



## **Advisory Announcement**

***Released: August 31, 2021***

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### **2021 Yukon River Salmon Fall Fishery Announcement # 18**

#### **Fall Update # 6, Yukon Area Salmon Fishery**

Districts Affected: Yukon Area

The Yukon River fall chum and coho salmon runs are projecting to be the lowest on record (1974–2020), see Figures 1 and 2. The fall chum salmon run is projected to be 93,000 fish compared to a historical run size of 868,000 fish based on median timing. The coho salmon run size is projected to be 32,000-36,000 fish, based on median and late timing, compared to a historical average run index of 240,000 fish. Both the fall chum and coho salmon runs are past the third-quarter point at the mainstem Yukon River sonar project operated near Pilot Station. According to the Fall Chum Salmon Management Plan, the inseason projection does not meet the threshold of 300,000 fish needed to allow subsistence, personal use or commercial fishing. A run of this size is unlikely to meet the drainagewide escapement goal of 300,000-600,000 fall chum salmon, tributary escapement goals and Canadian treaty objectives.

Fall chum salmon typically take 39 days to migrate from the mouth of the Yukon River to the U.S./Canada border, using an estimated travel rate of 35 miles per day. The first group of fall season chum salmon entered the river on July 16 and is expected to be approaching the U.S./Canada border currently. The second group of fish are expected to approach the U.S./Canada border around September 6. The third group of fish are expected to approach Fort Yukon around September 5 and the U.S./Canada border around September 15. A fourth group entered the river August 22 and are expected to be approaching Galena on September 5, Tanana/Huslia on September 6, Nenana around September 17, Fort Yukon by September 20, and the U.S./Canada border around September 30. Monitored lower Yukon River and tributary water levels and water temperature are near average which should not adversely affect the migration of fall chum and coho salmon. The upper Yukon mainstem river systems in Canada are currently running extremely high for this time of year and may delay migration in Canada.

Coho salmon typically enter the Yukon River in mid-August with the bulk of the run occurring between August 13 and 25 in the Lower Yukon Test Fishery (LYTF). Coho salmon have been weak and since more than half of the fish have entered the river after August 23, the run is exhibiting late run timing (Figure 2). Coho salmon are smaller fish than fall chum salmon and typically travel about 30 miles per day.

#### **Fall Assessment Projects**

All projects that handle fish (LYTF; Mt. Village Drift Test Fishery; Pilot Station and Eagle sonars) are making efforts to reduce salmon mortality and distribute test fish catches to community members. Any salmon healthy enough will be released alive from the test nets. Injured salmon and mortalities will be distributed to community members by Tribal councils or on a first come first-served basis from a public dock.

Lower Yukon Test Fishery / ADF&G, Yukon Delta Fisheries Development Association

Fall season operations began on July 16 using 6-inch mesh drift gillnets to target fall chum and coho salmon. As of August 29, the fall chum salmon cumulative catch per unit effort (CPUE) was 113.91 which is below the average of 1,506.76 for this date. The coho salmon cumulative CPUE was 10.14 which is below the average of 352.12 for this date. Both fall chum and coho salmon are past the third-quarter point in their respective runs at this project based on median timing.

Mountain Village Drift Test Fishery / Asacarsarmiut Tribal Council

Fall season operations began on July 18, and as of August 29, the fall chum salmon cumulative CPUE was 399.29 which is below the average of 1,847.65 for that date. The coho salmon cumulative CPUE was 72.00 which is below the average of 772.61 for this date. Both fall chum and coho salmon are past the third-quarter point in their respective runs at this project based on median timing.

Sonar Project near Pilot Station / ADF&G

The sonar project operated near Pilot Station transitioned to fall season counts on July 19. As of August 29, the cumulative passage estimate is 128,463 chum salmon. This is well below the median cumulative passage of 694,591 chum salmon for this date. The estimated fall chum salmon component of this count is approximately 82,000 fish after the application of genetic stock proportions. On average, the run is past the third-quarter point by this time of year. The cumulative passage estimate of coho salmon is 22,995 fish as of August 29, which compares to the median cumulative passage of 120,963 coho salmon for this date. The third-quarter point for coho salmon is typically on August 30 at this project based on late run timing.

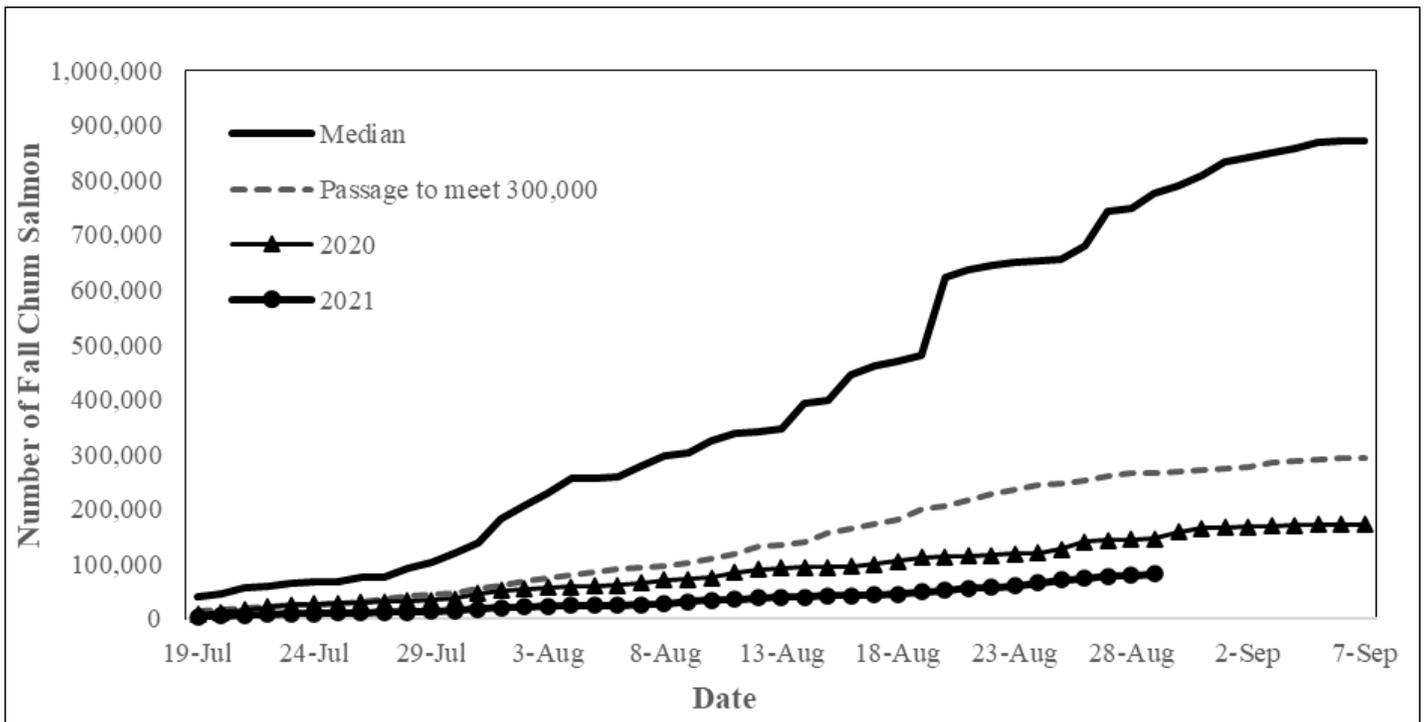


Figure 1. Cumulative passage of fall chum salmon at the mainstem Yukon River sonar project (Pilot Station) compared to median and 2020–2021. The dashed line is the passage required to meet the minimum management requirement of 300,000 fish to allow subsistence fishing.

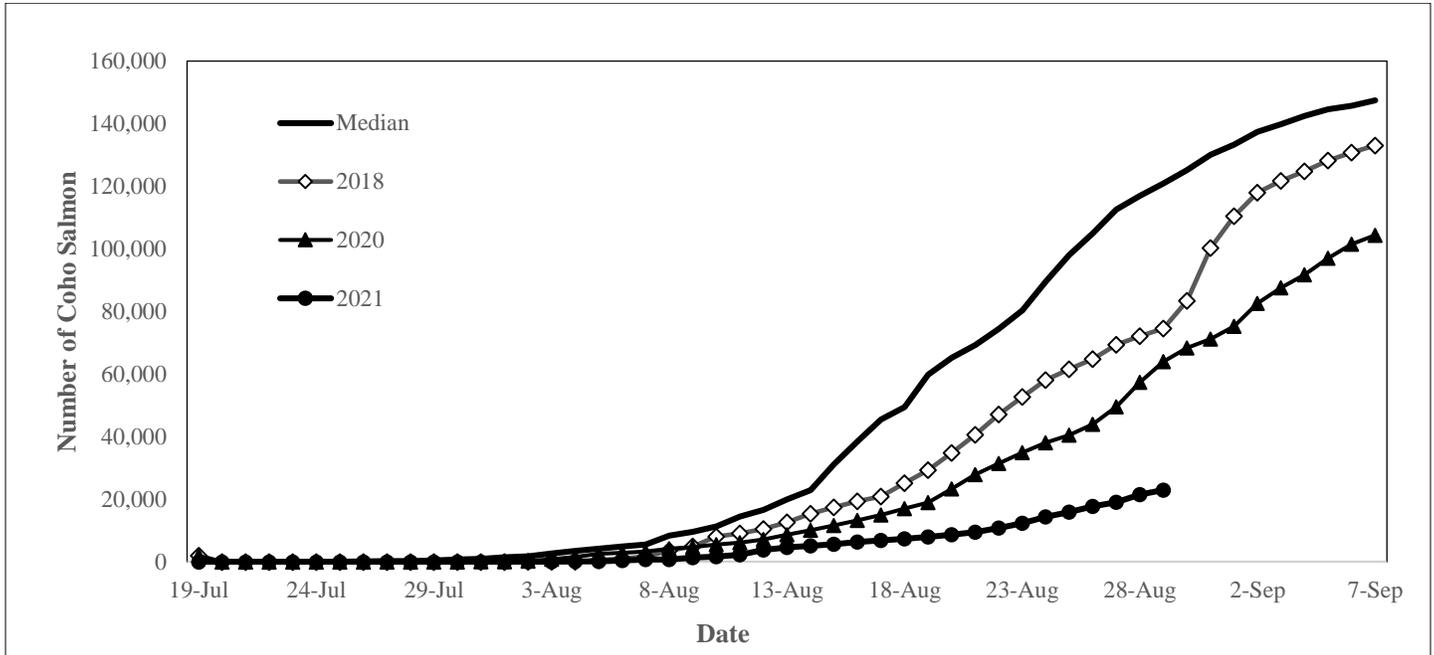


Figure 2. Cumulative passage of coho salmon at the mainstem Yukon River sonar project (Pilot Station) compared to median, 2018, and 2020–2021.

#### Teedriinjik (Chandalar River) sonar / United States Fish and Wildlife Service

The sonar project began counting fall chum salmon on August 22. As of August 29, the cumulative passage estimate is 1,412 fish which is well below the historical median of 30,407 fish for this date. This estimate includes a preseason expansion from the normal start date of August 8 through August 21. This expansion plus the sonar passage estimates is used to compare the historical cumulative for the same date.

#### Porcupine River Sonar / Yukon Territory Canada / Department of Fisheries and Oceans

This project transitioned to counting fall chum salmon last week. The cumulative passage of fall chum salmon from August 15-28 is 146 fish, which is below the average passage of 3,865 for this date. The first quarter-point is typically September 4 at this project.

#### **Age, Sex, and Length Composition**

The preliminary chum salmon age composition of the fish sampled (n=116) from the LYTF 6-inch drift gillnets through August 23 is 87% age-4 and 11% age-5, compared to the 1983–2020 average of 66% age-4 and 32% age-5. Females represent 51% of the fish sampled (n=124), which is below the average of 58%, through August 28. The average length is 562 mm from a sample of 117 chum salmon, which is below the 1981–2020 average of 592 mm.

#### **Stock Identification**

Genetic mixed stock analysis on chum salmon that passed the mainstem sonar from July 19–August 5, indicates approximately 64% summer chum and 36% fall chum salmon. The summer chum salmon stocks were primarily Lower River stocks at 37%, while the Middle River and Tanana stocks together represented 27%. The fall chum salmon stocks consisted of 22% Border/US (Teedriinjik/Sheenjok/Draanjik), 9% Canadian, and 5% Tanana Fall stocks. For fall chum salmon this represented 76% U.S.-origin and 24% Canadian-origin stocks. The second stratum will not be analyzed until mid-September and the results will be reported once available. On average more than 95% of the fish are fall chum salmon at this point in the run.

## **Fall Season Management Strategy**

The 2021 fall chum salmon projection is critically low, and below the 300,000 fish threshold in the Fall Chum Salmon Management Plan to allow any subsistence, personal use, sport or commercial fishing in the Yukon Area. The fall chum and coho salmon runs are projecting to be the lowest on record. Preliminary data from assessment projects indicate that both species have the smallest fish lengths observed in their respective datasets. Due to extremely weak runs of both species, the need to allow salmon passage to spawning grounds and the higher probability of encountering small-bodied salmon in 4-inch gillnets, the nonsalmon subsistence fishing schedule was adjusted to provide additional protection for migrating salmon. Subsistence fishing with 4-inch gillnets to target nonsalmon will be on a reduced schedule in all districts. Additional manned fish wheel opportunity for nonsalmon is being provided during daylight hours for subsistence fishing in all districts. While using dip nets and manned fish wheels, all fall chum salmon must be released alive and coho salmon are also recommended to be released alive given the historic low run size. Other nonsalmon legal gears remain open, see details below.

Lower Yukon subsistence fishermen should plan for continued salmon fishing closures to conserve fall chum and coho salmon through the end of September. In the Middle and Upper Yukon, fishermen should plan for continued closures at this time.

## **Summer Assessment Projects**

### Eagle Sonar (ADF&G)

As of August 29, the cumulative passage is 31,417 Chinook salmon, which is below the average of 55,433 fish for this date. The Interim Management Escapement Goal for Canadian-origin Chinook salmon is 42,500–55,000 fish. The goal is assessed post-season using the Eagle sonar count minus the estimated U.S. and Canadian harvest of Chinook salmon above the sonar.

## **Current Management Actions**

The following management actions and gear listed apply to the lakes, sloughs and tributaries within the districts and subdistricts of the Yukon River drainage.

### Fishing Gear

All districts may use the following gear for subsistence fishing to target nonsalmon:

#### **Nonsalmon gear: open 24 hours per day, 7 days per week:**

Legal gear to take nonsalmon species includes hand line, longline, fyke net, dip net and spear. A hook and line with a rod or pole may only be used in the Coastal District up to the Nulato River mouth and including the Nulato River drainage (in Subdistrict 4-A Upper). Subsistence fishermen may use dip nets to target nonsalmon but all fall chum salmon must be released alive immediately. The live release of coho salmon from dip nets is also strongly recommended for conservation given the historic low run size.

#### **Fish wheels (manned):**

Subsistence fishermen may use **manned fish wheels to target nonsalmon from 8 a.m. to 9 p.m., 7 days per week**. All fall chum salmon must be released alive immediately and must bypass any livebox structure. The live release of coho salmon is also strongly recommended for conservation given the low run size.

### Fishing Schedules

**Coastal District** (Chevak, Hooper Bay and Scammon Bay):

Subsistence fishing with 4-inch or smaller mesh gillnets (60 feet in length or shorter) for nonsalmon is reduced to the following schedule: Two 48-hour periods per week from **Saturdays 8 p.m. to Mondays 8 p.m. and from Wednesdays 8 p.m. to Fridays 8 p.m.**

**Districts 1-3** (Emmonak, Nunam Iqua, Alakanuk, Kotlik, Mountain Village, Pitkas Point, St. Mary's, Pilot Station, Marshall, Russian Mission, Shageluk and Holy Cross):

Subsistence fishing with 4-inch or smaller mesh gillnets (60 feet in length or shorter) for nonsalmon is reduced to the following schedule: Two 36-hour periods per week from **Saturdays 8 p.m. to Mondays 8 a.m. and from Wednesdays 8 p.m. to Fridays 8 a.m.**

**Subdistrict 4-A Lower** (Grayling and Anvik):

Subsistence fishing with 4-inch or smaller mesh gillnets (60 feet in length or shorter) for nonsalmon is reduced to the following schedule: Two 48-hour periods per week from **Saturdays 8 p.m. to Mondays 8 p.m. and from Wednesdays 8 p.m. to Fridays 8 p.m.**

**Subdistricts 4-A Upper, 4-B and 4-C and the Koyukuk River** (Kaltag, Nulato, Koyukuk, Huslia, Hughes, Alatna, Allakaket, Bettles, Wiseman, Galena and Ruby):

Subsistence fishing with 4-inch or smaller mesh gillnets, (60 feet in length or shorter) is reduced to the following schedule: Two 48-hour periods per week from **Sundays 8 p.m. to Tuesdays 8 p.m. and from Wednesdays 8 p.m. to Fridays 8 p.m.**

In the subsistence permit area of South Fork and the Middle Fork of the Koyukuk River, gillnet gear may only be used from August 20 to June 30 and must be 3½ inches or smaller mesh size.

**District 5** (Tanana, Rampart, Stevens Village, Beaver, Birch Creek, Arctic Village, Fort Yukon, Venetie, Chalkyitsik, Fort Yukon, Central, Circle and Eagle):

Subsistence fishing with 4-inch or smaller mesh gillnets, (60 feet in length or shorter) is reduced to the following schedule: Two 48-hour periods per week from **Sundays 8 p.m. to Tuesdays 8 p.m. and from Wednesdays 8 p.m. to Fridays 8 p.m.**

In Birch Creek and the subsistence area portion of Beaver Creek, gillnet mesh size may not exceed 3 inches.

**Subdistricts 6-A and 6-B, including the Kantishna River** (Manley, Minto, Nenana, Healy, Cantwell, and Lake Minchumina) and the **Upper Tanana Area** (the Tanana River from the confluence with the mouth of Volkmar River on the north bank and the mouth of the Johnson River on the south bank upstream to the Tanana River headwaters, which includes Dot Lake, Tanacross, Tetlin, Tok, Northway and Nabesna):

Subsistence fishing with 4-inch or smaller mesh gillnets, (60 feet in length or shorter) is reduced to the following schedule: Two 42-hour periods per week from **Mondays 6 p.m. to Wednesdays 12 p.m. and from Fridays 6 p.m. to Sundays 12 p.m.**

### **Personal Use Salmon Fishing**

**Subdistrict 6-C** (from the regulatory markers at the mouth of the Wood River upstream to the downstream mouth of the Salcha River, which includes the communities of Fairbanks, North Pole and Salcha):

Personal Use salmon fishing is currently closed.

### **Personal Use Whitefish and Sucker Fishing**

**Fairbanks Nonsubsistence Area** (a portion of the Tanana River drainage from the Wood River upstream to the mouth of the Volkmar River on the north bank and the mouth of the Johnson River on the south bank, which includes Fairbanks, North Pole, Salcha and Delta Junction):

Personal Use whitefish and sucker fishing in Subdistrict 6-C with gillnets and fish wheels follows the Subdistrict 6-C salmon fishing schedule and is closed until further notice. Fishing with other gear for

whitefish and suckers in the Fairbanks Nonsubsistence Area remains open 7 days per week, 24 hours per day, subject to permit stipulations.

A personal use whitefish and sucker permit is required for this area.

Subsistence harvest calendars are available from the Alaska Department of Fish and Game Fairbanks office (459-7274). Subsistence and Personal Use permits are available at [www.adfg.alaska.gov/store](http://www.adfg.alaska.gov/store).



This is an announcement by the ADF&G in cooperation with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

To reach the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Yukon River Subsistence Fishery Manager,

Holly Carroll, please call 907-351-3029.



Announcements will be shared on Facebook at [www.facebook.com/YukonRiverFishingADFG](https://www.facebook.com/YukonRiverFishingADFG)

### **COVID-19**

Under Alaska's Health Advisories 1, 2, 3, and 4, subsistence and commercial fishing is considered essential and is part of Alaska's Essential Services and Critical Infrastructure. Commercial fishermen should ensure that all travel and other activities in support of commercial fishing operations follow protocols in Alaska COVID-19 Health Advisories. COVID-19 Health Advisories may be found here: <https://covid19.alaska.gov/health-advisories/>.