

Kuskokwim River Salmon Management Working Group

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

ADF&G Bethel toll free: 1 (855) 933-2433

March 27, 2015

Meeting called to order at 8:40am and adjourned at 5:00pm. Total meeting time was just under 8.5 hours, with periodic breaks and a lunch break. A quorum was maintained throughout the meeting.

AGENDA ITEMS:

Fisheries Management (recap)- Aaron Poetter (ADF&G)

Fisherman's Meeting Summary- Art Nelson (Bering Sea Fishermen's Association)

Capacity Building to Support Sustainable Management and Stakeholder Engagement- Mike Jones (Michigan State University).

Management Discussion:

- **Recommendations from the Working Group**
- **Public Outreach**
- **Board of Fish 2016 cycle**
- **Update on Kuskokwim Fisherman's Exchange Program- Jennifer Yuhas (ADF&G)**

Working Group Business meeting:

- Membership
 - Election of officers (co-chairs)
 - Seat and alternate elections
 - Meeting participation
 - Recruiting new members

Update on the USFWS 805 process for the Kuskokwim / Dept. of Interior Demonstration Project - Gene Peltola Jr. (USFWS)

Working Group Business Meeting, continued:

- Working Group Packet design
- The Foraker Group plan

WORKING GROUP ACTION ITEMS: *These items were not called "action items" at the time of meeting; however work was assigned or volunteered.*

1. A letter will be drafted by the Working Group to support the 60% reduction in Chinook salmon by-catch being requested by various groups to the NPFMC. (*LaMont Albertson*).
2. Members of the Kuskokwim Drainage Exchange Program committee will respond to Jennifer Yuhas by Tuesday, March 31. (*Bev Hoffman, Dave Cannon, Lisa Feyereisen, Dan Esai, Mark Leary, Fritz Charles*).
3. Draft a letter to AVCP requesting disaster relief items. (*Bev Hoffman*).
4. Draft a written letter to the Chairman of the Board of ONC thanking them for supporting the inter-agency and Working Group fish meetings on March 25-27, 2015. (*Bev Hoffman*).
5. Email a list of Working Group member contact info to the entire Working Group. (*Chris Shelden*).
6. Make the Kuskokwim River Management Plan available on the ADF&G website. (*ADF&G Staff*)

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WORKING GROUP MOTIONS: *For full verbiage and description of motions, see the section on Motions, starting on page 7.*

1. To approve the agenda as amended. *Passed (Unanimous).*
2. The Working Group supports participation in the upcoming Kuskokwim regional meetings on capacity building to support sustainable management and stakeholder engagement. *Passed (Unanimous).*
3. *To close subsistence fishing regardless of net size and length in the entire Kuskokwim drainage until enough king salmon have passed the Bethel Test Fish site. (Withdrawn).*
4. To start the season closed no later than May 15 in the main stem of the Kuskokwim River and its salmon spawning tributaries as has been listed in the regulation in the past, with some opportunity to fish using 4-inch mesh or less set nets, 2 days a week 9am-9pm. *Failed (5 yeas, 5nays).*
5. To implement any salmon closures starting on May 1, 2015. *Passed (Unanimous).*
6. To allow 4-inch mesh gear 4 days a week, 12 hours. *Passed (9 yeas, 1 nay).*
7. The Working Group supports having the state's regulations on fish wheels mirror the federal regulations on the use of fish wheels. *Passed (Unanimous).*
8. Allow the use of fish wheels throughout the summer even during conservation periods. *Passed (Unanimous).*
9. *To allow the use of 50 fathom 6-inch mesh or less gear below the lower section of 1B. (Withdrawn).*
10. To continue with the current Working Group officers for the next year. *Passed (Unanimous).*
11. To write a letter in support of the 60% reduction in by-catch and to send a representative from the Working Group to testify before the North Pacific Fisheries Management Council. *Passed (Unanimous).*
12. For the Working Group to write a letter to AVCP requesting disaster relief items. *Passed (Unanimous).*
13. To adjourn. *Passed (Unanimous).*

AGENDA ITEMS:

FISHERIES MANAGEMENT PRESENTATION (recap)- Aaron Poetter

Aaron Poetter (ADF&G) reviewed the 2014 salmon run, provided information on the 2015 Chinook salmon season forecast with harvest outlooks for other salmon species, gave an update on the recent Board of Fish (BOF) actions for the Kuskokwim drainage and presented the preliminary 2015 season management options.

Mr. Poetter reported that the 2014 Chinook salmon escapement range was 82,000-170,000 drainage-wide based on aerial surveys, weir data and the run reconstruction model. The drainage-wide escapement goal had been met, however he acknowledged that the Kuskokwim drainage was in a Chinook salmon decline. The sockeye salmon escapement goal was met in 2014. The 2014 chum salmon run was lower than average but met escapement. The coho salmon run had been above average.

The 2015 Chinook salmon forecast projected a total run of 96,000-163,000 fish; well below average in run size.

Mr. Poetter provided an update on the BOF subsistence related proposals. ADF&G was given authority regarding the operation of 4-inch mesh gillnets to be used as set nets only, where the entire net would need to be within 100 feet of the "ordinary high water mark" along the bank. A definition of the "ordinary high water mark" was provided. BOF gave ADF&G Emergency Order (EO) authority to adjust the length

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of gillnets during any particular harvest opportunity and the use of chutes on fish wheels to improve the ability of fishers to selectively harvest non-Chinook salmon species.

ADF&G planned to continue with a conservative approach for the 2015 management season due to the low Chinook salmon run forecast. Mr. Poetter commented that the management options for 2015 included: starting the season closed; implementing 4-inch mesh set nets only with bank orientation requirements, utilizing the EO 6-inch mesh net length to provide some opportunity when chum and sockeye salmon became more abundant; implementing tributary restrictions; and using Chinook salmon live-release mechanisms such as dip nets and fish wheel live boxes and chutes.

Discussion:

The definition of the “ordinary high water mark” was discussed. Ideas were shared on how to educate residents on the new regulation. Some Working Group members suggested using a diagram along with the definition to help clarify the regulation.

Concerns by Working Group members were raised regarding tributary escapement goals compared to drainage wide escapement goals. ADF&G recognized the need to continue conservation efforts of Chinook salmon even though the 2014 drainage wide goals had been met.

Working Group members pointed out that during periods of Chinook salmon conservation the reliance on other salmon species increased. Preliminary subsistence harvest results from the 2014 harvest survey were provided to Working Group members. This included both an assessment of whether ANS was reached for each species, and also data regarding how fishers characterized their own catches with respect to meeting their subsistence salmon needs in 2014.

FISHERMEN’S MEETING SUMMARY - Art Nelson

Mr. Nelson reported on the March 26 Fishermen’s Meeting in Bethel. He discussed three presentations that had been given including the discussion of disaster relief funding, the Department of Interior Kuskokwim Demonstration Project and the establishment of a Kuskokwim River Intertribal Fishery Commission. He summarized the concerns expressed by the public during the Q&A section that followed the ADF&G management presentation.

Mr. Nelson summarized the responses from the three afternoon breakout sessions: 1.) how to equitably distribute Chinook salmon harvest opportunity along the Kuskokwim River during times of conservation; 2.) how to provide maximum harvest opportunity for other salmon and fish species, and 3.) the importance of commercial opportunity for chum and coho salmon, and how it interacts with ongoing subsistence activity.

CAPACITY BUILDING TO SUPPORT SUSTAINABLE MANAGEMENT AND STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT - Mike Jones

Mike Jones introduced the Management Strategy Evaluation (MSE) process. He commented that MSE is a “highly technical” process that depends on the engagement of stakeholders and helps to build a management process they can trust. Mr. Jones noted that project supporters would like to work with the stakeholders of the Kuskokwim region to build capacity and understanding regarding the process and operation of the MSE. Mr. Jones proposed three regional workshops: two in the fall of 2015 and one in the spring of 2016. These workshops would engage stakeholders, introduce key concepts of MSE and inform the experts of local knowledge and values that should be considered in management. Mr. Jones requested that the Working Group support the regional workshops. (*See Motion #2*).

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2015 MANAGEMENT PLANS:

Recommendations from the Working Group:

The Working Group discussed ideas and recommendations for the department to consider in the 2015 salmon management season. (*See Motions #3-9 on pages 7-8*).

Nick Kameroff (Middle River alternate) raised the issue of high seas fisheries and their impact on the low salmon returns. ADF&G informed the Working Group that the manager had jurisdiction only within the river system and was unable to address those concerns.

Working Group members expressed concern regarding the run reconstruction model and projects, including escapement numbers from weirs, aerial surveys, and mark/ recapture projects. Ken Harper (USFWS) reported that aerial surveys were used as an index to estimate numbers in locations without weirs. Zac Liller (ADF&G) commented that aerial surveys are “excellent tools for broad scale assessment” and that general conclusions could be made from reviewing all in-season aerial surveys. He also commented that the run reconstruction model considered all available information but weighted weir information higher than aerial surveys. ADF&G acknowledged that the Chinook salmon run was considerably lower than average in 2014, but did reach the drainage-wide escapement goal. Ben Staton (Auburn University) discussed the use of retrospective analysis as a tool to review data over time within the model. He was willing to provide some of the information at a future meeting.

Greg Roczicka (Lower River Subsistence alternate) reported that the ONC subsistence committee and Tribal Council were concerned regarding the 2015 management approach to conservation. He said that they recommended no fishing until there was confidence that half of the run had passed the Bethel Test Fish site. At that point they recommended a limited amount of fishing opportunity with 6-inch mesh, 25 fathom or less nets and possibly limiting it to an elder fishery or set nets.

Bev Hoffman (Sport Fishing alternate) recommended starting the 2015 season closed on king salmon, including tributaries, and restricting 4-inch mesh set nets to Wednesdays and Saturdays from 9am-9pm. She recommended that people encourage the sharing of fresh caught fish. Ms. Hoffman recommended opening fishing on June 20, or once the chum salmon ratio was good, to allow some opportunity with 6-inch mesh 25 fathom gear or less. She also suggested permits for tribal entities to allow one king salmon per tribal household for fresh fish opportunity.

Lisa Feyereisen (Middle River Subsistence alternate) reminded the group to be cautious when lifting the closures because of the effects on the entire river. She suggested that any Working Group recommendations should be able to be equally implemented by both state and federal governments.

The use of dip nets was discussed. Aaron Poetter clarified that the use of “leads” or “fences” were not within the regulations. ADF&G was considering requests for more flexibility with the 12-hour dip net periods.

The Working Group discussed the need to be mindful of the differing geographic locations along the river when considering subsistence closures and openings. Rolling openers were discussed in relation to the head water communities. Some Working Group members encouraged managers to consider the need to allow the same reasonable opportunity along the entire river.

Recommendation for USFWS to take over management of all salmon stocks

LaMont Albertson (Chair) recommended federal take over of the management of salmon stocks within the Kuskokwim River. Some Working Group members discussed their concern that the state did not

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prioritize subsistence needs of the middle and upper Kuskokwim River communities. Mr. Albertson said that the federal government was more sensitive to the subsistence needs for people in the upper Kuskokwim communities. Aaron Poetter agreed that better and more productive communication was needed on both sides. He said that ADF&G wanted ideas and thoughts from everyone along the river to move toward a working relationship.

Changes in the escapement goals in 2013 were discussed. Some speakers stated that the drainage-wide goal had been changed but it was clarified by ADF&G that there had never been an official drainage-wide goal prior to 2013. ADF&G addressed how the current escapement goals were developed and that the goals had not caused a decline in the salmon runs. Dan Bergstrom (ADF&G) pointed out that the state continually tries to improve management and relationships along the Kuskokwim River.

The importance of food and language to a culture was voiced. Mike Williams Sr. (Lower River Subsistence) discussed challenges experienced by local users that had occurred over time from working with both the state and federal governments, but that he wanted to work together to move forward. He also appreciated the difficult discussions that had been brought up in order to heal and move on. Some Working Group members felt they had been ignored in 2014.

James Charles (Downriver Elder) commented on how the Working Group had changed over the decades. He encouraged people to work with the managers to keep the resource alive. The change, over time, in management focus in the Kuskokwim drainage from commercial to subsistence fishing was pointed out. Greg Roczicka encouraged working together with the users, and federal and state governments. John Linderman (ADF&G) commented that subsistence was a priority in the state statutes, however ADF&G did not have the authority to allocate among subsistence users.

DEPT. of INTERIOR USFWS DEMONSTRATION PROJECT FOR THE KUSKOKWIM River - Gene Peltola Jr.

The Department of Interior announced at AFN that they would construct a federal demonstration project to work with tribes on the Kuskokwim River. Gene Peltola Jr. was given the lead for this project through the USFWS and was charged with getting to a starting point. He had met with Skye Starkey, legal counsel to AVCP, and was using “the tools available to meet the direction of the Deputy Secretary of the Interior.” Mr. Peltola said the best situation would be a committee structure involving tribal entities, rural subsistence users, state, and federal governments. This would include balancing out lower, middle and upper river concerns as well as commercial, sport and subsistence needs. Mr. Peltola said OSM had been given a time frame to implement this structure by 2016, but the vetting could take up to 9 months. Other challenges included funding. He reported that the process was on going.

WORKING GROUP BUSINESS MEETING:

Election of Officers: *See Motion 10 below.*

Seat and Alternate Elections: Topic did not get discussed at the meeting.

Meeting Participation: Topic did not get discussed at the meeting.

Recruiting New Members: Topic did not get discussed at the meeting.

Foraker Group:

The department had procured funding to seek the assistance of the Foraker Group, a company that specializes in helping non-profits improve their working processes, in order to help facilitate the Working Group process. The Foraker Group would be engaged to help clarify understanding of the Working Group

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mission, assist in overcoming challenges and improve communication within the group, and between the group and other management and regulatory agencies. The Foraker Group would also help to improve group processes through discussion and an in depth review of by-laws, meeting procedures, and meeting records. Working Group members had agreed to participate and a date needed to be set for a meeting between the parties. The Working Group tentatively decided on April 20-21. LaMont Albertson, Barbara Carlson, and Mark Leary said they would be unable to attend.

KUSKOKWIM FISHERMAN'S EXCHANGE PROGRAM - *Jennifer Yuhas*

Jennifer Yuhas (ADF&G) reported that progress had stalled on the Fishermen's Exchange Program due to a lack of response from the Working Group committee formed to provide input. She reminded the committee members of multiple communications requesting feedback and that she had not received any response. She commented that until she received more information from the committee she would be unable to move forward. Bev Hoffman requested that Ms. Yuhas resend the emails to the committee and they would respond to her by Tuesday March 31, 2015.

WORKING GROUP PACKET DESIGN – *Chris Shelden*

Chris Shelden reviewed some of the graphs that had previously been included in the Working Group Informational Packets. He noted several complaints that had come from members regarding these materials, and suggested a few alternatives that might help alleviate these problems. Barb Carlson (Upriver Subsistence alternate) requested more specificity at the bottom of the Bethel Test Fish graph to explain the type of restriction(s) that had occurred during individual years. ADF&G discussed the development of a data notebook to provide the Working Group with general information that was often requested. ADF&G reminded the Working Group that all data and graphs were accessible on-line. Dave Cannon requested that ADF&G also post the Kuskokwim Management Plan on the website.

WORKING GROUP MOTIONS:

Note: The Working Group is an advisory group to the state of Alaska, Department of Fish and Game. Actions of the Working Group are intended to advise state manager. Actions are not binding and do not supersede state law or ADF&G regulations. The Working Group has no formal relationship with federal managers.

Motion 1: To approve the agenda as amended. Passed (Unanimous).

The Working Group amended the agenda to move the Capacity Building presentation, originally scheduled in the afternoon, to follow the Fishermen's Meeting Summary in the morning.

Motion 2: The Working Group supports participation in the upcoming Kuskokwim regional meetings on capacity building to support sustainable management and stakeholder engagement. Passed (Unanimous).

Following the presentation by Mike Jones on the MSE and capacity building workshops for the Kuskokwim region, the Working Group voted to support the proposed regional meetings.

Motion 3: To close subsistence fishing regardless of net size and length on the entire Kuskokwim drainage until enough king salmon have passed the Bethel Test Fish site. (Withdrawn).

Some Working Group members said there had not been enough conservation in 2014 and that a full river closure should be in place for the 2015 season. The majority of the members felt this recommendation was too drastic and that some opportunity to harvest other fish species was important for subsistence needs. After discussion, the motion was withdrawn.

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Motion 4: To start the season closed no later than May 15 in the main stem of the Kuskokwim River and its salmon spawning tributaries as has been listed in the regulation in the past with some opportunity to fish using 4-inch mesh or less set nets, 2 days a week 9am-9pm. Failed (5 years, 5 nays).

There was discussion regarding the dates to initiate a closure and on the amount of days that should be allowed for harvest opportunity of other fish species. A few members thought the date was too late in May with the possibility of an early break-up and run. Members also were in disagreement whether two days of fishing were enough for subsistence users. Members of the public expressed concern regarding the use of 4-inch mesh gear.

Motion 5: To implement any salmon closures starting on May 1, 2015. Passed (Unanimous).

The Working Group agreed that a May 1 closure was early enough in the season to ensure Chinook conservation in the beginning of the run.

Motion 6: To allow 4-inch mesh gear 4 days a week, 12 hours. Passed (9 years, 1 nay).

There was some disagreement among the Working Group members on whether 4 days of fishing per week provided enough conservation. Others pointed out that with a time restriction in place and the “ordinary high water mark” regulation, it would offer significantly more conservation than previous years.

USFWS Law Enforcement assured the Working Group that they would be able to enforce this type of regulation. They commented that in order to reduce and prevent net seizures, users would need to understand and comply with the restrictions.

Motion 7: Working Group supports having the state’s regulations on fish wheels mirror the federal regulations on the use of fish wheels. Passed (Unanimous).

Due to the confusion last year regarding the differences between state and federal regulations on the use of fish wheels, Working Group members requested that the two governments follow the same regulations.

Motion 8: Allow the use of fish wheels throughout the summer even during conservation periods. Passed (Unanimous).

Working Group members expressed concerns that in the upper portions of the Kuskokwim River, Chinook and sockeye salmon run together making it important to allow the use of fish wheels during Chinook salmon conservation periods. ADF&G clarified that chutes require close attendance and that, by regulation, live boxes only need to be checked every 6 hours.

Motion 9: To allow the use of 50 fathom 6-inch mesh or less gear below the lower section of 1B. (Withdrawn).

Some members of the Working Group suggested that 50-fathom nets should be allowed in the lower section of Kuskokwim fishing district 1B due to the width of the river and difficulty catching fish in that area. Aaron Poetter reported that the state had the EO authority to regulate and specify the length of gill nets used on any opener and that this motion would suggest limiting the department’s ability to provide opportunity. Some Working Group members were concerned that people from above 1B could go down to fish using 50-fathom nets. After discussion, the motion was withdrawn.

Motion 10: To continue with the current Working Group officers for the next year. Passed (Unanimous).

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Fritz Charles, Mark Leary, Bev Hoffman, LaMont Albertson and Casie Stockdale were retained as officers for the upcoming year.

Motion 11: To write a letter in support of the 60% reduction in by-catch and to send a representative from the Working Group to testify before the North Pacific Fisheries Management Council. Passed (Unanimous).

Greg Roczicka reported that the North Pacific Fisheries Management Council was meeting in Anchorage and discussing a proposed 60% reduction in allowable by-catch. Tim Andrew (AVCP) provided more information regarding this meeting. The Working Group supported sending a letter in favor of the 60% reduction in by-catch and to send a representative to the meeting.

Motion 12: For the Working Group to write a letter to AVCP requesting disaster relief items. Passed (Unanimous).

Bev Hoffman suggested that the Working Group write a letter of support for the initiative to provide gear to help with disaster relief. There was some discussion on what size nets should be requested. The Working Group decided it could be up to individual tribes.

Motion 13: To adjourn. Passed (Unanimous).

COMMENTS FROM THE WORKING GROUP:

Barb Carlson reported that the Stony-Holitsna Advisory Committee had asked her to put together proposals for the 2016 BOF meeting concerning the provision of reasonable salmon fishing opportunity for the middle and upper Kuskokwim River area communities. She reported that she was currently working on three proposals on the AC's behalf. She requested feedback on her drafts and any other support Working Group members could provide with those efforts.

GLOSSARY OF ABBREVIATIONS:

Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ADF&G), Orutsararmiut Native Council (ONC), Kuskokwim Native Association (KNA), Association of Village Council Presidents (AVCP), Georgetown Traditional Council (GTC), U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), 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, Working Group, or WG), Sustainable Escapement Goal (SEG), Biological Escapement Goal (BEG), Management Objective (MO), Amounts Reasonably Necessary for Subsistence (ANS), Emergency Order (EO), Bering Sea Fishermen's Association (BSFA)

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WORKING GROUP ATTENDANCE:

MEMBER SEAT:	NAME:
DOWNRIVER ELDER	James Charles
UPRIVER ELDER	<i>Vacant</i>
LOWER RIVER SUBSISTENCE	Mike Williams Sr.
MIDDLE RIVER SUBSISTENCE	Dave Cannon
UPRIVER SUBSISTENCE	Mark Leary
HEADWATERS SUBSISTENCE	Daniel Esai
MEMBER AT LARGE	Fritz Charles
WESTERN INTERIOR RAC	Ray Collins
YK DELTA RAC	Bob Aloysius
COMMERCIAL FISHING	Charlie Brown
SPORT FISHING	LaMont Albertson
PROCESSOR	<i>Absent</i>
ADF&G	Aaron Poetter
CHAIR	LaMont Albertson

Other Participants:

ADF&G Comm. Fish: Aaron Tiernan, Brittany Blain, Chris Shelden, Zac Liller, Dan Bergstrom, John Linderman, Jan Conitz, Colton Lipka, Josh Clark, Tracy Hansen, Jordan Head, Jen Peeks, Nich Smith

Sport Fish: John Chythlook, Tom Taube

Subsistence Division: Lisa Olson, Hiroko Ikuta, Dave Runfola

ADF&G Liaison Team: Jennifer Yuhas

USFWS: Neal Lalonde, Brian McCaffery, Lew Coggins, Robert Sundown, Spencer Rearden, Ken Harper, Aaron Moses, Bill Raften

OSM: Don Rivard, Pippa Kenner, George Pappas, Gene Peltola Jr.,

Dan Gillikin (KNA)	Greg Roczicka (Lower River Subsistence alternate)
Bill Bechtle (AVCP)	Mary Sattler (Lower River Subsistence alternate)
Matt Catalano (Auburn Univ)	Beverly Hoffman (Sport Fish alternate)
Ben Staton (Auburn Univ)	Barbara Carlson (Upper River Subsistence alternate)
Dan Gwinn (BMR)	Lisa Feyereisen (Middle River Subsistence alternate)
Ben Matheson (KYUK Radio)	Nick Kameroff (Middle River Subsistence alternate)
Tim Andrew (AVCP)	John Andrew (Downriver Elder)
Dustin Wagner (ONC)	Greg Hoffman Jr. (Commercial Fishing alternate)
Paul Michael (KWT Inc)	Gabriel Stone
Nicholai Alexie (KWT Inc)	Marc Cloward (AWT)
Bernice Sallison (Nunapitchuk)	Jeff Sanders (Bethel)
Amanda Hoeldt (KNA)	Martin Nicolai (KWT Inc)

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