of the solution, help to provide king salmon for subsistence. In the 1870 expedition, there was abundant resources. They did not like federal designated fisher permits, not all people in village got fish from the designated fishers. Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act (ANSCA) is the problem – loss of Native rights, and Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act (ANILCA) and state’s noncompliance with rural priority. What would be least offensive would be providing king salmon to those that need it year-round, also for culture and their way of life: they hunt, fish and gather year-round and it keeps them active and healthy. Timing is everything: when fish are there, they fish for them. Managers should go to villages on a monthly basis and get feedback: most people cannot afford to travel to Anchorage or Bethel. Not everyone has a boat or a snowmachine, so if there are household permits, some people would be left out. Concerns that if there is a permit system, it would be in place forever. Guides should have permits, and there are environmental factors, such as mining in the headwaters. Proxy fishing does not cover all situations, such as a broken boat or no nets.
- Charlton Epchook – Kwethluk – Kwethluk River a subsistence use river, state has not recognized this use, sport fishermen and guides still using river and disrespecting the fish resource. Subsistence users should not be burdened with subsistence permits. Coho salmon are not being fully utilized, backbones and heads left on the river banks.

- b) Panel member thoughts regarding Monday's discussions:
- Permit options:
 - Cultural harvest permit, or community permit, or household harvest permit:
 - under state law when allocating a subsistence resource if the harvestable surplus is lower than the low end of the ANS, it is a Tier II situation.
 - Board could set permits that have specific limits
 - Community harvest permit concept – Concept document provided to panel that blended community cultural harvest permit [ONC handout] with individual household permits (Proposal 97).
 - Community permit – provide for traditional king salmon pattern of use, including sharing, smokehouse, drying aspects.
 - Individual household permit (Proposal 97) – pattern of use tied to individual household use: freezing, canning, more contemporary uses.
 - Additional potential instructions to fishermen included on concept document.
 - See “Kuskokwim king salmon permit draft” document.
 - General discussion of state elder fishery. Concerns about elders having to stay with the net while it is fishing. Panel questioned if the elder fishery should stay on the books, if the community cultural permit is adopted, since the communities should be looking out for the elders, and others in need.
 - Concepts for a board-generated proposal regarding the use of 4-inch nets were discussed.
 - Panel not supportive of permits for use of 4-inch nets.
 - Many of the traditional whitefish/nonsalmon fishing sites are in intertidal areas.
 - Considerable differences in upriver vs downriver use and timing.
 - Panel did not recommend a board-generated proposal for 4-inch nets.
- c) Panel member recommendations and action items:
1. Send forward to the board's October 2015 work session, for consideration as a board-generated proposal, the concept document blending community cultural permits and household permits. Included in the concept document are additional concerns and recommendations on administration of the permits.
 2. Send forward to the board October 2015 draft board finding concepts supporting two patterns of use of Kuskokwim River king salmon.
 3. The panel made the following recommendations to the board on the current Kuskokwim River proposals:
 - a. Proposals 93/94 (inriver goals) – [no comments or recommendation].
 - b. Proposal 95 (Tier II) – consensus to oppose.
 - c. Proposal 96 (nested ANS) – No recommendation. Without good inseason assessment difficult to manage. An ANS is not an inseason tool; rather it is a postseason tool to assess the season's management. The headwaters are more important than previously thought, and this potential production needs to be addressed in the management plan. Proposals 94, 96, and 97 were created to give department direction on where the fish should go. Metrics are just a measurement tool, but if the department does not have ability and confidence that the actions will achieve the goals, they are all for naught. The department has the same obligation to provide opportunity to all subsistence users regardless of their geographic location in river. Need to find the balance between providing for upriver and lower river. Subsistence harvest timing is weighted toward early portion of run.
 - d. Proposal 97 (permits) - [see recommendation and action items above].
 - e. Proposal 98 (establish management river sections) – There was a lively discussion but no recommendation. One border aligns with upper USFWS refuge border.

Consistency with federal actions. Lower boundary requires GPS coordinates and equipment to locate location. State regulations are different than lower refuge boundary to provide visual references to that boundary. Move Section 5 boundary to above the mouth of the Holitna River, separates upriver stocks from Holitna River stocks. Boundaries in proposal are based on recent rolling closures – codifies what has been used. Concerns expressed about locations of boundaries resulting in splitting of villages and management of upper river stocks.

- f. Proposal 99 (one 4-inch mesh net per household) – Consensus to support, with one in opposition.
 - g. Proposal 100 (beach seine definition) – Consensus to support.
 - h. Proposals 101–105: no discussion [101 specific to the commercial fishery, 102–105 specific to Kuskokwim Bay fisheries].
- d) People to be heard
- Mary Awinowak (?) We are all human beings. Education is important, and people of all ages should be involved. Grants can be written.
- e) Concluding remarks: The Board of Fisheries is hugely appreciative of the work, time, passion of the panel members and the Kuskokwim people.