



DIVISION OF SUBSISTENCE
ALASKA DEPT. OF FISH AND GAME

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR

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COMMUNITIES

OSCARVILLE

NAPAKIAK

NUNAPITCHUK

PROJECT TIMEFRAME

2015 - 2017



ADF&G complies with OEO requirements as posted at <http://www.adfg.alaska.gov/index.cfm?adfg=home.oeostatement>

Lower Kuskokwim River Inseason Estimation of Chinook Salmon Subsistence Harvest

The purpose of this three-season project is to learn more about the effects of poor king salmon returns on subsistence fishing practices of households in the lower Kuskokwim River region.

Background

The Kuskokwim River is the second largest river in Alaska. Each year, mature Chinook salmon return to the river and its tributaries to spawn, supporting an annual average subsistence harvest of 83,000 fish and a small commercial fishery of about 2,800 fish in the ten years prior to 2010. The subsistence Chinook salmon fishery in the Kuskokwim River is the largest in the state, and it is a fundamental part of local culture. The commercial Chinook salmon fishery, though modest in value compared to other areas of Alaska, has been an important component of the market economy of lower Kuskokwim River communities. Accurate estimates of total annual Chinook salmon returns are essential in managing the fishery for both escapement goals and subsistence needs, but such estimates are difficult to assess inseason in large and remote systems such as the Kuskokwim River. Data collection methods that estimate harvests in-season would supplement other data sources, resulting in increased accuracy and timeliness of total run abundance assessments. These would also support an inseason evaluation of the department's ability to provide for annual amounts of Chinook salmon reasonably necessary for subsistence in the Kuskokwim Area.

Project Overview

We know that in recent years low numbers of king salmon have affected Kuskokwim area households' abilities to get the salmon that they need. However, we still need to learn more about what those effects might be. Many people from the area have communicated that limited opportunities to fish for salmon has changed the way they fish. This has resulted in a number of concerns, including changes to the kinds of salmon that people target and changes to the dates that people are able to catch and process salmon each summer.

It is very important to talk to fishers about these concerns so that ADFG can record information about changes to fishing patterns and other ways that people are adapting to conservative salmon management strategies. It is also important to talk to fishers during the salmon fishing season so that we can learn about these concerns while they are occurring. This will allow salmon managers to have as much information as possible so that they can try to provide fishing opportunities that will help people get the salmon that they need.

This project is funded by the Alaska Sustainable Salmon Fund and the Chinook Salmon Research Initiative.



How will this information be used?

- Help fisheries managers monitor subsistence harvests throughout the fishing season
- Help researchers to accurately predict the size of king salmon runs
- Provided to the community and the general public in a summary report
- The information collected will NOT be used for enforcement

Project Methods

Several staff members from the ADFG Division of Subsistence will be traveling to the lower river communities of Oscarville, Napakiak, and Nunapitchuk. They will attempt to contact as many households as possible in each community to ask residents questions about the ways their subsistence activities have been affected by conservative salmon management this year. Division of Subsistence staff will also work with a small number of fishers to record more detailed information about their salmon fishing and harvests. These volunteers will be asked to record their fishing locations, net dimensions, number of drifts, soak times, and total harvests.

The surveys are voluntary and confidential. Any information shared will be reported in summary fashion and will focus on the region as a whole. No names or other identifying information will be reported, and none of the information will be used for enforcement.



Project Timeline

March 2015, 2016, and 2017 - Community approvals

May 2015, 2016, and 2017 - Sampling protocol training with participating fishers

Summer 2015, 2016, and 2017 - Fieldwork

2016 - 2017 - Data analysis and report writing

Fall 2017 - Project review presentations for communities

November 2017 - Final report completed and sent to communities

