



U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
Bureau of Land Management
National Park Service
Bureau of Indian Affairs

1

Federal Subsistence Board

1101 E Tudor Rd, MS 121
Anchorage Alaska 99503



Forest Service

Federal Waters Within the Boundaries of the Yukon Delta National Wildlife Refuge

2014 Kuskokwim Area Salmon Fishery News Release 2014 Kuskokwim Area Outlooks and Pre-season Management Strategy

Issued at: Bethel, Alaska
May 6, 2014

This is an announcement from the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service for subsistence fishermen in the Kuskokwim Area.

Kuskokwim River

State and Federal fishery management staff will continue to follow guidelines outlined in the *Kuskokwim River Salmon Management Plan 5 ACC 07.365*, to the extent possible, to meet escapement goals, provide for subsistence use, and allow commercial fishing on available harvestable surpluses under State management. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service intends on following the trajectory of decisions for the 2014 fishing season made in public meetings with tribes, the Kuskokwim Salmon Management Working Group, the public, and the Alaska Department of Fish & Game.

Federal Special Actions

The Federal Subsistence Board adopted Federal Special Action FSA14-03 at its April 17, 2014 meeting. The action closed the Kuskokwim Chinook salmon fishery with the exception of Federally qualified users with customary and traditional determinations. The Board also adopted a Section 804 Analysis to determine who would be qualified to fish for a harvestable surplus of Chinook salmon. A harvest allocation of not more than 1,000 Chinook by USFWS permit only may take place in the middle of June. No further allocation is projected beyond the 1,000 Chinook for the remainder of the season. Permit information will be made available in late May to Kuskokwim area residents who qualified under the 804 Analysis adopted by the Federal Subsistence Board.

As a result of this action, the State of Alaska will be managing the Chinook salmon fishery outside the boundaries of the Yukon Delta National Wildlife Refuge as well as the dipnet fishery within the boundary of the refuge. ADF&G will manage the chum, sockeye, and coho fishery beginning at some point in July in all of the Kuskokwim Drainage.

Kuskokwim River Chinook Forecast

Since 2010, the Kuskokwim River has experienced poor Chinook salmon returns and 2013 was the lowest return on record. The 2014 Chinook salmon forecast is for a return of 94,000 fish (range of 71,000–117,000). The drainage-wide escapement goal is 65,000–120,000. If the 2014 return is within the forecast there may be sufficient numbers of Chinook salmon to meet escapement goals and provide for very limited Chinook salmon subsistence harvest. The majority of escapement goals were not met in 2013 and all weir assessment projects had the lowest passages on record. Given consecutive years of low Chinook salmon returns and non-achievement of escapement goals, significant conservation measures are warranted.

Kuskokwim River Salmon Outlook

The Alaska Department of Fish & Game will manage the salmon fishery beyond the Chinook season. Broad expectations are developed based on parent-year escapements and recent year trends for sockeye, chum, and coho salmon abundance which are expected to be similar to 2013. The abundance of chum, sockeye, and coho salmon are expected to be large enough to meet escapement goals, amounts reasonably necessary for subsistence uses, and for non-subsistence uses. Anticipated available surpluses for commercial harvest range from 5,000 to 20,000 sockeye; 100,000 to 200,000 chum; and 80,000 to 140,000 coho salmon. Conservation measures to protect Chinook salmon may limit commercial harvest of chum and sockeye salmon to levels below the available surpluses. Markets and processing capacity are expected to be similar to last year.

Kuskokwim River Subsistence Salmon Fishing Restrictions

The season will begin with a Special Action to limit the Chinook salmon fishery to Federally qualified users within the boundary of the Yukon Delta National Wildlife Refuge. Subsistence salmon fishing on the Kuskokwim River in 2014 will be closed early in the season. Closures will start in the lowest sections of the river and move to upstream sections based on the migratory timing of Chinook salmon. During the salmon fishing closures, the use of set gillnets with 4-inch or less size not exceeding 60 feet in length and 45 meshes in depth is allowed for the harvest of non-salmon species. Set gillnet is defined as a gillnet that has been intentionally set, staked, anchored, or otherwise fixed.

The following are actions expected to take place:

Kuskokwim River within the Yukon Delta National Wildlife Refuge (Federal Special Action)

Effective 12:01 a.m., Tuesday, May 20, 2014 Federal public waters in that portion of the Kuskokwim River drainage that are within and adjacent to the exterior boundaries of the Yukon Delta National Wildlife Refuge are closed to the harvest of Chinook salmon except by the residents of the Kuskokwim River drainage and the villages of Chefornek, Kipnuk, Kwigillingok and Kongiganek.

Kuskokwim River Mouth to Tuluksak: Sections 1 and 2 (Federal Special Action)

Effective 12:01 a.m., Tuesday, May 20, 2014 Chinook fishing with hook and line gear is closed and fishing is restricted to the use of set gillnets with 4-inch or less mesh size not exceeding 60-feet in length in salmon conservation sections 1 and 2. This area is defined as, that portion of the Kuskokwim River and its tributaries upstream from a line from Apokak Slough to the southernmost tip of Eek Island to Popokamiut, to a line

between ADF&G regulatory markers located approximately half a mile upstream of the Tuluksak River mouth. This section includes the slough (locally known as Utak Slough) on the northwest side of the Kuskokwim River adjacent to the Tuluksak River mouth. Excluded waters are non-salmon spawning tributaries: those portions of Kinak, Kialik, Tagayarak, Johnson and Gweek rivers more than 100 yards upstream from the mouth of these rivers, are open with any mesh size gillnet and are not affected by these closures.

Tuluksak to Chuathbaluk: Section 3 (Federal Special Action to the Aniak River and State Emergency Order upriver of)

Effective 12:01 a.m., Tuesday, May 27, 2014 Chinook salmon fishing with hook and line gear is closed and fishing is restricted to the use of set gillnets with 4-inch or less mesh size not exceeding 60-feet in length in salmon conservation Section 3. Additionally, a fish wheel used to take fish must be equipped with a livebox that contains no less than 45 cubic feet of water volume while in operation. The livebox must be checked at least once every six hours while in operation and all Chinook salmon must be returned to the water alive.

This area is defined as that portion of the Kuskokwim River and its tributaries upstream from a line between ADF&G regulatory markers located approximately half a mile upstream of the Tuluksak River mouth to the refuge boundary on the East bank of the Aniak River at its confluence with the Kuskokwim, (State closures through Chuathbaluk are expected in this area). This section does NOT include the slough (locally known as Utak Slough) on the northwest side of the Kuskokwim River adjacent to the Tuluksak River mouth. Excluded waters are non-salmon spawning tributaries: the Whitefish Lake drainage near Aniak and those portions of Discovery, Birch, and Swift creeks more than 100 yards upstream from the mouth of these rivers, are open with any mesh size gillnet and are not affected by these closures.

Dip Nets

A newly adopted regulation by both the State of Alaska and the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service allows for the use of dip nets to harvest non-salmon species and salmon other than Chinook salmon. Qualified Alaska residents are allowed to fish under State Law using this gear type because the Special Action limiting fishing to Federally Qualified Users is intended for Chinook salmon conservation and gear types that are intended to harvest Chinook salmon or have a high likelihood of harvesting Chinook salmon. The State of Alaska and the USFWS intend to provide dip net harvest opportunity beginning in mid-June during times when salmon fishing with gillnets is closed. Dip net opportunity will be based on the abundance of chum and sockeye salmon with the first fishing periods in Sections 1 and 2. As the salmon migrate upstream fishing periods will open in the upriver sections. When fishing periods are open to dip nets, all Chinook salmon must be immediately returned to the water, unharmed.

The specifications of a legal dip net from §100.25 (a) *Definitions* is a bag-shaped net supported on all sides by a rigid frame; the maximum straight-line distance between any two points on the net frame, as measured through the net opening, may not exceed 5 feet; the depth of the bag must be at least one-half of the greatest straight-line distance, as measured through the net opening; no portion of the bag may be constructed of webbing that exceeds a stretched measurement of 4.5 inches; the frame must be attached to a single rigid handle and be operated by hand.

The new Federal Regulations reads as follows; *§100.27(e)(4)(ix) You may only take salmon by gillnet, beach seine, fish wheel, or rod and reel subject to the restrictions set out in this section, except that you may also take salmon by spear in the Kanektok, and Arolik River drainages, and in the drainage of Goodnews Bay. You may also take salmon by dip net in the Kuskokwim River drainage, with the provision that all Chinook salmon caught with a dip net must be released immediately to the water.*

Six Inch Gillnet Mesh Size Restrictions

The Service intends to provide opportunity to harvest chum and sockeye salmon with gillnets restricted to 6-inch or less mesh size. Fishing periods will be based on Chinook, chum, and sockeye salmon abundance. Fishing periods will likely be limited in time to reduce incidental harvest of Chinook. These periods will likely be initiated during the last week of June in the lowest sections of the river and open in the upriver sections based on salmon migratory timing. Fishing periods could occur prior to the last week of June if run assessment indicates a sufficient abundance to achieve Chinook escapement goals. The duration and frequency of fishing periods will be increased or decreased based on inseason run assessment. Additionally, gillnets may be restricted to 25 fathoms in length during these periods to reduce incidental harvest of Chinook.

Once the majority of Chinook have passed through the fishery, which is anticipated to occur in mid-July, salmon fishing restrictions will expire and subsistence fishing regulations will be as specified in 5 AAC 01.260-270.

Inseason Assessment and Research

Inseason indicators of salmon run strength include the Bethel Test Fishery, subsistence catch reports, commercial catch statistics, aerial surveys, weirs, and additional tributary escapement monitoring projects operated by an assortment of partnerships between State, Federal, and Tribal organizations. Staff from Orutsararmiut Native Council will survey Bethel Area subsistence fishermen to assess salmon run timing and abundance.

Further announcements will be made from the Yukon Delta National Wildlife Refuge office and through local radio stations. News releases will be faxed to area villages.

For additional information concerning this news release:

USFWS: Brian McCaffery 907-543-1014

-end-

DISTRIBUTION:

Tim Towarak, Chair, Federal Subsistence Board
 Members, Yukon Kuskokwim Delta Federal Subsistence Regional Advisory Council
 Gene Peltola, Jr., Assistant Regional Director, Office of Subsistence Management, USFWS
 Ryan Noel, Acting Special Agent in Charge, LE Division, USFWS
 Myron Naneng, President, Association of Village Council Presidents
 Cora Campbell, Commissioner, Alaska Department of Fish & Game
 Sgt. Mark Agnew, Alaska Bureau of Wildlife Investigation
 Delta Discovery
 Tundra Drums
 KYUK Radio