



OPPOSITION TO ARTIFICIAL SALMON ENHANCEMENT AND HATCHERIES IN THE YUKON RIVER WATERSHED

- WHEREAS,** Tanana Chiefs Conference (TCC) is an Alaska Native tribal health and social services consortium established by the Interior Alaska tribes and tribal communities, to provide a unified voice in advancing sovereign tribal governments through the promotion of physical and mental wellness, education, socioeconomic development and culture of the Interior Alaska Native; and
- WHEREAS,** We have sustained the role as the stewards of the land and waters for at least 11,000 years with the responsibility to protect wildlife and fish within our scope of sovereign authority of our tribal governments; and
- WHEREAS,** Grounded in our Indigenous/Traditional knowledge and science, tribal members have sustainably hunted, fished, and gathered necessary foods and other natural products from the lands and waters since time immemorial; and
- WHEREAS,** Like our tribal members, the ecology and genetics of wild salmon of the Yukon River are shaped by unique, and nonreproducible or replaceable, features of their lands and waters; and
- WHEREAS,** The Indigenous people, tribal members, and rural residents that live along the Yukon River and tributaries depend on salmon to provide for cultural, spiritual, economic, and nutritional well-being; and
- WHEREAS,** The Yukon River Watershed is immense, flowing over 1,980 miles and draining an area of approximately 321,500 miles. The salmon-producing streams that contribute to the total Yukon River salmon run have not been comprehensively documented due to the large size of the watershed. As of 2017, 183 Yukon River basin spawning areas have been documented, including 79 in the United States and 104 in Canada; and
- WHEREAS,** The Yukon River Chinook salmon experienced a large commercial fishery in 1989-1998 and 2003-2007. Since 2007, Chinook salmon productivity has declined. The recent Chinook salmon subsistence harvest in 2018-2022 averaged 26,201 fish, a substantial decline from previous decades. Since 2008, only summer chum-directed fisheries have operated. The decline of salmon harvesting along the Yukon River watershed has created tremendous hardship for families that depend on Salmon for well-being; and

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- WHEREAS,** The 2022 Chinook Salmon drainage wide outlook was for a run size of 99,000 to 150,000 fish, with the Canadian component forecast to be approximately 41,000 to 62,000 fish. The Chinook Salmon drainage wide run was much lower than the preseason outlook and the worst on record, with approximately 45,000 Chinook Salmon passing Pilot Station Sonar. Of those passing the Sonar, approximately 20,000 were Canadian-origin and were expected at the Eagle Sonar. Only 12,000 Canadian-origin Chinook Salmon passed at the Eagle Sonar, well below the interim Management Escapement goal of 42,500 to 55,000. For the fourth season in a row, nearly half as many Canadian-origin Chinook Salmon as expected arrived at the Eagle Sonar; and
- WHEREAS,** Management of the Yukon River salmon fishery is complex due to overlapping multispecies salmon runs, allocation issues, overlapping state and federal jurisdiction boundaries, and an international treaty with Canada. Salmon fisheries within the Yukon River drainage may harvest stocks that are up to several weeks and over a thousand miles from their spawning grounds. Management on the Yukon River is separated seasonally, with Summer Season management focused on co-migrating Chinook and summer chum salmon, and Fall Season management focused on co-migrating fall chum and coho salmon. Because these are mixed stock/species fisheries, some tributary populations may be over-exploited in relation to their actual abundance. Based on current knowledge, it is not possible to manage for individual stocks in most areas where fishing occurs, though considerable efforts are made to use species-selective gear and adjust time and area to reduce impacts to specific species/stock groups when necessary and possible; and
- WHEREAS,** Given the decline of salmon, specifically on the Yukon River, fisher-people, communities, and tribal members have expressed an interest in learning about salmon enhancement, including the potential benefits of hatcheries; and
- WHEREAS,** Despite anecdotal stories and media coverage to the contrary, the use of artificial salmon enhancement, including hatcheries, has a long history of failing to recover or supplement struggling wild salmon stocks, and the science of salmon enhancement is exhaustive; and
- WHEREAS,** In the Columbia River Basin alone, officials have spent billions of dollars on nearly 200 hatchery projects during the past 50 years to improve wild numbers, but research shows those programs are having an opposite effect; and



- WHEREAS,** The weight of evidence from exhaustive scientific research indicates that artificially enhanced salmon detrimentally impact the productivity and survival of wild salmon by mechanisms such as but not limited to, erosion of locally adapted gene complexes, ecological interactions such as competition for food or space for rearing juveniles or spawning adults, and increased risk of disease spread; and
- WHEREAS,** Approximately 40% of the over 5,000,000,000 hatchery-produced juvenile Pacific salmon released annually into the North Pacific Ocean currently come from Alaska hatchery programs; and
- WHEREAS,** The mitigation hatchery in Whitehorse, Alaska does not result in returning salmon and instead wastes resources that could be used to enhance habitat and research salmon decline; and
- WHEREAS,** The management of mixed stock fisheries that include both enhanced and wild components that co-migrate is extremely challenging and costly; and
- WHEREAS,** Artificial salmon enhancement does not address the root causes of salmon declines and ultimately is responsive to only the symptom of the fundamental problems; and
- WHEREAS,** Hatcheries as a potential solution to salmon decline could be used to distract from activities that harm salmon, including ocean bycatch and bottom trawling; and
- WHEREAS,** The federal government of the United States and the State of Alaska have a shared responsibility to sustainably manage the wild salmon stocks in the Yukon River and should acknowledge the science that demonstrates enhancements are dangerous to wild stocks; and
- WHEREAS,** The known risks of artificial salmon enhancement far outweigh any reasonable potential benefit; and
- WHEREAS,** The Yukon River Intertribal Fish Commission, founded on tribal unity of the Yukon River Tribes and First Nations, for the health and well-being of Tribal members, future generations, and all Alaskans and Canadians who rely upon the health of the Yukon River fisheries, is opposed to any artificial salmon enhancement, including hatcheries, being considered for installation on any rivers and waterways within our region.

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NOW THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the Tanana Chiefs Conference Full Board of Directors fully supports the restoration of the Yukon River salmon species through scientific and Indigenous knowledge-backed methods, including the reduction of ocean bycatch and trawling, harvest conservation with appropriate cultural allocations, and habitat restoration; and

BE IT FINALLY RESOLVED the Tanana Chiefs Conference Full Board of Directors has considered the various factors and opposes hatcheries and all artificial salmon enhancement and fisheries in the Yukon River Watershed and directs staff to use appropriate resources to advocate the opposition.

CERTIFICATION

I hereby certify that this resolution was duly passed by the Tanana Chiefs Conference Full Board of Directors on March 14, 2024 at Fairbanks, Alaska and a quorum was duly established.

Secretary/Treasurer

Submitted by: Tanana Tribal Council