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#### STUDY COMMUNITIES

FORT YUKON

STEVENS VILLAGE

MANLEY HOT SPRINGS

**PROJECT TIMEFRAME**  
2014 - 2016



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

# Exchange Practices in the Upper Yukon River

*An ethnographic project to explore historic and contemporary customary trade of salmon in communities on the upper Yukon and Tanana Rivers.*

## Background

Along the Yukon River and in much of rural Alaska, salmon and other subsistence resources are distributed locally and widely through sharing, barter, and customary trade. This distribution system provides subsistence resources to those who are unable to participate in the harvest themselves and supplies the harvesters with other resources that support a subsistence way of life. Not all subsistence users or households participate equally in the harvest of all resources, yet most households in subsistence based communities use a wide variety of subsistence resources. These distribution networks provide the means for households to access resources they do not harvest and are hallmarks of subsistence economies.

Customary trade has a long history in Alaska. Prior to contact with Europeans in the 18th century, Alaska Native societies traded to obtain subsistence resources not available locally. After Europeans arrived in Alaska, trade was international in scope, with Alaskan furs destined for the Chinese or European market, and Siberian reindeer skin, iron, tobacco, tea, and other goods headed for Alaskan villages. In the past and continuing today, trade forged both economic and social relationships through which resources were exchanged over time and space, often with a moral obligation to share one's riches or provide for others in need.

## Project Description

This project will examine the historic and contemporary customary trade of salmon in the Upper Yukon and Tanana Rivers. It will take place in three communities: Fort Yukon, Stevens Village, and Manley Hot Springs. Declining Chinook salmon abundance has required Yukon River fishers to reevaluate the ways in which they use salmon as evidenced by declining harvests, shifting strategies for maximizing harvests, and increased debate over various priority uses of salmon, such as customary trade. This research will greatly increase our understanding of the role of customary trade, both historically and today, in the customary and traditional patterns of salmon use in the upper Yukon River.

The salmon fishery on the Yukon River is extremely complex. It is one of the largest subsistence fisheries in the state, and salmon fishing is a central component of the socio-economic profile of most families and communities in the Yukon River region. This project builds on earlier research on customary trade in the region, focusing specifically on the customary trade of salmon in upper Yukon River communities. Currently, there are no studies of contemporary customary trade practices in the upper Yukon or Tanana rivers—areas that differ tremendously from the middle and lower Yukon River areas in terms of cultural histories, access to resources, and socio-economic profiles.



Fish rack by the Yukon River

## Project Objectives

1. Through ethnographic methods, describe how customary trade practices fit within the overall subsistence use of salmon in the upper Yukon area, both historically and in present times of declining salmon.
2. Using a survey on barter and exchange practices, document the scope and local nature of customary trade in three upper Yukon River communities. Describe exchange networks and transaction in terms of the species and types (e.g. processing) of fish traded. Where possible, quantify transactions.
3. Improve understanding of the role of customary trade within a continuum of exchange practices, including any potential effects on customary trade resulting from declining runs within the context of subsistence management and uses.

## Study Design

These communities were selected to provide a representative picture of customary trade in the Upper Yukon River area. Stevens Village and Fort Yukon, in the Yukon Flats, were selected to evaluate the potential differences and/or similarities in customary trade practices in a small community versus a larger, hub community. Manley Hot Springs, located on the Tanana River, is home to several dog mushers and active fishermen with ready access to Chinook salmon and fall chum salmon and a need to procure large quantities of chum salmon for dog food and Chinook salmon for human consumption.

The ethnographic research for this project includes the anthropological method of semi-structured interviews. In each study community, individuals will be identified who are active in customary trade. Generally it is well known within a community who is active or skilled in an activity such as fishing or trade and these individuals will be identified through a snowball sampling design. We will approach tribal council offices, contacts through the Yukon River Drainage Fisheries Association board, and previous interviewees to access these individuals.

Community-level characterizations of customary trade will be made through the use of a short, confidential survey on barter and trade practices by community households. The short survey will be primarily designed to document local views and *prevalence* of different types of exchange involving salmon, in addition to quantifying or estimating the actual extent of those practices on a household or community level.

## Project Timeline

**Summer 2014** - Community approval of research

**Fall 2014 and 2015** - Ethnographic research in communities for 7-10 days in each community

**2016** - Draft reports available for community review

**December 2016** - Final report published

