

# **Kuskokwim River Salmon Management Working Group**

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

## **Meeting Summary**

**March 30, 2012**

Called to order at 9:20 am at ADF&G Rabbit Creek Rifle Range in Anchorage. Meeting adjourned at 5:00 pm. Twelve of thirteen members were present and a quorum was established.

### **AGENDA ITEMS:**

- 1.) Continuing Business
- 2.) Old Business
- 3.) New Business
  - 1.) Jon Andrew elected as YK Delta RAC alternate member.
  - 2.) Discussed issues regarding KRSWMG member participation and attendance, including possibly adding more alternate members.
  - 3.) Discussed options to fill the vacant Upriver Elder seat.
  - 4.) Discussed the future of the KRSMWG
  - 5.) Other New Business items listed under Action Items

### **WORKING GROUP ACTION ITEMS:**

- 1.) Anyone interested should email their concerns regarding Chinook bycatch in ocean groundfish fisheries to: [npfmc.comments@noaa.gov](mailto:npfmc.comments@noaa.gov).
- 2.) Greg Roczicka will write a proposal to the Alaska Board of Fish to re-instate Chinook as a stock of Yield Concern for the Kuskokwim River.
- 3.) Greg Roczicka will write a proposal to the Alaska Board of Fish to add a regulation ensuring that 8-inch drift gear could not be used for commercial fishing, except in District 1 after June 30<sup>th</sup>.
- 4.) Bev Hoffman will write a letter stating that the KRSMWG endorses AVCP's resolution to add a tribal representative to the Alaska Board of Fish.
- 5.) Lamont Albertson will write a letter to support HB332, regarding the establishment of an endowment fund for Chinook research.
- 6.) Lamont Albertson will write a letter to the Alaska Congressional Delegation stating the KRSMWG's appreciation of the involvement of USF&WS in the Working Group process.
- 7.) The KRSWMG will posthumously award the Robert Nick Conservation Award to Calvin Simeon.
- 8.) At the next meeting the KRSWMG will discuss creating a Calvin Simeon Award.
- 9.) At the next meeting the KRSWMG will update the Roll Call list and add possible alternate members.

### **MEETING ACTION ANNOUNCEMENT:**

The next KRSMWG meeting will be at the call of the Chairs.

### **PRE-SEASON MANAGEMENT PLAN:**

The 2012 Chinook salmon forecast is for a return of 197,000 fish (range 158,000 to 236,000). Sockeye, chum, and coho salmon abundance is expected to be similar to 2011. In an effort to ensure adequate salmon escapement, the following preseason measures have been agreed

upon by the Department of Fish and Game, US Fish and Wildlife Service, and the Kuskokwim River Salmon Management Working Group:

**Kuskokwim River Mainstem:**

Additional inseason management actions may be indicated in the event of a weaker than anticipated return of Chinook salmon to the Kuskokwim River drainage.

Subsistence fishing in the Kuskokwim River is anticipated to be open 7 days per week. Exceptions would include closures implemented to conserve Chinook salmon as discussed above, or closures 6 hours before, during, and 3 hours after each commercial fishing period. During closed periods, subsistence fishing for species other than salmon will be allowed with gillnets not exceeding 4" mesh and 60 feet in length.

**Kuskokwim River Tributaries:**

For the purpose of conserving Chinook salmon From June 1 through July 25, the following restrictions will apply to the Kuskokwim River tributaries (listed below).

- The Kwethluk River drainage including its confluence with Kuskokuak Slough and downstream to ADF&G regulatory markers located at the downstream mouth of the slough. The remainder of Kuskokuak slough from the mouth of the Kwethluk upstream to the confluence with the Kuskokwim River will be open to subsistence salmon fishing.
- The Kasigluk and Kisaralik river drainages including Old Kuskokuak Slough to ADF&G markers at the confluence of Old Kuskokuak Slough with Kuskokuak Slough.
- The Tuluksak River drainage including its confluence with the Kuskokwim River and downstream approximately 1-mile to ADF&G regulatory markers.
- The Aniak River drainage to ADF&G regulatory markers at its confluence with the Kuskokwim River.
- The George River drainage including its confluence with the Kuskokwim River and downstream approximately a half mile to ADF&G regulatory markers.

The following conditions constitute a closure to subsistence fishing on the above tributaries:

- Sport Fishing for Chinook will be closed.
- Subsistence fishing for Chinook with hook and line gear will be closed.
- Subsistence fishing will be restricted to gillnets with 4-inch or smaller mesh, not to exceed 60 feet in length.
- Emergency orders may supersede these restrictions.

**Kuskokwim River Commercial Fishing:**

Commercial fishing in the Kuskokwim River will be limited to gillnets with 6-inch or smaller mesh size. Processing capacity will limit commercial openings in District 1 to alternating subdistrict openings. As in 2011, there is a potential for opening the Lower Section of Subdistrict 1B for two additional hours.

Chinook salmon abundance, escapement, and subsistence needs may limit commercial harvest of chum and sockeye salmon in late June and early July. A coho salmon directed commercial fishery is anticipated in late July and August.

### **WORKING GROUP MOTIONS:**

- 1.) To add Jon Andrew as YK Delta RAC Alternate Member. Motion passed unanimously (12 Yeas, 0 Nays).
- 2.) To add the Aniak River to ADF&G's 2012 Pre-season Tributary Recommendations. Motion passed unanimously (11 Yeas, 0 Nays).
- 3.) To accept ADF&G's 2012 Pre-season Tributary Recommendations, as amended. Motion passed unanimously (11 Yeas, 0 Nays).
- 4.) To accept ADF&G's 2012 Pre-season Mainstem Recommendations, as amended. Motion passed unanimously (11 Yeas, 0 Nays).
- 5.) The KRSMWG will write a proposal to the Alaska Board of Fish to re-instate Chinook as a Stock of Yield Concern for the Kuskokwim River. Motion passed unanimously (11 Yeas, 0 Nays).
- 6.) The KRSMWG will write a proposal to the Alaska Board of Fish to add a regulation ensuring that 8-inch drift gear could not be used for commercial fishing, except in District 1 after June 30th. Motion passed unanimously (11 Yeas, 0 Nays).
- 7.) The KRSMWG will endorse AVCP's resolution to add a tribal representative to the Alaska Board of Fish. Motion passed unanimously (11 Yeas, 0 Nays).
- 8.) The KRSMWG will write a letter to support HB 332: "An Act establishing the Alaska Chinook research and restoration endowment fund and relating grants from the fund." Motion passed unanimously (11 Yeas, 0 Nays).
- 9.) The KRSMWG will write a letter to the Alaska Congressional Delegation stating the group's appreciation for the involvement of USF&WS at meetings. Motion passed unanimously (11 Yeas, 0 Nays).
- 10.) The KRSMWG will award the Robert Nick Conservation Award to Calvin Simeon posthumously. Motion passed unanimously (12 Yeas, 0 Nays).

### **PEOPLE TO BE HEARD:**

- 1.) **Casie Stockdale** gave a presentation on the AVCP State of Our Salmon Special Convention held in Bethel March 6-8<sup>th</sup>, 2012. All convention materials can be found at [www.avcp.org](http://www.avcp.org).

The purpose of the convention was to identify ways to conserve Chinook salmon and how to better incorporate tribes in the management throughout their migration route (from the ocean to spawning grounds). The agenda included shared experiences from a panel of five Yukon and five Kuskokwim subsistence users, state and federal management reports, and problem solving sessions. Convention attendance was widespread, with 973 live views and many people streaming the convention online. KYUK has 18 hours of airtime, which will be broadcasted on Alaska One on April 16<sup>th</sup>, 2012.

The outcomes of the State of Our Salmon Convention included five AVCP Executive Board resolutions, attention to AYK stocks, outreach, identifying concerns, identifying possible solutions, and tribes working together. The resolutions by the Executive Board included a request for more funding for research, a reduction of Chinook and chum bycatch, requesting a seat on the NPFMC so that tribes have more of a say in the areas that affect them, and that tribes need to be unified through fish commissions to talk about these issues.

### State of Our Salmon Executive Board Resolutions:

- To support House Bill 332 to establish a long-term research fund for Chinook
- A call for the reduction of Chinook and Chum bycatch in U.S. and Asian ocean fisheries
- To authorize AVCP to apply for a Tribal Grant under the Pacific Coastal Salmon Recovery Fund
- To establish at least one Tribal seat on the North Pacific Fisheries Management Council. Tribes would nominate this representative.
- A call for the establishment of Inter-Tribal Fish Commissions for the Yukon and Kuskokwim Rivers

### COMMENTS:

Casie felt that the Convention received a positive response and participants would like to see AVCP host more natural resource planning sessions. Many long-term subsistence users were involved and agreed that there is a conservation concern for Chinook numbers and that Chinook are smaller than they used to be. Casie said that many subsistence users reported voluntary reductions to their harvest. There seems to have been disagreement about gillnet mesh size changes as a good solution to conserve Chinook and a disagreement on whether or not tier II would be a supported solution to low Chinook abundance. There was a call from many subsistence users for more information about the tier II system.

Tim Andrew (AVCP) commented that currently, tribes have a limited voice with respect to fishery management. He pointed out that the KRSMWG and YR DFA are just advisory groups, and that the State of Alaska does not recognize the authority of tribal governments with respect to resource management. If tribes wish to be involved in management, which he felt was necessary to protect the salmon resource for future generations for, it is up to them to make the effort necessary to make that happen. As a start, he suggested that communities need to authorize members to represent them. He pointed out that, things are starting to move in this direction. Lamont Albertson (Chair) commented that AVCP set a historical precedent with this Convention.

2.) **Dan Gillikin** gave a presentation on salmon biology and marine derived nutrients. His research specifically focused on Chinook habitat in the Kwethluk River, where he described research investigating how ecosystems responded to ecological changes. His study focused on spawning females and related the number of female spawners to the abundance of juvenile salmon the next year. Important point:

- Spawning fish contribute nutrients to the ecosystem, such as carbon, nitrogen, and phosphorus, which keep the ecosystem productive. Juveniles also feed on flesh and eggs from dead adults.
- Because of greater relative abundance, spawning Chum, Sockeye, and Coho contribute more nutrients than Chinook; especially Coho because they arrive late, swim far upriver, and decompose all winter.
- Pacific Decadal Oscillation (PDO) relationships hold true for the Kuskokwim. In years of high productivity on the high seas, males could possibly grow faster and mature early, returning disproportionately to the total run.
- Suggested that management needs to focus on allowing as many females to the spawning grounds as possible (and eggs in the gravel).

COMMENTS:

Jon Andrew (YK Delta RAC) asked why small males come in the first pulse, and half of the second pulse is females. Dan replied that males usually come upriver first.

Dan was careful to point out that spawner recruitment models only account for total number of fish and not numbers of females. Therefore, they may miss an important perspective on whether the escapement of a particular year actually does contain ideal or adequate reproductive potential for replacing the parent generation and providing for escapement and harvest in future years.

Ray Collins commented that Chums are taken out of the river by commercial fishing, but they contribute valuable nutrients to spawning grounds.

**3.) Gene Peltola, Jr. (USF&WS), Chuck Brazil (ADF&G), and Robert Sundown (USF&WS)** came together to recognize the villages of Kwethluk, Akiak, and Akiachak for making sacrifices with in subsistence harvest for the conservation of King Salmon in 2011. Such an award cannot compensate for the sacrifices that these and other communities made in 2011. Managers wished to express that we understand this, and appreciate those sacrifices and the benefit they have had in allowing fish to reach their spawning grounds to enrich future generations of Kuskokwim people. The Kwethluk plaque was presented to Jon Andrew. Representatives from the other two villages recognized could not be present.

COMMENTS:

Doug Molyneaux thanked Kwethluk for their support of the weir project because it has given ADF&G and USF&WS very important data.

Evelyn Thomas (Upper River Subsistence) said that the Crooked Creek Tribal Council thanks lower river communities for conserving. She stated that because of the 2011 flood that decimated her village, many had a greater need for salmon that year. The conservation efforts of the lower river villages allowed more fish to be captured near crooked creek and allowed many people to eat. She also wanted to thank ADF&G.

Regarding USF&WS and ADF&G working together, Robert Sundown commented that the two agencies have a relationship like a marriage, and the KRSMWG is what brings them together. USF&WS mandates are (in order of importance) conservation, treaty obligations, and to provide subsistence opportunity for locals.

Gene Peltola, Jr., added that balancing these three mandates can be difficult at times, but USF&WS and ADF&G usually agree. Last year USF&WS delayed taking action in order to give subsistence opportunity, but eventually they felt that they had to act, resulting in an additional closure. Lamont commented that upriver communities appreciated the USF&WS actions as well as the earlier ADF&G actions.

Chuck Brazil reiterated the fact that USF&WS and ADF&G usually collaborate well and agree on actions that need to be taken. He restated the fact that different management directives between the two agencies suggest that, although agreement will be the norm, disagreements will sometimes occur. Chuck also reminded the group that agency staff from both agencies made huge efforts to communicate subsistence fishing closures.

## CONTINUING BUSINESS:

### ONC SUBSISTENCE REPORT:

**Eva Patton (ONC)** gave a presentation on Inseason Subsistence Surveys in the Bethel area. The objectives of the ONC surveys are to survey users to determine whether harvest goals are being met, to characterize run timing and abundance, to determine the method of harvest, and to see how factors (such as environmental factors or quality of fish) other than fish abundance affect fishing success. ONC surveys show:

- The importance of harvest timing
- The importance of weather conditions for harvest and drying
- Fish size, and size/sex ratios
- That communication and outreach has to go both ways
- The relationship between upriver and downriver communities is important for managing the subsistence fishery

The inseason surveys are conducted in person with fishers at fish camps. Fishers surveyed are usually well established, long-term subsistence users. Eva talked about the importance of fishing and fish camps to local livelihoods, to educating children in the traditional way of life, and the skills necessary to maintain that way of life. She stressed the point that once the fish are caught, they have to be tended. She passed on the sentiment that it is most efficient to harvest and process the fish in a single effort rather than protract it across several events throughout the season and that this is made difficult by the implementation of subsistence closures. Eva stated that people know the number of each species that their family needs for food, and in 2011 many people said they took fewer Chinook and processed more sockeye to meet their needs. The KRSMWG is valued by people in the communities and many people look to the KRSMWG for input about the harvest.

Bethel currently has a population of 6,522 (63% Alaska Native) and is a hub for 56 villages. ONC has 2,640 members and there are 175 fish camps in the ONC survey area. Kuskokwim River subsistence Chinook harvest is the largest in the state at 49% (Yukon River is 32% and Bristol Bay is 10%), of which many people are unaware.

### COMMENTS:

Ray Collins commented that one of our management goals should be to prioritize traditional ways. He reiterated the importance of education and the need to keep a cultural context in mind.

Lamont Albertson commented that ONC surveys are important for qualitative information. Kevin Schaberg (ADF&G) added that KNA in Aniak is also doing inseason subsistence surveys. Doug Molyneaux commented that fishers can get paid to conduct inseason sampling, and to contact Zach Liller (ADF&G; (907) 267-2380) for more information.

### PROCESSOR REPORT:

**Nick Souza** provided a summary of **Coastal Villages Seafoods** (CVS) operations in 2011 and plans for 2012. He explained that CVS is a subsidiary of the Coastal Villages Regional Fund (CVRF). This Community Development Quota (CDQ) group is designed to help villages on the Bering Sea. The CDQ keeps revenue in Alaska by giving back 10% to 20 different villages.

CVS's salmon and halibut operation loses 5 million dollars a year by giving money back to residents, processors, and fish tenders. CVS employs mostly Alaska residents in over 375 jobs.

For salmon, CVS places tenders in the lower Kuskokwim River, near Quinhagak, and in Goodnews Bay. In 2011 CVS bought 2.2 million pounds of salmon, which was 1 million pounds less than 2010. However, in 2011 CVS worked with 100 fewer permit holders because Stuart Currie with Kuskokwim Seafoods contracted with those fishermen. In 2011 CVS made \$1.9 million, compared with \$2.6 million in 2010. In 2011 CVS fishers averaged 5,995 pounds. There were 4,624 deliveries. Prices in 2011 were \$0.85 for all species (2010 was \$0.79). An average fisher earned \$5,095. Nick predicted that CVS will probably raise prices again this year, but operate the same otherwise.

**Steve Walsh** with **Kuskokwim Seafoods** commented that the company plans to operate the same as last year. Kuskokwim Seafoods will have three tenders upriver and one downriver, and a buyer in Bethel. Steve also stated that Kuskokwim Seafoods is 10% the size of CVS, and that the company lost \$500,000 last year and is hoping for a better season in 2012.

#### COMMENTS:

James Charles commented that tenders in the lower river failed to get ice to fishermen in time at the beginning of the 2011 season, and to please make a note of that.

#### MANAGEMENT PRIORTIES BASED ON MARCH 29 MSE PRESENTATIONS:

Agency staff and the KRSMWG discussed recommendations on tributary conservation measures and Mainstem management plans. Based on the **Management Strategy Evaluation (MSE)** presentation by Matt Catalano (Michigan State University), Kevin Schaberg, and Dan Gillikin at the Interagency Meeting on March 29. The KRSMWG identified and agreed on management priorities for the Kuskokwim River with respect to Escapement, Subsistence, Commercial, and Other:

<b>Priorities of Management Objectives</b> Rated by the KRSMWG on 3/30/12	
<b>High Priority</b>	Escapement Subsistence Escapement quality (fish size, sex, genetic diversity) Adequate density for Upriver Weak stock protection Minimize bycatch in ocean groundfish fisheries Maintain traditional fishing practices Spawning habitat Long term sustainability Predictability of closures Timing of closures (to minimize loss due to poor weather) Equal subsistence fishing opportunity (minimizing restrictions to villages outside of Bethel)
<b>Medium Priority</b>	Non-Chinook directed commercial harvest (and incidental Chinook harvest)
<b>Low Priority</b>	Commercial harvest of Chinook Sport Fishing: Chinook directed

**ADF&G PRE-SEASON RECOMMENDATION**

**These recommendations were amended during discussion. Details are provided in motion descriptions below. Fully amended preseason management plans appear on page 1 and 2 of this document:**

**Kuskokwim River Mainstem:**

Similar to 2011, pre-season management actions will be used. These are recommended in an attempt to conserve Chinook salmon and meet escapement goals. Additional inseason management actions may be indicated in the event of a weaker than anticipated return of Chinook salmon to the Kuskokwim River drainage.

Subsistence fishing in the Kuskokwim River is anticipated to be open 7 days per week. Exceptions would include closures, implemented to conserve Chinook salmon as discussed above, or closures 6 hours before, during, and 3 hours after each commercial fishing period. During closed periods, subsistence fishing, for species other than salmon, will be allowed with gillnets not exceeding 4" mesh and 60 feet in length.

**Kuskokwim River Tributaries:**

For the purpose of conserving Chinook salmon From June 1 through July 25, the following restrictions will apply to the Kuskokwim River tributaries:

- All waters of the Kwethluk, Kisigluk, and Kisaralik Rivers to the confluence with Kuskokuak slough, including Old Kuskokuak Slough



- All waters of Kuskokuak Slough between ADF&G commercial fishing markers, and including waters of Old Kuskokuak Slough
- All waters of the Tuluksak River and the Kuskokwim River downstream, approximately one mile, to ADF&G markers
- All waters of the George River to its mouth and downstream a half mile in the Kuskokwim River

The following conditions constitute a closure to subsistence fishing on the above tributaries:

- Sport Fishing for Chinook will be closed.
- Subsistence fishing for Chinook with hook and line gear will be closed.
- Subsistence fishing will be restricted to gillnets with 4-inch or smaller mesh, not to exceed 60 feet in length.
- Emergency orders may supersede these restrictions.

### **Kuskokwim River Commercial Fishing:**

Commercial fishing in the Kuskokwim River will be limited to gillnets with 6-inch or smaller mesh size. Processing capacity will limit commercial openings in District 1 to alternating subdistrict openings. As in 2011, there is a potential for opening the Lower Section of Subdistrict 1B for two additional hours.

Chinook salmon abundance, escapement, and subsistence needs may limit commercial harvest of chum and sockeye salmon in late June and early July. A coho salmon directed commercial fishery is anticipated in late July and August.

### **WORKING GROUP MOTIONS:**

**MOTION 1:** To add Jon Andrew as YK Delta RAC Alternate Member. Motion passed unanimously (12 Yeas, 0 Nays).

**MOTION 2:** To add the Aniak River to ADF&G's 2012 Pre-season Tributary Recommendations, which would restrict subsistence fishing to 4-inch mesh gillnets less than 60 feet in length from June 1 - July 25th. Chinook-directed sport fishing and rod and reel subsistence fishing would not be allowed at this time. The boundary proposed by the KRSMWG would be at the mouth of Aniak at the main confluence of the Kuskokwim River (without a buffer zone). Motion passed unanimously (11 Yeas, 0 Nays).

### **COMMENTS FOR MOTION 2:**

Gerald Simeon (Middle River Subsistence) suggested closing sport fishing on the Aniak. Dan Gillikin stated that Aniak sonar couldn't differentiate Chinook from other species, so there may not be good data to support the motion. Gerald Simeon suggested that the sonar is too high up the river and he would like to be able to count Chinook on the Aniak. Kevin Schaberg recalled the Salmon River weir which operated on a tributary of the Aniak as part of a short term project. Kevin informed the WG that he is currently trying to get long-term funding for a weir project, but acquiring funding will take a few years. Lamont Albertson commented that Aniak has more sport fishing pressure than anywhere else on the Kuskokwim. Many guides catch every fish in a pool, at least 25% of die after being released. Evelyn Thomas (Upper River Subsistence) agreed, and added that we should listen to the comments of local people like Gerald Simeon now and act on those recommendations, instead of waiting for funding for a project. Chuck Chaliak also agreed.

Robert Sundown, USF&WS law enforcement for the area, reminded the group that the motion would likely result in local fishermen being cited for subsistence fishing with Chinook gear. He clarified that the motion would make it forbidden to remove incidentally caught Chinook from the water, for any reason, prior to release.

Dave Cannon said to keep in mind that people fishing with rods may not be fishing for Chinook, which has been a misperception by KRSMWG members before.

Chuck Brazil asked the group to define the boundaries of the motion, and suggested a buffer zone to protect the bank oriented Chinook migrating toward the Aniak River. Chuck pointed out that rod and reel subsistence harvest does occur in the eddy immediately below the mouth of the Aniak, and that this would increase. Lamont Albertson stated that most "damage" occurs on the Aniak River itself, so a buffer zone is not necessary at this point. Chuck accepted the suggestion, but stated that if increased harvest at the mouth of the river were to become a problem, an additional layer of protection might become necessary.

**MOTION 3:** To accept ADF&G's 2012 Preseason Tributary Recommendations, as amended (see pages 1 and 2). ADF&G accepted Jon Andrew's friendly amendment to open five-mile portion of Kuskokuak slough to subsistence fishing with mesh greater than 4-inches from June 1-July 25, when the remainder of the slough is restricted. Motion passed unanimously (11 Yeas, 0 Nays).

#### COMMENTS FOR MOTION 3:

Bev Hoffman commented that Bethel is responsible for increased pressure on tributaries like the Kisaralik. She is concerned about people getting hurt by big jet boats and the impact that both jet boats and prop boats have on the fish. She wants these concerns to be addressed.

Jon Andrew explained that fish larger than 20 pounds tears small mesh nets. Furthermore, the Mainstem Kuskokwim near Kwethluk is shallower each year, and Kuskokuak Slough is becoming the new Mainstem and most of the salmon are there now. He suggested opening a five-mile stretch of Kuskokuak slough from the mouth of the Kwethluk River upriver, or east, to the upper confluence with the mainstem Kuskokwim.

**MOTION 4:** To accept ADF&G's 2012 Preseason Mainstem Recommendations, as amended. Inseason management is based on the daily Bethel Test Fish catch. The three tools suggested for management for Chinook were rolling closures, mesh size restrictions, and full river closures. The KRSMWG asked to amend the list of possible management options to include 1) "restricting fishing to set nets only" and 2) clarifying that a complete closure would be enacted only "under drastic conditions." ADF&G accepted the amendments. Motion passed unanimously (11 Yeas, 0 Nays).

#### COMMENTS FOR MOTION 4: Regarding Rolling Closures

Chuck Brazil explained that the purpose of rolling closures is to move a large group of fish upriver. The closures would start at the mouth of the Kuskokwim River and move upriver, one predefined portion of the river (or "reach") at a time. Each reach would experience 7 days of closure and closures for each reach would be staggered and progress upriver, eventually affecting the entire river. Reach closures would overlap one day with adjacent reaches to

provide protection for Chinook stragglers. Rolling closures would be in effect up until chum and sockeye were between 20-60% of their runs.

James Charles commented that people are used to "windows closures," so rolling closures would not be that different. Women need a break from cutting fish, as well. James thought that as long as there was plenty of notice, rolling closures seemed fine. Gerald Simeon pointed out that people usually only take a three or four day rest from fishing, so a seven-day break would be too long. Chuck Brazil replied that it takes Chinook six days to pass Bethel, so a seven-day closure is necessary to protect them.

There was much discussion on the length of the closures. Chuck acknowledged that a seven-day closure could be inconvenient, but it has benefits over short notice closures. He hopes to prevent a situation similar to one that occurred in 2011, in which a rumor about impending closures may have caused unusually heavy fishing in the lower river. Managers on the ground counted 200 driftnets and 100 set nets in a single inspection tour. This may have contributed to a precipitous drop in Bethel Test Fish numbers around the same time and contributed to decisions to close the river to subsistence fishing. Ideally, rolling closures would encourage normal fishing patterns, making it easier for managers to assess the run inseason. Dan Gillikin elaborated on Chuck's comment, saying that windows closures used in the mid 2000's were too brief to be effective. He suggested that closures must be long enough to allow for a large pulse of Chinook to get upriver. Shorter windows encourage hard fishing during a relatively short period of time.

Much discussion followed regarding notification for the rolling closures. Agency staff will do their best to notify the public as soon as the decision is made and the entire schedule will be publicized at one time. James Charles commented that ADF&G notified the public well last summer by sending postings by email and fax to village councils, offices, and post offices. Evelyn Thomas was concerned about notification to upriver communities, but affirmed that with adequate notification there would be better compliance and preparedness. It was pointed out that upriver communities will have the most time to prepare because the closures will start in the lower river, with several days transition between reaches. LaDonn Robbins (KNA) added that KNA has been effectively working with the agencies to notify the public. Casie Stockdale reminded ADF&G that KYUK has no weekend or Monday news broadcasts, tribal offices are closed on the weekend, and tribal council fax numbers often do not work. Maureen Horne-Brine (ADF&G) suggested recording a public announcement to broadcast over the weekend, which has been an effective tool on the Yukon.

Greg Roczicka asked about the predictability of the start date for closures. Chuck Brazil replied that it was impossible to predict at this time, but that ADF&G will scrutinize the run on a daily basis and take note of reports from fishers in the lower river as the first indication of run strength.

Eva Patton commented that the dates of the closure would be more critical upriver, where harvest opportunities are shorter. Robert Sundown wondered whether it was possible to limit the effect of this action on upriver fishers, since different portions of the river harvest different amounts of fish.

### Regarding Mesh Size Restrictions:

Bev Hoffman asked if eliminating 8-inch mesh permanently could be an option for conserving large Chinook salmon. Chuck Brazil explained that a Board of Fish (BOF) proposal would be necessary for such a global restriction. He stated that the Department is not considering such a proposal at the current time, explaining that there is currently no solid biological justification to implement such permanent changes. John Linderman echoed these sentiments.

Dan Gillikin explained that the restrictions being discussed are conservation tools that can be used if necessary. He also pointed out that ADF&G has more options available in management decisions. He said that USF&WS has to use more of a "blunt tool" in regard to management actions, so he recommended that, if possible, agencies and stake-holders should try to manage using state regulations first, and resort to federal intervention as a last resort.

### Regarding Complete Closures:

ADF&G accepted the KRSMWG suggestion to amend the motion to suggest complete closures only "under drastic conditions." In other words, the complete closures would be a worst case scenario; such as an imminent failure to meet escapement goals.

Bev Hoffman was concerned that if ADF&G mentions complete closures now, people would overfish like 2011. In 2011, there were twelve total days of closures, and she felt that many people were nervous about 2012. Bev also predicted early subsistence fishing effort this year.

Chuck Brazil commented that a large portion of the run comes in a two-week window, which is of primary importance to conservation. Last year closures didn't allow fish to move through the area completely. If people fish early, BTF will see it. Last year the BTF graph flat-lined concurrent with the heavy fishing activity observed. After the closures, BTF catch indices never caught up. Chuck clarified that opportunity would be provided in that people would be allowed to fish before and after the rolling closures.

Chuck asked the KRSMWG for input on how to make conservation efforts in the Bethel more effective. He said, "We all talk about conservation but no one does it." He went on to state that even if each person took five fewer Chinook it would help. ADF&G cooperated with USF&WS in 2011 to talk with the KRSMWG, visit communities, give public service announcements, and to publish articles in the local paper. He recognized that conservation is difficult, but it is essential that everyone understands how important it is and why and commits to it instead of just paying lip service.

Robert Sundown reminded the KRSMWG that many escapement goals have not been met in recent years. Kwethluk River escapement goals have not been met for the last four years. He said that the need for saving Chinook has to be communicated in order to prevent people from shifting efforts and fishing harder.

Greg Roczicka replied that he was concerned that, with increased mobility, people would simply drive to areas above or below the closed reach. Greg suggested asking everyone to give-up one-third of his or her household's usual catch.

Lamont Albertson agreed about the importance of massive outreach. He also commented that it would be nice if the CDQ could get on the radio and say that commercial fishermen are also concerned about Chinook conservation.

Evelyn Thomas commented that because many people in the Middle River resented ocean bycatch, they would want the entire Pollock fishery closed before the river was closed.

Eva Patton said that there was fantastic outreach effort last year and much positive feedback. She expressed the need for more funding to increase the level of impact. Alissa Joseph (ADF&G) suggested that her Board Support section could go to schools and do "mock fisheries meetings" as a way to educate youth. This approach would also require funding.

Pippa Kenner stated that in 2011 the subsistence Chinook salmon harvest was down 30% from four years ago. She suggested targeting specific groups in the outreach process, because conservation efforts may reach people but not the right ones. Ray Collins added that we need to remember that all the fish caught in the early season, many of which are caught in Bethel, are headed to the headwaters. He thinks we need to consider how fish are caught (set nets or drift nets), as well.

**MOTION 5:** The KRSMWG will write a proposal to the Alaska Board of Fish to re-instate Chinook as a Stock of Yield Concern for the Kuskokwim River. Motion passed unanimously (11 Yeas, 0 Nays).

#### **COMMENTS FOR MOTION 5:**

Bev Hoffman proposed eliminating 8-inch mesh from subsistence fishing. The group had mixed reactions to this idea. Henry Lupie (Member at Large) commented that people in Tuntutuliak have been voluntarily downsizing their king nets to 7-inch mesh, and so they may support it. Bev Hoffman also thought that in the Bethel area most people have stopped using 8-inch mesh because most of the fish swim through.

Greg Roczicka thought gear restrictions would be a hard sell for the entire drainage, and suggested a permit system instead. Gerald Simeon thought that in Aniak, the only objection would be the cost of changing gear. They would probably support eliminating 8-inch mesh because of the widely held notion that large mesh nets that used to be used in the commercial fishery had severely decimated Kuskokwim Chinook stocks. Eva Patton thought that fishermen would need a window of time to make the change because of the cost.

Doug Molyneaux reminded the group that on the Lower Yukon a CDQ group facilitated a program to replace 8-inch nets with 7-inch. This program was federally funded because the Yukon fishery was declared a disaster. Casie Stockdale hoped that the Yukon precedent could inform a similar program on the Kuskokwim. She remembered that last year agencies suggested needing a mesh size study first. Regarding the Yukon, John Linderman explained that it took several years of BOF proposals to pass the mesh size restriction. A three-year mesh size study showed the ADF&G that a key mesh size could allow large fish to pass and not catch other species (this was 7.5-inch mesh). Linderman then stated that the Yukon data is not the same for the Kuskokwim because Kuskokwim Chinook are smaller.

After much discussion, the KRSMWG decided not to propose eliminating 8-inch mesh at this time. Greg Roczicka suggested reinstating a Stock of Yield Status Concern for Chinook for the whole Kuskokwim River, originally in effect from 2001-2006. John Linderman explained that if the BOF passes that proposal, ADF&G would be required to devise a management plan around rebuilding the stock. Dan Gillikin reminded the group that such a proposal may have unintended consequences, and suggested new planning strategies instead. He also stated that political or monetary motivation was not a good reason for the change. Greg Roczicka replied that his intent was for increased focus on rebuilding Chinook stocks. He also wanted to make clear the proposal would be for a stock of concern for yield status, not biological. The group supported this motion.

**MOTION 6:** The KRSMWG will write a proposal to the Alaska Board of Fish to add a regulation ensuring that 8-inch drift gear could not be used for commercial fishing in District 1 before June 30<sup>th</sup> annually. Motion passed unanimously (11 Yeas, 0 Nays).

**MOTION 7:** The KRSMWG will endorse AVCP's resolution to add a tribal representative to the Alaska Board of Fish. Motion passed unanimously (11 Yeas, 0 Nays).

**MOTION 8:** The KRSMWG will write a letter to support HB 332: "An Act establishing the Alaska Chinook research and restoration endowment fund and relating grants from the fund." Motion passed unanimously (11 Yeas, 0 Nays).

**MOTION 9:** The KRSMWG will write a letter to the Alaska Congressional Delegation stating the group's appreciation for the involvement of USF&WS at meetings. Motion passed unanimously (11 Yeas, 0 Nays).

**MOTION 10:** The KRSMWG will award the Robert Nick Conservation Award to Calvin Simeon posthumously. Motion passed unanimously (12 Yeas, 0 Nays).

#### **OTHER NEW BUSINESS:**

1.) The KRSMWG group discussed nominating the Holitna Basin to the Alaska Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) Triennial Review: "Every three years the public may submit nominations for a specific water body to be designated as an outstanding national resource due to exceptional recreational or ecological significance." Greg Roczicka proposed nominating the Holitna as Tier 3 status. However, the deadline for the proposal was April 27, 2012, and the group decided to study the issue and perhaps submit at a future call.

2.) Bev Hoffman wanted to discuss the future of the KRSMWG. Last year she got frustrated with some of the process and felt that stakeholder advice was overlooked at times. The State of Our Salmon 2012 Resolutions about tribal representation make her want to revisit the KRSMWG bylaws this summer. Specifically, she would like to review membership, representation, and the importance of member attendance. Questions Bev would like the group to ponder until discussion in July are: "Where are we going?", "Is the KRSMWG still a good thing?", and "Are we making an impact?"

#### **GENERAL COMMENTS:**

Doug Molyneaux commented that the KRSMWG seems to be a great tool for agencies to get information out to the public. Lamont Albertson was very impressed with the Anchorage

meeting attendance and encouraged continued good attendance (on the phone, if not in Bethel) this summer. Dan Esai (from Nicolai) replied that for many members the summer is the only time to work or to be at fish camp, which makes communication difficult. Evelyn Thomas (from Crooked Creek) also said that this year will be busy and she did not anticipate being able to participate much. Bev retorted that June is a very important time to make decisions, especially for upriver representation. Last year Ray Collins was the only consistent representation for upper river, and Dan Esai was very diligent about checking in with him. She encouraged Evelyn to do the same so that the KRSMWG and agency staff has subsistence status updates, and also so that upriver has a vote. ADF&G commented that by not attending meetings, members are opting for their communities not to be heard. Chris Shelden (ADF&G) pointed out that checking in when not able to attend is valuable, but that when a seat is not represented, there is no vote given for that portion of the river, cutting down on the group's effectiveness as a means of providing a representative opinion from Kuskokwim salmon users.

Bev Hoffman and Ray Collins thanked everyone involved with the meeting for good attendance and information.

Greg Roczicka commented that he sees more of a need for restrictions. Dan Esai commented that he wants at least one closure for seven days to get fish past Bethel, especially if fish only swim 12 miles per hour. He was happy about this meeting's discussions regarding mesh restrictions. Dan would like to see more meetings during the winter.

Nick Petruska appreciated coming to Anchorage. He explained that he could not participate last year because of health issues, and he hopes to attend more this summer.

Jon Andrews expressed thanks for being included in the KRSMWG and also appreciated all of the information from the Interagency Meeting.

Evelyn Thomas commented that the Anchorage Interagency and KRSMWG meetings are always informative. Issues will be heating up in Crooked Creek because of Donlin Mine.

Charlie Brown reported that Eek elders asked for the entire month of June for subsistence fishing because last year it was difficult to meet their needs.

Henry Lupie requested more information on electro-fishing.

Chuck Chaliak thanked the group for being at the meeting. Through translator James Charles, Chuck said that "God created people like these in the room to help preserve subsistence." He wanted to encourage agencies to continue their good work and consideration of subsistence users. He did not like the subsistence closures implemented last year. Instead, he suggested that managers implement closures in the Bethel area because Bethel's population continues to increase and so does the amount of set and drift nets on the river in the summer.

Jon Andrew commented that when Bethel's population exceeds 10,000 it will not be considered "rural" anymore. If it is in Tier II there will be more restrictions.

Chris Sheldon (ADF&G) thanked everyone for attending/participating in the meeting. He also recognized OSM for its contributions as funding agency for the KRSMWG. Pippa Kenner (OSM) is administrator for that grant.

Dan Gillikin thanked everyone for working together and hopes to carry good spirits into the summer.

Chuck Brazil also thanked everyone who attended the meeting for his or her input.

**MEETING ATTENDANCE:**

<b>MEMBER SEAT:</b>	<b>NAME:</b>
UPRIVER ELDER	<i>Vacant</i>
DOWNRIVER ELDER	James Charles
COMMERCIAL FISHER	Charlie Brown
LOWER RIVER SUBSISTENCE	Greg Roczicka
MIDDLE RIVER SUBSTENCE	Gerald Simeon
UPPER RIVER SUBSISTENCE	Evelyn Thomas
HEADWATERS SUBSISTENCE	Daniel Esai
PROCESSOR	Nick Souza
MEMBER AT LARGE	Henry Lupie
SPORT FISHER	Bev Hoffman
WESTERN INTERIOR RAC	Ray Collins
Y-K DELTA RAC	Jon Andrew
ADF&G	Chuck Brazil
CHAIR	Lamont Albertson

<b>Other Participants:</b>	
<p><u>ADF&amp;G Comm. Fish:</u> Chuck Brazil, Kevin Schaberg, Christopher Sheldon, Alice Bailey, Travis Elison, Zach Liller, Janet Bavilla, Jan Conitz, Maureen Horne-Brine, Sue Aspellad, Naomi Brodersen, Jon Linderman, Brittany Blain  <u>Sport Fish:</u> John Chythlook  <u>Subsistence Division:</u> Hiroko Ikuta</p>	
<p><u>USF&amp;WS:</u> Dan Gillikin, Robert Sundown, Steve Miller, Gene Peltola, Jr.  <u>OSM:</u> Ken Harper, Pippa Kenner</p>	
<p>LaDonn Robbins, KNA            Alissa Joseph, ONC            Eva Patton, ONC            Casie Stockdale, AVCP            Tim Andrew, AVCP            Sky Starke, AVCP</p>	<p>Aaron Moses, ANSEP            Steve Walsh, Kuskokwim Seafoods            Doug Molyneaux            Dave Cannon, Aniak            Jimmy Andrew            Sandy Nikori            Chuck Chaliak</p>



## **GLOSSARY OF ACRONYMS:**

Alaska Department of Fish and Game (**ADF&G**), Orutsararmiut Native Council (**ONC**), Kuskokwim Native Association (**KNA**), Association of Village Council Presidents (**AVCP**), U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (**USF&WS**), 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 or Working Group, WG**), Sustainable Escapement Goal (**SEG**), Biological Escapement Goal (**BEG**), Management Strategy Evaluation (**MSE**).