

Kuskokwim River Salmon Management Working Group

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

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

May 20, 2014

Meeting called to order at 1:30pm on May 20, adjourned at 5:30pm. Total meeting time was 4 hours. Ten voting members were present and a quorum was maintained throughout the meeting.

AGENDA ITEMS:

- **People to be heard.**
- **Subsistence reports.**
- **Historical data.**
- **Discussion with Fish and Wildlife: 2014 season management for Kuskokwim drainage waters on or adjacent to federal lands.**
- **Discussion with ADF&G: 2014 season management for waters of the Kuskokwim drainage outside of federal jurisdiction.**
- **Report from Mike Williams Sr. regarding recent Yupiit Nation fish meeting.**
- **Addition of Alternate Members.**
 - Mary Sattler's letter to the Working Group
- **Distribution of test fish kings.**
- **Support for Monitoring Projects/Monitoring Project Updates.**
- **May 28th Fish Commission Meeting in Bethel.**
- **Comments from the Working Group.**

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

1. The USFWS was requested to provide a flier that would clearly spell out how and when restrictions would be applied in salmon conservation Section 3. *Assigned/volunteered: USFWS Staff. Distributed on 5/22/2014.*
2. Request that the graph provided by LaMont Albertson be forwarded to AVCP for distribution. *Assigned/volunteered: ADFG Staff. Provided 5/29/2014.*
3. The Department of Fish and Game were requested to provide a report on conversations with Kuskokwim Bay coastal villages regarding king salmon conservation in 2014 at the next full meeting of the Working Group. *Assigned/volunteered: ADFG Staff*
4. Provide written report to Working Group members regarding the recent Yupiit Nation meeting. *Assigned/volunteered: Mike Williams. Distributed on 5/28/2014.*
5. Reach out to the villages of Kwethluk, Tuluksak, Akiak, and Akiachak to encourage continued dialogue with the USFWS regarding their participation and support for the weir projects on the Kwethluk and Tuluksak Rivers. *Assigned/volunteered: Mike Williams.*
6. Provide further information regarding the Tribal Fish Commission meeting in Bethel on May 28, 2014 for distribution to Working Group participants. *Bev Hoffman. Distributed on 5/23/2014.*

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WORKING GROUP MOTIONS: For full verbiage and description of motions, see the section on Motions, starting on page 4.

1. To approve the agenda as amended. (Unanimous).
2. In support of the Department of Fish and Game investigating whether it would be possible to allow the use of fishwheels on the Kuskokwim River above federal waters consistent with regulation enacted for their use within federal waters in 2014. Motion passed (Unanimous)
3. In deference to the serious decline in numbers of Kuskokwim River King salmon in recent years, the Working Group supports maintaining the Kuskokwim River weir projects and encourages agreement between Kuskokwim River communities and researchers for the continued collection of critical salmon escapement data. The Working Group recognizes the weirs on the following rivers as vital to this endeavor: Kwethluk, Tuluksak, Salmon, George, Kogrukluuk, Tatlawiksuk, Takotna (*unfunded*), and Telaquana Rivers. Motion Passed (9 yeas, 1 abstention).

PEOPLE TO BE HEARD:

- 1) Casie Stockdale announced that the University of Alaska, Bethel campus would be sponsoring an educational event for kids at the Saturday Market on May 24th. Fifty wooden salmon cut-outs would be provided and kids would be allowed to decorate and paint them. Casie said that the focus of the event would be to promote king salmon conservation.
- 2) Mary Sattler, of Bethel, spoke about the terrible trends regarding king salmon escapement, sex ratios and length and size over the past four years. She said that for those paying attention, the urgency was obvious, but questioned the effort to get this information to the communities. She said that many individuals seemed to be in the denial stage of grief with respect to these problems and suggested that more could be done to spread the message. Several individuals, including Bev Hoffman, James Charles, and Casie Stockdale detailed the efforts that had been made to spread information and encourage conservation over the years. They stated that efforts had been substantial and had a number of examples to illustrate the point. Mark Leary suggested that perhaps the message could be boiled down to a few bullet points to be more easily digested.
- 3) Charlie Brown commented that the delay of opportunity to fish for chum and red salmon would negatively impact his family. He said that he depended on salmon resources for food at this time of year. Charlie said that waiting until July to harvest chum and sockeye could leave his family with a shortage of food in the near term and impede his ability to gather resources for the coming winter.
- 4) Adolph Lupie advocated for increasing the number of test fishery projects in the Kuskokwim River to provide better tracking of fish movements and abundance. He also said that he thought the state and federal agencies were too friendly with each other and ignore what the people say. He said he felt that hardship should be distributed equitably between all Kuskokwim communities.

LaMont Albertson requested that the state and federal managers introduce themselves and talk a bit about their experience, recognizing that they were both new faces in the Working Group forum in 2014.

- 5) Aaron Poetter, the ADF&G Kuskokwim Area Manager, told the Working Group that he had moved to Naknek in 1989 with his family and had grown up there. He had attended college in Fairbanks and worked a number of seasons on the Goodnews and Kanektok Rivers in the Togiak National Wildlife Refuge, making public use contacts and participating in fisheries assessment projects. He stated that early in his Fish and Game career, he had worked on the Yukon with fall season management. In 2005, Aaron moved to Kodiak and soon after, took on the position of Area Management Biologist for the Westward Region. Aaron worked with user groups in the management of mixed stock fisheries

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until taking his current position as Kuskokwim Area Manager. Aaron said that he was excited to be working in this area and would be in Bethel beginning the 27th of May for summer management.

- 6) Brian McCaffery, introduced himself as the acting Yukon Delta National Wildlife Refuge Manager, and the inseason manager for the Chinook fishery on the Kuskokwim within the borders of the wildlife refuge. He stated that he had been living in the YK Delta for 30 years, starting in 1984 as a Jesuit Volunteer at the Catholic mission school in St. Mary's. He began working with the USFWS in Bethel in 1986 and has been with them ever since. He said that he had been ordained a deacon at the local Bethel Catholic Church in 2002 and had a long history of involvement with the local community.

AGENDA ITEMS:

SUBSISTENCE REPORTS: *subsistence reports were given in a geographically random order during the meeting. They have been reordered here, from lowest river location, progressing upstream; consistent with how reports are normally given inseason.*

James Charles reported that he had recently traveled on the river and had only seen one person fishing, though he had not received a report from that person. The prior evening, he had received a report that one person had caught a jack king in Tuntatuliak. He said that he knew of one other person fishing near Tuntatuliak for whitefish but the water was very low.

Henry Lupie reported that he knew of three or four other kings that had been harvested by people incidental to harvesting other resources in the lower river.

Fritz Charles reported that he had received a report of two kings caught on a downriver egg hunting expedition. The kings had been caught in driftnets in the Eek channel.

Robert Lekander reported that he had caught a king in the Bethel area on the previous Friday, and was aware of one other person that had caught one previously. He talked about communities wanting to initiate a designated village harvester as a way of controlling and tracking harvest.

Mark Leary said that he had received four firsthand reports of people catching king salmon in the Bethel area.

Mike Williams reported that no one in Akiak was fishing for king salmon but there were nets out for whitefish, sheefish, and smelt for both human food and dog food.

Bob Aloysius reported that people in the Kalskag area were confused about the application of closures and were not drifting, even though that area was not currently under restriction.

Lisa Feyereisen reported that two nets in the Chuathbaluk area had been catching pike, whitefish, and sheefish.

HISTORICAL DATA: LaMont Albertson provided a graphic illustrating Chinook salmon escapement bar graphs for each of the Kuskokwim River weir projects, super imposed on a map of the Kuskokwim, and detailing the relative decline in chinook abundance at each location over time. He suggested that data be presented in a different way than it had been in recent years, saying that some descriptive wording going along with graphs could be more helpful in getting the message across. He said that most people are visual learners and the providing information in text and graphs together would improve comprehension and retention.

The graphs LaMont et al. provided are similar to those typically presented in the post season projects assessments annually provided to the Working Group. Managers have also used these preseason and in

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interagency presentations to illustrate historical trends. The key difference was the inclusion of callouts discussing the percent decline over the past several years seen at each project.

DISCUSSION WITH FISH AND WILDLIFE: 2014 season management for Kuskokwim drainage waters on or adjacent to federal lands:

Brian McCaffery said he felt that there was reason to be hopeful regarding salmon management in the Kuskokwim River. He cited an improved understanding of salmon biology in the Kuskokwim and a wide recognition that a problem exists among Kuskokwim communities. He said that state and federal managers were largely on the same page with respect to the need to be conservative and the strategies that can and should be employed. Brian lined out the strategy that federal managers were planning to employ:

- Beginning May 20, from the village of Tuluksak down to the lower boundary of refuge land (eight miles below the lower boundary of state fishing district W1), salmon fishing would be closed and gear would be restricted to 4-inch set gillnet, not to exceed 60ft in length and 45 meshes in depth, for the purpose of harvesting non salmon fish species.
- Beginning on May 27, the same restrictions would extend upriver as far as the village of Aniak.
- A dipnet fishery was likely sometime in mid-June. The details of that management strategy would be released at a later date. The purpose would be to give people an opportunity to harvest chum and sockeye with little or no impact on Chinook salmon.
- In late June (actual date to be announced) 6-inch gillnets will again be allowed to target chum and sockeye salmon; but only at such time as run data indicate that the likelihood to negatively impact Chinook salmon escapement is minimal.
- Fishwheels with live boxes would be allowed for the harvest of fish species other than Chinook salmon. Chinook captured in fishwheels were to be released alive.
- A community based social and cultural harvest permit system would be developed to allow the harvest of up to 30 kings per village to provide some fish for cultural sustenance to Kuskokwim communities. This is in no way to attempt to meet subsistence needs, but is provided in recognition of a cultural need to honor and remain connected with the Chinook salmon.

Brian made it clear that the input of the Working Group had figured prominently in the choices made regarding the measures taken and the timing applied for Chinook salmon conservation. Brian encouraged interested parties to contact him directly with questions: (907) 543-1014.

DISCUSSION WITH ADF&G: 2014 season management for waters of the Kuskokwim drainage outside of federal jurisdiction.

Aaron Poetter discussed the plan for management in the waters above those closed by federal special action.

- Beginning at the federal boundary above Aniak Slough, and extending to the upstream bank of the confluence with the Holitna River (modified salmon conservation section 4), subsistence fishing was currently unrestricted.
- But beginning on June 1st, salmon fishing would be closed in that section, and gear would be restricted to 4-inch gillnet, not to exceed 60ft in length and 45 meshes in depth, for the purpose of harvesting non salmon fish species.
- Beginning on June 4, the same restrictions would extend upriver from the mouth of the Holitna to include the entire drainage above that point.
- It was clarified that in the upper river sections 4 and 5, 4-inch gillnets would not be required to be setnet because state regulation could not delineate this use of that gear type. It was also clarified that,

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unlike in federally managed waters, fishwheel use would be limited to specific fishery openings, similar to dipnet fisheries. These openings would be scheduled by emergency order.

- Similarly, dipnet openings would be scheduled at such time as chum and sockeye numbers in the river made their use practical. These would also be scheduled by emergency order.
- Markers delineating the boundaries of these sections would be put in place in cooperation with USFWS to advise users.
- A commercial fishery would be considered for chum and sockeye later in the season only once the Chinook salmon run was essentially over and run indices indicated good chum and sockeye abundance in the commercial fishing districts.

REPORT FROM MIKE WILLIAMS REGARDING RECENT YUPIIT FISH MEETING:

Mike reported that the Akiak Native community had asked AVCP to address the question of an intertribal fish commission. Mike said that the tribes were invited to discuss the short term and long term fishery strategies in that forum. He said that leadership feared the possibility of civil disobedience and the degradation of relations between communities and managers. But he stated a pervasive sentiment among users when people were working to feed their families, they were not criminals, no matter the action taken. He said that the long term plans for leadership were being discussed on the Yukon and would be taken up again in a discussion in Bethel on May 28th. He said that this would be a long term strategic plan that would truly create co-management including state, federal, and tribal governments.

ADDITION OF ALTERNATE MEMBERS:

Mary Sattler, a Bethel resident, expressed an interest in become part of the Working Group. She provided a letter to co-chair Bev Hoffman describing that interest.

DISTRIBUTION OF TEST FISH KINGS:

Roberta Chavez informed the Working Group that ONC would be working with Bethel Test Fish this summer to help distribute king salmon both within the village of Bethel and to other “close” villages. ONC said they would consider any suggestions for how these distributions could be most effective.

SUPPORT FOR MONITORING PROJECTS/MONITORING PROJECT UPDATES:

There was discussion about the Tuluksak and Kwethluk weirs and the local communities waning support for these projects. The villages of Akiak, Akiachak, Kwethluk and Tuluksak had proclaimed that if fishing were curtailed too much, they would not support these projects as they normally have. In most years, these projects have been primarily staffed residents of those villages. The Working Group hoped that the USFWS and the affected villages could come to an understanding that would allow the weirs to operate as normal. *See Motion 3.*

MAY 28TH FISH COMMISSION MEETING IN BETHEL:

Discussion of an inter-tribal fish commission would continue on May 28th in Bethel. Details would be distributed as they became available.

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WORKING GROUP MOTIONS:

Motion 1: to approve the agenda as amended. Motion passed (unanimous):

Amendments included the addition of the following points to that agenda:

- Subsistence reports
- Historical data
- Monitoring project updates
- Letter from Mary Sattler
- May 28 Fish commission meeting.

Motion 2: In support of the Department of Fish and Game investigating whether it would be possible to allow the use of fishwheels on the Kuskokwim River above federal waters consistent with regulation enacted for their use within federal waters in 2014. Motion passed (unanimous).

During the discussion on state management upriver of Aniak, several individuals expressed dissatisfaction with the state position that fishwheels would not be allowed until salmon designated subsistence fishing openings were scheduled. The department was informed that several upstream villages were building fish wheels with live boxes to allow them to harvest fish without negatively impacting king salmon. They hoped that the department would reinvestigate this decision and determine whether it would be able to allow fishwheel use consistent with that allowance in the Special Action area below the federal boundary.

Motion 3: In deference to the serious decline in numbers of Kuskokwim River King salmon in recent years, the Working Group supports maintaining the Kuskokwim River weir projects and encourages agreement between Kuskokwim River communities and researchers for the continued collection of critical salmon escapement data. The Working Group recognizes the weirs on the following rivers as vital to this endeavor: Kwethluk, Tuluksak, Salmon, George, Kogrukluk, Tatlawiksuk, Takotna (unfunded), and Telaquana Rivers. Motion Passed (9 yeas, 1 abstention).

Motion 3 grew from the discussion above regarding “*Support for Monitoring Projects.*” The Working Group chose to support all projects, not just Kwethluk and Tuluksak, reasoning that they were all important for the continued health and integrity of the Kuskokwim Salmon assessment program. The hope was that, in each case, local support for assessment projects could be maintained to the degree necessary for continued operation.

COMMENTS FROM THE WORKING GROUP:

Ray Collins said that he was very disappointed in the loss of the Takotna weir because it was the only headwaters escapement project. He felt that continued operation was important in monitoring changes in the headwaters. He said that he felt it was short sighted not to seek funding for this project. Dave Cannon and LaMont Albertson shared this concern.

James Charles commented that people have been asking how the changes in king salmon management would affect them this year. He said he wants to continue to help those people by saving king salmon for the future. He talked about years in the past when he had to travel to catch salmon because it was too difficult near the village of Tuntatuliak.

Bev Hoffman thanked everyone for all the work they were doing to try to protect the king salmon. She also told the Working Group that ADF&G had suggested Bev participate in another advisory role to the Pacific States Marine Fishery Commission (PSMFC) and that she would be going to her first meeting in July. This Group includes Washington, Idaho, California, Oregon, and Alaska. Bev went on to stress the

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importance of the contributions of the Working Group in getting messages to the people regarding salmon management and conservation, reinforcing that each member had a great deal of responsibility in managing that message for the benefit of all users.

Mark Leary commented that in the previous year on the fourth of June he had caught 27 reds in what was reported to have been a late year. He said that in 2014, things seemed to be early and that this is why people wanted to use fishwheels sooner rather than later.

Bob Aloysius commented that USFWS and ADF&G should make efforts to let people (living in areas where no restrictions were yet in place) know that they were still unrestricted. He also said fishwheels could be responsibly managed by people for the live release of king salmon.

Mike Williams said that he was all for conservation and that the contribution of tribal governance was the missing part.

LaMont Albertson said that it seemed like every year, “we’re paring things back” with regard to funding assessment projects. He said he was very concerned about getting good data, particularly when we have reached a point in which we have long term datasets on the Kuskokwim for comparison.

Fritz Charles said that regardless of forecasts, nobody really knows what will happen in the coming months with respect to the salmon runs. He referred to comments that he had made in recent weeks that had been quoted in the news regarding king salmon harvest. He said that he supported conservation for his kids, and their kids, to be able to taste king salmon. He also said that the Working Group was a state advisory group and wasn’t sure where the group would figure into the 2014 management.

Henry Lupie said of the Kuskokwim and Yukon Rivers’ Chinook salmon conservation that he was hopeful for finding solutions in order to increase escapements. Henry asked Bev to take concerns (regarding the high seas fisheries) to the PSMFC.

Lisa Feyereisen requested that anyone observing minnows on the Kuskokwim River should take photos and send them to Dave Cannon for identification. Lisa also thanked the Working Group for all the work they had done in the past. She said she appreciated how anyone could participate and comment during meetings, and she didn’t think the group got enough praise for their commitment and time. She said that people in her village felt that this group was unlike any other because it was so inclusive.

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>Absent</i>
LOWER RIVER SUBSISTENCE	Mike Williams
MIDDLE RIVER SUBSISTENCE	Dave Cannon
UPRIVER SUBSISTENCE	Mark Leary
HEADWATERS SUBSISTENCE	<i>Absent</i>
MEMBER AT LARGE	Fritz Charles
WESTERN INTERIOR RAC	Ray Collins
YK DELTA RAC	Bob Aloysius
COMMERCIAL FISHING	Charlie Brown
SPORT FISHING	LaMont Albertson
PROCESSOR	Henry Mitchel
ADF&G	Aaron Poetter
CHAIR	Bev Hoffman

Other Participants:

ADF&G Comm. Fish: Aaron Tiernan, Brittany Blain, Chris Shelden, Zac Liller, Kevin Schaberg, Dan Bergstrom, Josh Clark, Colton Lipka, Jan Conitz, Jordan Head,

Sport Fish: John Chythlook, Tom Taube

Subsistence Division: Dave Runfola

ADF&G Liaison Team:

USFWS: Brian McCaffery, Ken Harper, Steve Miller, Aaron Moses, Darryl Sipary

OSM: Don Rivard, George Pappas, David Jenkins,

Rebecca Frye (KNA)	John Andrew (Downriver Elder alternate).
Roberta Chavez (ONC)	Barbara Carlson (Upper River Subsistence alternate)
Robert Lekander (ONC)	Casie Stockdale (Lower River Subsistence alternate)
Bill Bechtle (AVCP)	Henry Lupie (Member at Large alternate)
Jennifer Peeks	Greg Hoffman (Commercial Fisher alternate)
Ben Matheson (KYUK Radio)	Lisa Feyereisen (Native Village of Chuathbaluk)
Zachariah Bryan (Tundra Drums)	Shawna Thoma (Senator Begich's office)
Doug Molyneaux (Unaffiliated)	Abel Hobson (Senator Begich's office)
Walter Nelson (Napaskiak)	Kate Schaberg (Georgetown Traditional Council)
Mary Sattler (Bethel)	Buddy Kutch (Georgetown Traditional Council)
Joe Spaeder (AYKSSI)	Josephine Whitefish (Lower Kalskag)
Stanley Hoffman (BOG)	Ellen Andrianoff (Chuathbaluk)
Adolph Lupie (Tuntatuliak)	Sophie Sakar (Chuathbaluk)

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