

BOARD OF FISHERIES
ARCTIC / YUKON / KUSKOKWIM FINFISH
JANUARY 12–16, 2016

PROPOSAL 92 – 5 AAC 07.365. Kuskokwim River Salmon Management Plan. Modify the Kuskokwim River Salmon Management Plan to manage the king salmon subsistence fishery based on the Bethel Test Fishery, as follows:

5 AAC 07.365(c)(2) is amended to add a new subparagraph (C) as follows:

(C) notwithstanding (A) and (B) of this section, when the preseason outlook is below 150,000 king salmon and taking into account recent run performance, the department shall manage the king salmon subsistence fishery conservatively and not open any subsistence salmon fishing periods until the approximate first 50% of the current king run has been determined to have passed the Bethel Test Fishery;

What is the issue you would like the board to address and why? Since 2010, the Kuskokwim River has experienced a decline in king salmon returns, with 2013 having the lowest total run and escapement on record, and 2014 seeing the implementation of unprecedented subsistence fishing restrictions for Kuskokwim Chinook salmon. In times of low run abundance, it becomes more difficult to ensure that adequate numbers of fish reach their spawning grounds and to provide enough fish for equitable distribution to subsistence users throughout the drainage. This proposal would close the subsistence salmon fishery until it has been determined that approximately 50% of the king salmon run has passed the Bethel Test Fishery.

PROPOSED BY: Orutsararmiut Native Council

(HQ-F15-108)

PROPOSAL 93 – 5 AAC 07.365. Kuskokwim River Salmon Management Plan. Modify the Kuskokwim River Salmon Management Plan to establish an inriver run goal of king salmon above the Bethel Test Fishery, as follows:

The BOF should establishment an In-River goal for Chinook salmon on the Kuskokwim River. The lower end of which is based on the established SEG, adjusted for uncertainty (85,000) and the addition of 10,000 fish for a total In-River goal of 95,000 Chinook above the BTF site.

5 AAC07.365. Kuskokwim River Salmon Management Plan is amended to:

(c) In the king salmon fishery,

Replace all occurrences in this section of the Kuskokwim River Salmon Management Plan of: "drainage wide escapement goal", with "the established In-River Goal".

What is the issue you would like the board to address and why? Currently fisheries managers lack codified in-season management objectives to provide for reasonable opportunity

for the harvest of Chinook salmon in the middle/upper regions on the Kuskokwim River. Reasonable opportunity for subsistence harvest of Chinook salmon has not been provided for over a decade in these communities when taking into account that considerable more effort and expense has been required to meet basic subsistence needs. This has been especially evident over the last five years when ANS drainage-wide has not been met. Post season harvest data (1990 to 2011) shows that Bethel is harvesting a significantly greater proportion of Chinook than in the past, approximately a 5% per decade rate increase. Although the number of Chinook harvested per household (HH) in Bethel has remained relatively constant, the number of HH's has been rapidly increasing (about 50 HH's/per year), or roughly the equivalent of adding one new Village the size of Upper Kalskag to the Kuskokwim each year. Over this same period most villages in the middle and upper river harvest and number of HH's has remained constant or declined. What is not captured by the harvest statistics however is how much harder the villages in the middle and upper Kuskokwim have had to work, and resources they have expended just to remain constant, or slow the decline of harvest. The primary cause of this inequality is fundamentally due to lower densities of Chinook above Bethel, as a result of; low abundance, increased population growth of Bethel, no segregation of ANS by sub regions (i.e. lower, mid and upper-river), and more recently the adoption of the basin-wide SEG which allows for unrestricted subsistence harvest in the lower river even when abundance is well below historic means.

An appropriate in-season management goal that could increase the relative density of Chinook above Bethel is needed. The "tool" at the BOF's disposal to accomplish this is establishing an In-River Goal for Chinook salmon above the Bethel Test Fish (BTF) site. The current basin-wide SEG is 65,000 -120,000 Chinook, which correlates well with the BTF indices, however to account for uncertainty a management objective of 85,000 Chinook is typically used to ensure that the minimum escapement is met. The 25 year average of subsistence harvest has been approximately 81,000 Chinook for the entire drainage. Taking into account the increase in the proportional harvest at Bethel (5% per decade), over a 25 year period approximately 12.5% of the total harvest has been "reallocated" to Bethel, or the equivalent of about 10,000 Chinook. Total Chinook harvested by the middle and upper Kuskokwim Villages between 1990 and 2011 has declined by approximately 6,000 Chinook.

Through establishment of an in-river goal using the management objectives of 85,000 plus an additional 10,000 fish as the lower bounds of a goal, as measured by the BTF, managers would be more likely to meet minimum escapement, and increase the density of fish in the middle and upper river resulting in more equitable, reasonable opportunity for those communities.

As an alternative solution, and because the ANS for Chinook salmon on the Kuskokwim has not been met drainage-wide over the last five years, under AS 16.05.258. (b)(4)(B), "if the harvestable portion of the stock or population is not sufficient to provide a reasonable opportunity for subsistence uses, the appropriate board shall. . . , distinguish among subsistence users..." i.e., establish a Tier II permitting system. The Board acknowledged this issue last October with its acceptance of ACR #8, and the establishment of the Kuskokwim Subsistence Salmon Panel to explore the issue further along with possible solutions. Three BOF proposals were adopted by the BOF addressing gear type changes; regrettably they fall far short of

addressing the core issues raised in ACR#8, and in this proposal. If the issue of inequitable harvest opportunity is not resolved by the BOF state statute clearly directs the BOF to instate a Tier II system for the subsistence harvest of Chinook salmon on the Kuskokwim River.

PROPOSED BY: Kuskokwim Native Association

(HQ-F15-089)

PROPOSAL 94 – 5 AAC 07.365. Kuskokwim River Salmon Management Plan. Establish an inriver run goal for the Kuskokwim River Salmon Management Plan, as follows:

5 AAC 07.365. Kuskokwim River Salmon Management Plan is amended to read:

(c) In the king salmon fishery,

(?) establish an Inriver Run Goal of 120,000 to 218,000 Chinook salmon, which is the historical median escapement +/- 30% plus the proposed nested ANS for communities upstream of Bethel.

(A) This inriver Run Goal would result in a level of escapement that ranges from the upper end of the current escapement goal, to well above the current goal.

(B) This inriver Run Goal provides a level of subsistence harvest opportunity upstream of Bethel consistent with historical opportunity. The level of annual escapement that would result also would provide decades of sustainable subsistence and commercial fisheries in the Kuskokwim River.

(1) when the projected escapement of king salmon is below the drainage-wide escapement goal range, the commissioner shall, by emergency order, close the commercial, sport, and subsistence king salmon fisheries,

What is the issue you would like the board to address and why? The Stony-Holitna Advisory Committee has submitted three separate proposals to use as tools in addressing this issue. The three proposals (see Proposals 96 and 97) would be most effective considered as a group in sequential order with this being the second proposal. However, each proposal could stand alone.

Reasonable opportunity for subsistence harvest of Chinook salmon has not been provided for many years in the middle/upriver communities on the Kuskokwim River. This has been especially evident over the last five years when there has been a limited harvestable surplus. The communities from Bethel and the surrounding area have harvested a disproportionate share of the Chinook. Currently there are no limits or reporting requirements for Chinook on the Kuskokwim. The increase in harvest at the lower end of the Kuskokwim results in not allowing enough Chinook to continue upriver to make escapement and provide a reasonable opportunity for those communities upriver of Bethel to meet their needs. The effect gets progressively more pronounced the further upriver a community is located.

Establish an inriver goal at a specific point, the Bethel Test Fishery, to guide managers in allowing enough Chinook upriver to provide reasonable opportunity for the middle/upriver

communities. This inriver goal could be set as the historical (1976-2013) median Chinook salmon escapement plus the nested ANS for the communities upriver of Bethel.

PROPOSED BY: Stony-Holitna Fish and Game Advisory Committee (HQ-F15-042)
