

Kuskokwim River Salmon Management Working Group

1 (800) 315-6338 (MEET) Code: 58756# (KUSKO)

ADF&G Bethel toll free: 1 (855) 933-2433

July 16, 2014

Meeting called to order at 1:30pm on Wednesday July 16, adjourned at 4:35pm. Total meeting time was ~3 hours. Nine voting members were present and a quorum was maintained throughout the meeting.

AGENDA ITEMS:

People to be heard

Continuing Business: Run assessment and management actions

Old Business Discussion Topics: Continued discussion on the Tier II permit request for the Kuskokwim River.

New Business Discussion Topics:

1. Discussion of support for the Kwethluk and Tuluksak weir crew.
2. Address concerns of discarding chum salmon (“chum chucking”) back into the river.

WORKING GROUP ACTION ITEMS: *these items were not called “action items” at the time of meeting; however work was assigned or volunteered.*

- Request for ADF&G to estimate the effect of normal (average unrestricted) Chinook salmon harvest on the total abundance estimate for Kuskokwim River Chinook salmon (to be provided post season). (ADF&G)
- Request for ADF&G to produce PSA’s on local radio stations discouraging the waste of chum salmon. (ADF&G)

WORKING GROUP MOTIONS:

1. Approval of the agenda as amended. *Motion passed (unanimously).*
2. Request to include the 2013 Kwethluk and 2006 Salmon River weir escapement numbers in the Working Group Informational Packet. *Motion passed (8 yeas, 0 nays)*
3. To support the ADF&G recommendation of a commercial salmon opener on Friday 18 July 2014 in the lower Kuskokwim River. *Motion failed (1 yea, 7 nays)*
4. The Working Group views the waste of chum salmon and other fishery resources as a serious issue and requests that ADF&G and USFWS act upon this illegal activity. *Motion passed (7 yeas, 0 nays)*
5. Adjournment. *Motion passed (unanimously).*

PEOPLE TO BE HEARD:

- Walter Morgan from Lower Kalskag reported that many people in the Kalskag area had not met their subsistence harvest goals for the 2014 season. He commented that people were planning to utilize coho salmon for subsistence purposes. Mr. Morgan said that the overall salmon run was not very good. He said that he did not support the commercial opener since people were still subsistence fishing.
- Nastasia Levi from Lower Kalskag said that there were a few families still fishing for chum salmon, though the numbers of fish were below average. She reported that many people had not harvested enough fish to meet their needs and were hoping to harvest coho salmon.

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CONTINUING BUSINESS:

1. Subsistence Reports:

- **Lowest River Reports:** Charlie Brown (Commercial Fisher) said that most of the subsistence fishing was over in the lowest part of the river.
James Charles (Downriver Elder) reported that in Tuntutuliak people were primarily done subsistence fishing. He said that fish racks were clean and people were busy smoking their fish. Mr. Charles reported that many people on the lower river had fished in the ocean for king salmon due to the gear restrictions in the river.
- **ONC In-season Subsistence Report:** Alissa Joseph (ONC) reported that ONC had surveyed 33 families total, 2 families were still fishing. Roberta Chavez (ONC) reported that ONC distributed a total of 285 fish from the BTF to 211 households within Bethel. USFWS had distributed BTF fish to ~16 Kuskokwim River villages. (*See the July 16 Informational Packet for full survey results.*)
- **Lower River Subsistence:** Greg Roczicka (Lower River Subsistence alternate) reported that some people were waiting for coho salmon to continue subsistence fishing. He commented that there would be an increased effort on coho salmon for subsistence purposes compared to prior years.
Mary Sattler (Lower River Subsistence alternate) reported that people from the mouth of the Kuskokwim River on up were finishing processing their catch. She commented that during one of her last setnet checks they caught a large female king salmon that had an odor; soft flesh, fungus on her head, and loose eggs.
Bev Hoffman (Co-chair/ Sport Fishing) reported that people worked hard to conserve the king salmon during the 2014 season and were planning to harvest coho salmon.
- **Middle River Subsistence:** Dave Cannon (Middle River Subsistence) reported that a few families met their subsistence needs. He said that one dog musher continued to fish for chum salmon. Many people were waiting for the coho salmon run to harvest more fish. Mr. Cannon reported that one person was using a 4-inch mesh drift net to target sockeye salmon.
Lisa Feyereisen (Middle River Subsistence alternate) reported that the normal numbers of chum salmon had not been seen near Kalskag. She suggested that management use Kalskag subsistence fishing reports as an indicator of run strength in the middle river. Ms. Feyereisen said that most people were done fishing for chum salmon and were planning to fish for coho salmon. She was concerned regarding the low chum salmon escapement numbers at the weirs.
LaMont Albertson reported that many people were planning to harvest coho salmon.
- **KNA Inseason Subsistence:** Brad Gusty (KNA) reported on the middle river inseason subsistence surveys. He commented that many people were waiting for coho salmon to meet their subsistence needs. (*The KNA inseason subsistence survey report will be included in the 23 July 2014 meeting Informational Packet.*)
- **Upriver Subsistence:** Mark Leary (Upriver Subsistence) had no fish report from Napaimute.
Barb Carlson (Upriver Subsistence alternate) reported that the chum salmon were running 1 to every 2 sockeye salmon and both species were lower than normal. She said that many people in Sleetmute were hoping to harvest more fish. She said they were no longer drying the fish due to poor weather conditions. Ms. Carlson commented that there were concerns of the reduction in chum salmon returns.
- **Headwaters Subsistence**
Dan Esai (Headwaters Subsistence) reported that the Chinook salmon run was dwindling and they were waiting for chum and coho salmon. He said that people were concentrating on whitefish.
Ray Collins (Western Interior RAC) commented that the water remained high and people were waiting for the coho salmon since the chum salmon were not suitable for human consumption.

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2. Overview of Kuskokwim River Salmon Run Assessment Projects:

- **Bethel Test Fish:** Colton Lipka (ADF&G) reported that the water temperature remained within the historical range, water clarity was below the average but within the historical range, and the water level was above average by ~2 ft. Mr. Lipka reviewed the daily CPUEs for the BTF. The BTF would run through the 24th of August. *(For more information on the BTF, please see the July 16 Informational Packet)*
 - **Radio Tagging Project:** Kevin Schaberg (ADF&G) reported on the lower river tagging project, which ended on July 10th, and had tagged ~90 Chinook salmon. Zach Liller (ADF&G) reported on the Kalskag tagging project. The project was nearing its completion and was fishing exclusively with drift nets as of July 12th. *(For more information on the tagging projects please see the July 16 Informational Packet).*
 - **Weirs:** Brittany Blain (ADF&G) reported on USFWS and ADF&G weir projects, per request of USFWS. All weir projects were reporting numbers for Chinook, chum and sockeye salmon. Ms. Blain explained that in 2012 the Kwethluk and Kogrukluks weirs experienced operational difficulties and did not have complete escapement numbers. USFWS and ADF&G were not in agreement regarding projections on whether or not escapement would be met for Chinook salmon in the 2014 season. *(For more information on weirs, please see the July 16 Informational Packet)*
3. **Commercial Catch Report:** Aaron Poetter (ADF&G) reported that there were 142 permits during the commercial salmon opening on July 14th in District W-1B. Harvested catch was 23 king (not sold), 1,030 sockeye, and 7,200 chum salmon.
 4. **Processor Report:** Henry Mitchell (CVS) reported they would be ready for the next potential opener by ADF&G. CVS was paying \$1.25 for sockeye and \$0.60 for chum salmon per pound. Mr. Mitchell reported CVS would buy coho salmon during the next opener. He commented that the commercial salmon fishery in the Kuskokwim River was subsidized by the Bering Sea Pollock fishery. He clarified that the fishery was designed solely for the benefit of fishermen and that CVRF had lost ~ \$4 million dollars per year on the commercial Kuskokwim River salmon fishery, in the interest of providing opportunity to local villages. Mr. Mitchell commented that there had been a decrease of capelin in the ocean which was a food source for salmon, suggesting one possible reason for declines in salmon numbers in recent years.
 5. **Intercept Fishery Report:** Henry Mitchell (CVS) reported that the chum and Chinook salmon by-catch had been minimal over the past 2 weeks during the B-season Pollock fishery. He said that squid by-catch in the Pollock fishery was getting close to the amount allowable.
 6. **Weather Report:** Colton Lipka (ADF&G) reported that the weather forecast called for overcast skies, rain, and SW winds for the lower, middle and upper river.
 7. **Recommendations:** Aaron Poetter (ADF&G) reported that ADF&G recommended a commercial salmon opening on Friday 18 July 2014 in the lower Kuskokwim River. He said there was a harvestable surplus of chum salmon available.
 8. **Motion for Discussion and Action:** The Working Group voted against a motion in favor of the ADF&G recommendation. *(See Working Group Motions on the following page for discussion.)*

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OLD BUSINESS:

- **Continued discussion on the Tier II permit request for the Kuskokwim River:** Grant Fairbanks (Bethel) discussed his letter to the BOF regarding a Tier II permit system on the Kuskokwim River. Working Group members expressed the need for on-going discussion regarding management strategies to address Kuskokwim River fisheries. Barb Carlson suggested holding a special meeting in the fall to further discuss the topic of a Tier II permit.

NEW BUSINESS:

1. **Discussion of support for the Kwethluk and Tuluksak weir crew:** Steve Miller (USFWS) reported no new concerns.
2. **Address concerns of discarding chum salmon “chum chucking” back into the river.** Aaron Poetter (ADF&G) said that there had been reports regarding the waste of chum salmon, that state law enforcement were investigating the matter, and that ADF&G takes the matter very seriously. (*See Working Group Motion 4 below*)

WORKING GROUP MOTIONS:

Motion 1: To approve the agenda as amended. *Motion passed (unanimous)*

Motion 2: Request to include the 2013 Kwethluk and 2006 Salmon River weir escapement numbers in the Working Group Informational Packets. *Motion Passed (8 yeas, 0 nays)*

Working Group members noted the omission of the 2013 Kwethluk weir and the 2006 Salmon River weir escapement data from the Informational Packet. ADF&G noted that it followed a policy of disregarding annual project counts when it considered the data inaccurate or incomplete, and pointed out that these data had been excluded for this reason. Kevin Schaberg (ADF&G) elaborated that there was a discrepancy between the 2013 Kwethluk weir count and multiple aerial surveys conducted in the same year. Citing this lack of confidence, ADF&G opted to disregard that year for Kwethluk when assessing the health of the current year's run. Similarly, the Salmon River escapement information from 2006 is known to be incomplete and would vastly underestimate the count for that year, rendering it an illogical choice for comparison. Working Group members requested that those numbers be included in the following packets along with an asterisk clarifying the uncertainty.

Motion 3: To support the ADF&G recommendation of a commercial salmon opener on Friday 18 July 2014 in the lower Kuskokwim River. *Motion Failed (1 yea, 7 nays)*

Many of the Working Group members were concerned that the 2014 escapement monitoring projects were showing lower than average salmon returns for that point in the season. They felt that a commercial opener would further deplete these numbers, and undermine the spirit of cooperative conservation that had been prevalent for much of the season. In addition, middle river subsistence users reported not having met their subsistence goals and would be harvesting coho salmon to meet their needs. Lisa Feyereisen commented on the importance of food security.

Working Group members were concerned that a commercial opener would decrease the amount of harvestable salmon for subsistence purposes and affect the overall bio-diversity of the ecosystem. Brian McCaffrey with USFWS was concerned with not meeting a biological escapement threshold, considering the need for marine nutrients as well as the need for minimum spawning populations. Aaron Poetter (ADF&G) reported that the BTF numbers showed a harvestable surplus for a commercial harvest.

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Motion 4: The Working Group views the waste of chum salmon and other fishery resources as a serious issue and requests that ADF&G and USFWS act upon this as an illegal activity. *Motion Passed (7 yeas, 0 nays).*

Working Group members were concerned regarding reports of people discarding unwanted chum salmon that had been caught while subsistence fishing. They supported efforts by management to address this issue and wanted to encourage people to utilize and respect all fishery resources.

Motion 5: Adjournment. *Motion passed (unanimous).*

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COMMENTS FROM THE WORKING GROUP

Mary Sattler said she was concerned regarding the increased chum salmon harvest on escapement. Ms. Sattler commented on her appreciation for ADF&G and said that the 2014 fishing season had been unique.

Lisa Feyereisen suggested that managers consider the correlation between the BTF and Kalskag fishwheel numbers. She said that the subsistence openers had affected the chum salmon numbers in the middle river and that other tools, in addition to the BTF, should be used when making management decisions. Ms. Feyereisen said she respected all the people who dealt with the critical issues happening on the river. She said there was a need to continue exploring ideas for managing the fisheries resource.

Mark Leary said that many people would be relying on coho salmon this season and requested that ADF&G takes that into consideration when making management decisions.

James Charles suggested that the coho salmon run may be slow or below average this 2014 season based on the BTF and the July 14th commercial opener numbers. Mr. Charles thanked Bev Hoffman for her participation on radio shows explaining the Working Group process and member commitments to the Kuskokwim River salmon fishery.

Charlie Brown said that when he conducted test fishing near the mouth of the river he would start picking the coho salmon around July 20th.

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WORKING GROUP ATTENDANCE:

MEMBER SEAT:	NAME:
DOWNRIVER ELDER	James Charles
UPRIVER ELDER	<i>Vacant</i>
LOWER RIVER SUBSISTENCE	Greg Roczicka
MIDDLE RIVER SUBSISTENCE	Dave Cannon
UPRIVER SUBSISTENCE	Mark Leary
HEADWATERS SUBSISTENCE	Dan Esai
MEMBER AT LARGE	<i>Absent</i>
WESTERN INTERIOR RAC	Ray Collins
YK DELTA RAC	<i>Absent</i>
COMMERCIAL FISHING	Charlie Brown
SPORT FISHING	LaMont Albertson
PROCESSOR	Henry Mitchell
ADF&G	Aaron Poetter
CHAIR	Bev Hoffman

Other Participants:

ADF&G Comm. Fish: Aaron Poetter, Aaron Tiernan, Brittany Blain, Zach Liller, Chris Shelden, Kevin Schaberg, Colton Lipka, John Linderman, Josh Clark, Jan Conitz, Jen Peeks

Sport Fishing: Tom Taube

Subsistence Division: Dave Runfola, Andrew Brenner, Hiroko Ikuta

USFWS: Brian McCaffrey, Steve Miller, Lew Coggins, Neil Lalonde, Steph Meggers

OSM: Don Rivard

Dan Gillikin (KNA)
Brad Gusty (KNA)
Roberta Chavez (ONC)
Alissa Joseph (ONC)
Kate Schaberg (NVGT)
Bill Bechtol (AVCP)
Grant Fairbanks (Bethel)

Mary Sattler (Lower River Subsistence alternate)
Lisa Feyereisen (Middle River Subsistence alternate)
Barb Carlson (Upper River Subsistence alternate)
Greg Hoffman Jr. (Commercial Fishing alternate)
Ben Matheson (KYUK Radio)
Walter Morgan (Lower Kalskag)
Nastasia Levi (Lower Kalskag)

GLOSSARY OF ABBREVIATIONS:

Alaska Department of Fish and Game (**ADF&G**), Orutsararmiut Native Council (**ONC**), Kuskokwim Native Association (**KNA**), Association of Village Council Presidents (**AVCP**), Georgetown Traditional Council (**GTC**), U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (**USFWS**), Bethel Test Fishery project (**BTF**), Catch Per Unit Effort (**CPUE**), Coastal Village Seafoods (**CVS**), ADF&G Commercial Fisheries Division (**CF**), ADF&G Sport Fisheries Division (**SF**), Regional Advisory Council (**RAC**), Kuskokwim River Salmon Management Working Group (**KRSMWG**, **Working Group**, or **WG**), Sustainable Escapement Goal (**SEG**), Biological Escapement Goal (**BEG**), Management Objective (**MO**), Amounts Reasonably Necessary for Subsistence (**ANS**), Emergency Order (**EO**), Bering Sea Fishermen's Association (**BSFA**)

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