

In Commissioners ██████ report to the HOUSE FISHERIES Committee on 02/03/2022

ADF&G provide a report on the findings on the low returns of chum salmon to the Yukon River drainage. He stated that many reasons had been identified as a culprit for the low returns, including bycatch. **An area M fishermen did mention bycatch in pollock industry but that issue is being addressed thru actions by AYK Tribes.**

He stated that sustainable management decisions were made by taking into consideration all of the impacts on low returns and also taking into consideration impacts of management to the fishing industry and communities. He stated that the department had closed in-river and coastal fisheries including subsistence, commercial, sport, and personal use due to the poor returns of chum salmon to the area. He reminded the committee that the Alaska State Constitution and statutes mandate that salmon fisheries be managed to the maximum sustained yield principle and, when returns are low enough that future returns would be put at risk, the department is bound to close fishing, including subsistence fishing.

He stated that one-and-a-half to two million fish are missing based on pre-season projections on the fish run. He added that western Alaska chum salmon could also be caught in mixed stock fisheries within state waters, such as those along the Alaska Peninsula,

in which an estimated 2.2 million chums were harvested in those fisheries and through genetic testing it is known that approximately 600,000 of those are of western Alaska origin, and half of which are known to be of Bristol Bay origin.

Yukon-

Kuskokwim area had collapsed in the 1990s and had rebounded in the early 2000s. He stated that the State of

Alaska is extremely concerned with the low returns of chum salmon experienced the prior summer impacting food security, culture, and economics.

Right now, there is no chum cap in the Area M fishery. The history of the AYK chum caps and other restrictions are in the **2018 South Peninsula AMR, Appendix B1, pages 52-60.**

It's my understanding the State used to describe the Area M chum caps in annual Yukon Area Management reports in the late 1990s and early 2000s during the last Yukon fall and summer chum crash years.

## Alaska Peninsula

The majority of chum salmon captured during June in the Unimak and Shumagin Islands area, located on the south side of the Alaska Peninsula, are bound for Bristol Bay, Asia, and the Arctic-Yukon-Kuskokwim (AYK) Region. The chum salmon stocks contributing to the harvest in this fishery have been described by several studies, including a tagging study in 1987. Beginning in 1993, a genetic stock identification study was conducted using samples from South Unimak and Shumagin Islands fishery. Results of this study indicate chum salmon stock contribution was similar to the 1987 tagging study. Sockeye salmon is the target species in the June commercial fishery, but incidental catches of chum salmon are also taken. The sockeye salmon harvest is regulated according to a quota that is adjusted annually and based on the Bristol Bay sockeye salmon forecast.

From 1993 to 1997, a harvest cap of 700,000 chum salmon during the June fishery was in effect. In addition, the board allowed ADF&G to open the fishing season and establish fishing periods based on sockeye to chum salmon ratios in an effort to reduce incidental chum salmon harvests. In January 1998, the BOF changed the fishery management plan for the June False Pass fishery. The most significant change lowered the chum salmon cap from 700,000 fish to a floating cap ranging from 350,000 to 650,000 chum salmon. The floating cap is dependent upon the previous year's harvest of summer chum salmon in AYK. The chum salmon cap for 1999 was 350,000 to 400,000 fish. A total of 1,375,000 sockeye and 245,000 chum salmon were taken in the combined South Unimak and Shumagin Islands June commercial fishery in 1999.

**Our chum rebounded with these measures, its proven a successful management plan but our runs are much poorer than that of 2000. This summer and fall chum crash was worse than what we experienced in those years, in 2000 fall chum run size was 252,000 but in 2020-2022 we have been below our escapement goals with no subsistence fishing or commercial opportunity.**

**Summer chum 2000-2001 552,000 compared to right now, lowest run sizes on record, in 2021, 154,000 and in 2022 439,000.**

**Commissioner DVL's report Status of Arctic  
Yukon and Kuskokwim  
(AYK) Fisheries**

**House Fisheries Committee Report on  
January 31, 2023**

Informing committee AYK extends into Canada and we have treated obligations Yukon drainage wide run sizes fluctuates 50-375,000. Closed commercial fishery and subsistence in 2021 and 2022. Complicated factor is that this stock is covered under pacific salmon treaty and the state has an obligation to meet escapement of 42,500-55,000 into Canada, 4 of 5 years the state has failed. YR harvest ANS 45,500 to 66,704 have really failed to meet ANS over 15 years. Treaty rights take priority over subsistence rights

Summer spawn in US waters meeting ANS except for the last 3 years. 2021 chum collapsed and poor escapement when expecting average, because of parent year escapement into that run some reason saw poor returns. Largely state has met ANS (ANS 83,500 to 142,192) and commercial fishing but not for 3 years, 2020-2022, severe to no fishing. Lower end of escapement goal meant severe fishing restrictions no subsistence so management measures for AYK salmon stocks of concern needs to be across regions of Area M and AYK.

**What does restrictions to salmon stocks of concern looks like and why proposal 140 is a compromise compared to the severe restriction planned preaseason. Fall chum salmon closures in 2020 to 2022 – Retention of nonsalmon and coho, sockeye, and pink salmon from selective gear (dip nets, manned fish wheels, and hook and line). Required release of chum and king salmon. – Nonsalmon fishing open with 4-inch or smaller mesh gillnets (60 feet or shorter length)**

**One thing that is different between regions is management decided AYK must use selected gear for subsistence and commercial fisheries and area m is not required to use selective gear or release salmon alive, commercial fishery on Yukon has used selective gear for over 10 years and must release salmon species. Since 2012 we have adapted gear types why are the same restrictions not required by area m ? \$900,000 made a year in area M and one area M fisherman shared w/ a reporter that he can make his years income in one week where as on the Yukon we have very little income opportunity and no commercial fishery to support purchasing selective gear, even 4 in gear was difficult to buy or find. During fall chum salmon closures, selective gear and nonsalmon gear used in 2020-2022 had low harvests due to inefficient or unavailable gear**

**Restrictions are the same for Kuskokwim**

Kuskokwim River  
Chum Salmon

- Dramatic decline in run size beginning 2020
  - 2021 was lowest on record
- The single escapement goal not met 2021 or 2022
  - July subsistence fishing restrictions
    - Mainstem and tributary gillnet closures
    - Gillnet restrictions
    - Limited time and area openings
  - ANS has not been achieved since 2018
  - No commercial processor since 2015

**During the fisheries committee presentation a question was asked of DVL-What is the threshold that F&G feels is best for the resource to be self-sustaining, what is the escapement we need in 4 or 5 years for for run returning before resources are almost gone? DVL Manage salmon resources to provide for sustainability and sustainability for fisheries depended on resource, manage resource over time sustainable fish in return and rebuild and sustainability fisheries with the priority being subsistence with the potential for commercial use and sports fishery after we nailed subsistence priority and we are going to have restrictions on fisheries until we get these stocks rebuilt. This highlights the issue for management restrictions like reducing fishing windows, live release of salmon stocks of concern, and selective gear.**

DVL stated he heard loud and clear harvest of incidental mix stock south peninsula fishery was a huge issue, 2 years ago we got surprised by the chum harvest in the South Peninsula June fishery mixed stock in seine and gillnet average harvest ½ million got up to 1.2 million 2 years ago. Currently 31% of total gross earnings in the purse seine fishery leave the state, 44% of total gross earnings in the drift fishery leave the state. As an AYK fisherwoman I support Alaskan residents and subsistence opportunity in area m.

**Proposal 140 is only asking for reduced fishing time not and complete closures. The current windows of commercial opportunity are disseminating the salmon stocks heading to AYK. There are no window restrictions that allow AYK salmon stocks to safely pass through Area M**

**Subsistence measure were taken a month ago at the AYK cycle, AYK fisherpeople were not provided voluntary measures or praise or management support, so again it is not equitable, what happens in one region with the same salmon stocks must happen in the other region,**

**what does that management regime look like in AYK if you liberalized management and let Tribes manage themselves as well as the commercial sector in the Yukon and Kuskokwim rivers?**

**Current drainagewide chum escapement goal range of 300,000 to 600,000 fish also groups with the greatest number of years with positive yield. Current drainagewide escapement goals of fish also groups with the greatest number of years with positive yield and low escapements can produce larger returns per spawner under favorable environmental conditions, Scientist believe that the numbers are now so low that getting each and every spawner back to the Yukon River matters**

**Another thing you must base your decision on and support proposal 140 is the subsistence threshold for chum**

In 2004, year we went from 350K (Optimal Escapement Goal) to 300K (Biological Escapement Goal) threshold to allow subsistence fishing based on the new escapement goal analysis that aligns with the historical drainagewide run size. The [BEG goal of 300k to 600k](#) means a minimum of 300K into the drainage to spawn for sustainable runs in most of the drainage based on the fish biology. Above 300k, fishermen can harvest some fish for subsistence, with possible restrictions until we reach 550K. The intent of 300k threshold is to allow for subsistence harvest during poor fall chum salmon runs. The plan allows for a 250k fishing buffer for subsistence (300k to 550k) before commercial, sport, and personal use may open.

commercial fishing drainage wide will not be allowed until the run is projected to be 600,000 fish, which will provide for the subsistence priority and bolster escapement on strong runs.

**The only fish processing plant on the Yukon River did not process fish for the second year in a row, the plant typically provided about 750 jobs/employment in the region, but when you include fisherman its 1,200 and \$10 million loss per season from selling chum products. This is a significant economic loss to an extremely remote region of Alaska with very little year round jobs, income from commercial fishing also provided families the ability to subsistence.**