

**KODIAK REGIONAL PLANNING TEAM
Fall Meeting – November 14, 2024
ZOOM virtual meeting
(9:00 – 11:00 AM)
DRAFT MINUTES**

1) Call to Order, Introduction of RPT, staff members and guests (Edlund, RPT Chair)

Attendees

KRPT Members

Kevin Schaberg (ADF&G), Flip Pryor (ADF&G), Tyler Polum (ADF&G), Jeff Stephan (KRAA), Wallace Fields (KRAA), Oliver Holm (KRAA)

Staff

ADF&G: Darin Ruhl, Heather Finkle, Lorna Wilson, James Jackson, Lorraine Vercessi, Tyler Dann, Sara Gilk-Baumer, Kristen Gruenthal, Jay Baumer, Kelly Krueger, Brad Fuerst, David Starzynski, Mark Witteveen, Birch Foster

KRAA: Tina Fairbanks, Genevieve Rich, Jakob Cronk, James Turman

Public/Guests

Alisa Abookire (Alaska Coastal Observations and Research), Kevin VanHatten (USFWS), Daniel Smith (Sun'aq Tribe of Kodiak), Celeste Ossowski (KANA), Susan Payne (Public), Thom Wischer (Public), Kevin Fisher (Public), Pete Olsen (Koniag Inc.)

2) Proof of public notice

Notice of meeting was published to the State of Alaska Online Public Notice System, ADF&G RPT website, and KMXT community calendar.

3) Public Comments

None

4) Amend/Approve Agenda

(Schaberg) Move to amend agenda to include discussion of selecting a new RPT chair in the closing comments section. Motion to approve amended agenda by Pryor, seconded by Polum. Motion passed.

5) Amend/Approve Minutes of Fall KRPT Meeting, 4/18/2024

No amendments. Motion to approve agenda by Schaberg, seconded by Holm. Motion passed.

6) Pillar Creek Hatchery – 2024 releases, 2024 egg takes and current inventory, 2024 returns, cost recovery, and monitoring data

(Turman) Pillar Creek Hatchery has 460,000 Afognak sockeye eggs that are currently hatching, 3.5 million Salterey sockeye eggs that were just picked, and about 19,000 Chinook alevin that just hatched. We were only able to collect and spawn 23 coho for egg take this year but it should be enough to ensure a Pillar Creek release to maintain the brood stock. All egg takes ran smoothly and had good survival percentages. We didn't hit the egg take goal for Afognak but there was higher than expected fecundity so we're not too short of the goal. This year we collected eggs for the Kitoi Bay Hatchery sockeye program as well. Current inventory is low for the Salterey

stock of fish bound for Telrod next year. We combated a fusobacteria infection this summer that caused a decrease in growth of those Telrod fish and are about 1 gram smaller than normal. There are about 20,000 Chinook that will be released in Monashka because one of the hens tested positive for BKD but not at high enough levels to be culled. For stocking this year we hit all our goals which can be found in the “November 2024 production summary” document that was provided in the meeting materials. Also in that document are the stocking recommendations for next year which were used to inform all of our egg take decisions this year.

7) Kitoi Bay Hatchery - 2024 releases, 2024 egg takes and current inventory, 2024 returns, cost recovery, and monitoring data

(Cronk) KBH released over 20 million Chum this spring. The Chum return was well over the forecast of 165,000 fish at 421,000 fish. Total harvest was 372,000 fish accounting for 76% of Kodiak’s total Chum harvest. Egg take was mid-July and we hit the goal of 36 million eggs with an average female percentage of 43%. Total brood was 53,000 fish but we only used 49,000 fish. Survival through pick was 78% due to high water temps which resulted in a fungus outbreak, leaving 27 million eyed eggs on hand. For pink salmon, we released over 198 million fry this spring. Pink return was pretty much exactly as forecasted at 3.8 million fish. A total of 3.3 million pink salmon were harvested, including cost recovery, which accounted for 47% of Kodiak’s total pink harvest. Cost recovery accounted for 13% of Kodiak’s total harvest, which occurred from August 13th-24th. For pink brood, 470,000 fish were collected with an average female percentage of 51% through egg take. 314,000 fish were used to reach our goal of 215 million eggs. There’s 93% survival after the recent picking which leaves us 201 million eggs on hand. For sockeye, 249,000 fry of BY22 fish were released from Little Kitoi lake, and 45,000 smolt were released at Ouzinkie. Working with Pillar Creek Hatchery, we reached our egg goal from Saltery brood. Those eggs look good and will be picked soon. Due to cold water temps, they’ve had slower development than normal. For Coho, 1.3 million BY22 fish were released at KBH and another 477,000 fish were stocked in remote lakes. Current inventory is 413,000 coho. Post out stocking revealed a shortage of 895,000 fish due to overflowing incubators from improperly installed screens and inadequate raceway setups resulting in fry leakage. So far, 168 coho have been collected for brood, which is very poor return for our coho program. Another egg take will take place next week.

8) KRAA Research and Monitoring Projects 2024 update

(Rich) We’ve added a lot of new staff to R&M this season and all have worked well together to complete our projects. For Spiridon, we had the smolt trap in and fish tight by May 2nd with the first smolt passing on May 7th. Total smolt passed in 2024 was 241,749 with an average length of 123mm and average weight of 16.5g. 99% age-1, 1% age-2, 0% age-3. These were the lowest smolt out migration numbers since 2018. Hopefully the smolt numbers will be higher the next few years with more age-2 fish. At Telrod, 415,000 smolt were released from the net pens. Cost recovery hit the goal of 250,000lbs of sockeye on July 20th. Limnology wrapped up in September and went well this year with five staff members getting trained. All of our water loggers were pulled this year except for one at O’Malley Lake as an experiment for over wintering data. In the process of changing our HOBO loggers to a new Bluetooth edition. DEC effluent monitoring proceeded as usual. Salmon in the classroom has been going well too.

9) 2024 Salmon Harvest Summary

(Jackson) Salmon runs were quite poor this year, as they were in the rest of the Gulf of Alaska. Early run sockeye on the west side didn’t hit their escapement goals so only two mandatory 33-hour openers happened in June.

There was very limited fishing opportunity due to poor runs. However, the KBH chum run was the exception and was well above the forecast. The pink salmon forecasts were very low and the runs came back even lower than expected, resulting in restricted fishing periods in July and into August. The wild chum run didn't hit escapement either. Some localized stocks hit escapement in the lower Eastside district which helped with fishing opportunity. Late-run Karluk sockeye was okay, allowing for more fishing opportunities through August and into September. Upper Station late-run sockeye was decent because of light fishing effort by gill netters, so the escapement was met even with a weak run. Coho salmon run was very weak like the rest of the Gulf of Alaska, resulting in heavy coho restrictions around the island. Ex-vessel value for gill netters was the lowest it's been since 2002. Ex-vessel value for seiners was very low too, but due to a much smaller number of permits fishing, it wasn't too bad. Other than the early-run sockeye in Karluk and Upper Station and the wild Chum run, all other escapement goals were met. For more info please refer to the "2024 KMA Season Harvest Summary" provided in the meeting materials.

10) ADF&G Finfish Research Projects 2024 end of season

Limnology

(Finkle) We've processed 1,515 water samples from this season, 892 of which are KRAA's. Zooplankton samples have all been read. We have only a few more samples to run to meet deadlines. Based on the water loggers around the island, 2024 wasn't as cold as 2023, with 2019 being the highest for a five-year average. The grab sampling project at Upper Station had a hard time getting fish but still got 100 smolt for aging and condition evaluation. Zooplankton biomass in the stocked lake all look good and above starvation levels.

Afognak Lake, Frazer Lake, Salter Lake, Foul Bay

(Edlund) For Salter, the weir was fish tight on June 15th and was pulled a little early due to a high water event, though escapement was already well surpassed, with a little over 66,000 sockeye passing, of which 2,800 fish were taken for PCH brood. 88% of the return this year were age1.2 fish. New tripods were assembled and replaced the older rotting ones. A new solar system was installed to power camp and help with the addition of Starlink for communications. For Foul Bay monitoring, returns were very low again due to the lack of stocking in Hidden Lake in 2019 and 2020. This was the last year the missing age classes should affect the run. As a result, we didn't see any fishing effort while on-site and no vessels reported any effort in Foul Bay for the season, so no samples were taken. The trip was used to backhaul project gear and supplies from Little Waterfall now that the concrete work has finished up there. The ladders were all checked on the trip as well.

(Ruhl) Afognak weir was in May 13th – August 8th and passed a little over 32,000 sockeye, meeting the escapement goal. New aluminum tripods and walkways were built this year and transported to camp via the K-Hi-C at the beginning of the season for installation. They worked very well throughout the season, including during a very high water event, so we're excited for their continued use for years to come. There are plans to put new metal siding and roofing on all the camp buildings next year. The solar system will be updated as well with some new batteries and solar panels. For Frazer, the pass was operational on June 11th and closed on August 19th. We passed just over 67,000 adult sockeye and 11,000 jack sockeye, resulting in a total run of 78,000 sockeye, just meeting the 75k lower limit of the escapement goal. Next year the project dates are going to be shifted back a week based on recent run timing. A new hydro turbine was installed at Frazer for more reliable energy production and to update the power system. This upgrade was in part funded by USFW in order to provide more reliable power to their apartment and bear viewing camera. A video counting system was installed

this year which allows fish to pass 24/7 and avoid build up in the holding tank. There is still some fine tuning to do with the camera placement and sampling station which will occur next season.

Afognak/Perenos Bay fish passes

(Ruhl) The Laura Creek resting pool has a hole at the base of the dam again, but after several surveys above the pool, it was determined fish were still making it above the resting pool and onward to the Laura ladder. At high water levels, the resting pool doesn't seem to be affected by the hole, but at low water levels, water fails to flow over the dam properly. Funding has finally been secured to make a permanent fix to this. Lumber and concrete have already been flown to the site for work to start next year. All concrete work at Little Waterfall has been completed, but there are still a few small fixes on those ladders, mainly new cross members and covers. Portage creek ladder needs a lower 6ft section to be replaced. The fixed section is in town and ready to be transported via the K-Hi-C to the site and be installed next year.

11) ADF&G Sportfish Projects 2024 end of season

(Polum) Only had a handful of Chinook to release in Salonie Creek this year due to a BKD outbreak. Hopefully will have more next year as we were able to get 22 females for brood this year. Brood is collected high up in the river to allow time for their scales to harden up so they can have better survival during transport to the raceways. We tried closing harvest of Chinook upstream this year in the Salonie and Olds where we usually collect brood, but due to low returns, it was hard to tell if it made a difference. There hasn't been that much sport fishing effort in those areas anyways so we will try the same strategy next year. Coho releases continue to go well and take a large amount of pressure off our wild coho runs and provide access to fishing opportunities much closer to town. Coho runs were poor island wide and through most of the Gulf this year, and the same was true for our stocked runs, though harvest still occurred quite frequently. Egg take only got us a handful of fish for brood in Pillar Creek. The co-op agreement with KRAA was renegotiated and finalized by the September deadline. The main changes are that we are getting the rainbow trout for stocking as fingerlings from the William Jack Hernandez Hatchery rather than as eggs, to avoid longer rearing time at PCH and decrease mortality rates. In the past we've received around 200,000 eyed eggs, and after rearing at PCH, end up with 50,000-60,000 fingerlings, versus this year we received 77,000 fingerlings and stocked 74,500 fingerlings, so vastly better survival rates. This also frees up raceway space at PCH which will now be used to rear coho for land locked releases. Also in the new co-op agreement, is to continue pursuing a road system sockeye release and future Chinook salmon production.

Road system sockeye release discussion

(Polum) Based on the success of our road system coho stocking program, we thought adding a road system sockeye fishery would be another popular option for our user groups, so has been added into the new co-op agreement. Stocking sockeye in Mill bay and Island lake would be ideal as it's a terminal harvest area, we already stock coho there, the lake feeds water into the bay, and it's far enough away from the wild run at Buskin. The questions that still need to be answered are which brood stock of sockeye to use, which run timing would be used, and what type of release strategy should be implemented.

(Fairbanks) KRAA is very supportive of this idea and appreciates the ADFG support as well. Some priorities would need to be shifted at the hatchery to accommodate a project like this, but KRAA wants to make sure it's serving all of the salmon users in the KMA and this production of a road system sockeye fishery would do that. More

meetings and discussions to hash out the details need to take place outside of the bi-annual KRPT format if we want to get this project moving.

(Payne) If an area like Mill Bay was selected for this, would the seine boundary be moved to outside the bay to prevent those fish from being taken in the commercial fishery? I urge a notification system with the public so we can weigh in on placement and details of this project.

(Jackson) One goal of this project is to provide an early season run for subsistence and sport fishing. The release locations being considered for this project would be around town and in the Northeast Kodiak management district, which is closed until July 6th for commercial fishing. So hopefully this sockeye run would show up before there's any commercial fishing in the area and not overlap with the pink runs. There would certainly be public notice about any plans that are being considered.

Karluk Chinook rehabilitation discussion

(Polum) In the most recent version of the Comprehensive Salmon Plan, the RPT identified rehabilitation of Karluk Chinook as one of the priorities. This year, only 76 kings returned to Karluk, the lowest on record. Along with declining Chinook returns statewide, the parent fish of this year's return were spawning during a 3-week timeframe in 2019 when water temperatures were in the lethal and sterilization range for king salmon, so multiple variables stacked up against this year's return. 2020 saw similar conditions as 2019, so next year's return could be just as poor. Internal ADFG discussions are ongoing as to what a project like this would look like. Only one other salmon rehabilitation project in the state has taken place like this, so there isn't much precedent to follow. At the moment there are no resources or staff dedicated to this project, so it's still conceptual at this point. A federal funding request was submitted for infrastructure development at the Monashka Creek raceways, in the hopes to use it for a rehabilitation project. No concrete plans have been established but Polum is in the process of applying for FTPs for the egg takes as a starting point of a project. Some big questions being considered: How does a project like this fit within our current hatchery regulations and policies? How would this project reduce the risk to the wild stock as much as possible? Which strategy would have the best chance of success? This project would be treated as a study, releasing fish to gauge what the bottlenecks in the freshwater are and seeing if those bottlenecks can be overcome with hatchery production to influence the run to a more sustainable level. This would have to be monitored over the lifetime of the returns, a timeframe of about 15 years. There would need to be visual marking of hatchery fish so only the wild fish are being used for brood stock. There are a lot of ideas like these that still need to be fleshed out.

(Fairbanks) It's important to note that Koniag Inc. has signaled their willingness to commit resources for this project, as has KRAA, even without a proper process. KRAA would be grateful and happy to sit in on the department's discussions as the entity that will need to be able to weigh in on how we achieve best results from any active measures that are taken in the coming years.

(Olsen) Koniag recognizes that this is an unprecedented situation, and I believe it may take unprecedented measures to fix. There may not be a solution that everyone is truly comfortable with in order to avoid the loss of an important salmon run. Koniag owns about 80% of the uplands in the Karluk drainage and we are very open to help facilitate any effort that may be taken for this rehabilitation project. This includes use of facilities, transportation, resources, and even funding. We support getting the ball rolling on this asap as the whole process will take some time, but action needs to be taken now and Koniag is ready to help in any way possible.

(Fields) While it may be an uncomfortable topic, from what I've seen and captains I've talked to, the taking of wild kings in the sport fishery in the area needs to be discussed. Lodges that are regularly bringing several clients out at a time and trolling for kings could make a big dent in the returns when there are only 76 fish returning. The westside sport fishery should be addressed as part of this project.

(Holm) To ensure the best chance of success for this project, we need to know more about the spawning habitat in the Karluk. Also need to know where the juveniles rear in the system and the water temperatures associated with those areas. Lastly, with the current ADFG policies around enhancement projects, they would preclude KRAA from taking eggs for brood from a run this low, so those would need to change.

(Olsen) Koniag is well positioned to help with getting that and more information on the system using our own resources or in conjunction with ADFG. I would like to be positioned to be able to take eggs even as soon as this year or as soon as possible because we might not have much more time.

12) Unique and significant stocks update

(Schaberg) There hasn't been a whole lot of progress on the quantitative approach we've been trying on the unique and significant stocks. With many pending conversations, like the Karluk Chinook one we just had, and overall the rehabilitation policy being actively reviewed and pursued by the department, there has been some concern in the subcommittee that jumping too far into the unique and significant stock designation may hamstring regional enhancement or rehabilitation options without really knowing how those designations would fit into the new policies. The RPT is responsible for looking into the unique and significant stock designations, and we have been doing that for several years now. If at any point we hear from a rehabilitation policy, or come up with a rehabilitation plan for Karluk Chinook, we would be able to bring the necessary designations to the RPT for inclusion in either of those unique or significant stocks. So, this shouldn't slow things down if a plan were to come in place that says those stocks need to be listed as one thing or another, we would have a meeting of the RPT to determine if we wanted to list something as one of those designations with our current framework and definitions to allow for the process to continue to move forward.

13) Closing Comments

(Schaberg) We are approaching the end of the two year chairperson cycle, so would like to ask RPT members to have nominations for the next chairperson of the KRPT be brought to the 2025 spring meeting.

(Holm) We can look at the returns of sockeye, and other salmon, around the island this year and conclude that the spawning conditions in 2019 were very poor due to the high water temperatures.

(Foster) I've looked at the Karluk early-run data and there is a negative correlation between brood year returns and high air temps in July on Kodiak. So those high temps in middle of the summer during spawning are really not good for the early-run fish. Ayakulik fish might be slightly less affected due to the habitat and the cooler spring-fed nature of the river.

14) Adjourn – Pryor moved to adjourn, Schaberg seconded motion, unanimously passed. 11:18am

Meeting length: 2 hr., 18 min