

# Kuskokwim River Salmon Management Working Group

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

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

**August 6, 2014**

Meeting called to order at 1:30pm on Wednesday August 6, 2014 adjourned at 5:00pm. Total meeting time was 3.5 hours. Eight voting members were present and a quorum was maintained throughout the meeting.

## **AGENDA ITEMS:**

### **People to be heard**

**Continuing Business:** Run assessment and management actions

### **Old Business Discussion Topics:**

1. Discussion of the dipnet fishery with Norman Ayagalria.
2. Continued discussion of a Tier II permit system and other fishery management options for the Kuskokwim River. *Tabled*
3. Follow-up on requests for federal takeover of fisheries on the Kuskokwim River.
4. Continued discussion on a Kuskokwim Drainage exchange program.
5. Discussion on changing the KRSMWG meeting times. *Tabled*
6. Discussion of current escapement goals. *Tabled*

### **New Business Discussion Topics:**

1. Discussion of a letter of support for Steve Miller's (USFWS) proposed project.
2. Letter from Jeff Regnart (ADF&G Commercial Fisheries Division Director) to Bev Hoffman, KRSMWG co-chair.

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

1. Distribute to Working Group participants the letter to Bev Hoffman from Jeff Regnart (ADF&G). (*Jen Peeks, 8/6/14*)
2. Provide Jennifer Yuhas (ADF&G) the names and email addresses of the KRSMWG subcommittee on a Kuskokwim Drainage subsistence fishers exchange program. (*Jen Peeks, 8/6/14*)
3. Distribute to Working Group participants the project proposal narrative for a USFWS graduated-field electrode array salmon counting system. (*Steve Miller, Jen Peeks; 8/7/14*)
4. Bullet point description explaining the Tier II permit system during the last Working Group meeting in August 2014. (*ADFG Staff*)

## **WORKING GROUP MOTIONS:**

1. Approval of the agenda as amended. *Motion passed (unanimously).*
2. To support the department's recommendation to continue to assess the BTF and subsistence reports on a daily basis with a possibility of a commercial opener during the week of August 11, 2014 at the earliest. *Motion failed (5 yeas, 3 nays)*
3. Request for the department to open up a dipnet fishery all season long. *Motion passed (7 yeas, 0 nays)*
4. Adjournment. *Motion passed (unanimously).*

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## PEOPLE TO BE HEARD:

1. Norman Ayagalria from Bethel spoke regarding the dipnet fishery on the Kuskokwim River during the 2014 fishing season. He explained that the 12 hour openings, 9:00am-9:00pm, did not work well for the Kuskokwim River due to the tidal influence and the unique characteristics of the river. He suggested that future dipnetting opportunities be extended to 3 days in a row which would allow fishers to fish with the tides. He said the best time to catch fish with a dipnet was during the “switch of the tides.” Mr. Ayagalria commented that the dimensions and shape of the dipnets should be specific to the Kuskokwim River. He explained the process of building his own dipnet.
2. Jeff Sanders from Bethel said there was a need to revisit the discussion of the Peninsula Falls Cap intercept fishery to provide further protection for weak Kuskokwim salmon stocks. He suggested that there should be continued discussion regarding the Kuskokwim Area management plan by the Working Group. Mr. Sanders encouraged the Working Group to closely review the Tier II permit system and its potential to create special fishing rights and eliminate stakeholders.
3. Aaron Alexie from Akiachak, via Bev Hoffman, suggested having 3 commercial fishing periods per week in the Kuskokwim River.
4. Robert Enoch from Tuntutuliak commented that since people weren't able to freeze king salmon during the 2014 season, some were harvesting silver salmon. He said there were very few people fishing in the lower river at this point in the season. He commented that the run appeared to be nearing the end. Mr. Enoch said that after hearing the BTF and subsistence reports he did not think a commercial opener in the lower river would negatively affect people or escapement.
5. Walter Morgan from Lower Kalskag said he was wondering what the sex ratio should be for healthy breeding salmon stocks.

## CONTINUING BUSINESS:

### 1. **Subsistence Reports:**

- **Lowest River Reports:** Charlie Brown (Commercial Fisher) said that the people in the lowest river were finished with their subsistence harvest. He reported that he had not seen anyone recently harvesting silver salmon. He said the good run was at the mouth of the Kuskokwim River. Mr. Brown commented that historically the peak of the run was in the lowest portion of the river at this point in the season. He said that people in the lower river only use silver salmon for salting and jarring. James Charles (Downriver Elder) said that people in Tuntutuliak were primarily done fishing. He reported that, personally, he had to fish for coho salmon. He said that during the last week in July he went drifting one day and caught 14 fish. On August 4<sup>th</sup> he drifted and caught 27 coho, 1 chum, and 1 sockeye salmon. Mr. Charles said that a seal had eaten one of his fish. He reported being the only person fishing on August 4<sup>th</sup>.
- **ONC In-season Subsistence Report:** N/A
- **Lower River Subsistence:** Fritz Charles (Member At Large) said that he drifted across from Bethel on August 5<sup>th</sup> and saw a lot of fish jumping. He did a 10-15 minute drift, 30 minutes total, and caught 24 silver and 1 chum salmon. He said he was fishing for freezer fish to compensate for the lack of Chinook salmon. He commented on the weather being good for drying. Bev Hoffman (Co-Chair/ Sport Fishing) reported that people were focusing on getting silver salmon to fill their freezers and to use for “hang a day, smoke a day” and jarring. Mike Williams (Lower River Subsistence) emailed comments, read by Bev Hoffman. He reported that the Akiak area had had continuous healthy catches of silver salmon. Households were harvesting ~10-20 silver salmon for salting and half-drying. He suggested that the department consider opening a commercial fishery based on the BTF and other reports from Working Group members.

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Casie Stockdale (Lower River Subsistence alternate) reported that she had been out fishing 3 times during the end of the chum and beginning of silver salmon runs. She said that she would be going out again in a few days and was fishing for 3-4 households.

- **KNA Inseason Subsistence:** Rebecca Frye (KNA) reported that people in Kalskag were happy for the delay in commercial fishing that provided them more opportunity to meet subsistence needs. She said a few families were finished but some would be fishing throughout the week. She reported that Crooked Creek, Red Devil and Sleetmute were just starting to see the silver salmon and would continue to fish as the run strengthened.
- **Middle River Subsistence:** Dave Cannon (Middle River Subsistence alternate) reported that a few of the local people had been drifting and some were catching 5-30 fish with one drift. One person reported getting more than 30 fish in one drift. Mr. Cannon said that rod and reel fishers were starting to catch silver salmon in the area.

Lisa Feyereisen (Middle River Subsistence alternate) said that the majority of people in Lower Kalskag would need 1-2 weeks to finish their subsistence harvest.

LaMont Albertson (Sport Fishing) reported that sport fishers were catching a few silver salmon and he heard moderate success in Aniak. He said that several people were not done fishing.

- **Middle and Upper River Creel Survey:** Kevin Schaberg (ADF&G) reported that Dave Runfola (ADF&G) was in Sleetmute conducting surveys and had been up as far as Stony River. He said that Stony River appreciated the lifting of the live box restriction so they could continue to use their fish wheel. As of August 5<sup>th</sup>, Mr. Runfola had contacted 45 households between Lower Kalskag and Crooked Creek. Mr. Schaberg said that 19 people had completed surveys and 10 fishers had committed to volunteering their harvest information on a regular basis. People were starting to catch coho salmon in the Kalskag and Aniak area. He said there had been an increase in fishing effort in the middle and upper river.

- **Upriver Subsistence**

Mark Leary (Upriver Subsistence) said that from Chuathbaluk down to Kalskag he observed people fishing and processing. He had seen seagulls flying and smokehouses in use on Monday August 4<sup>th</sup>. He had received 6 reports from Kalskag and Aniak requesting a little more time to subsistence harvest.

Barb Carlson (Upriver Subsistence alternate) wanted to thank ADF&G for conducting the creel surveys. She said that people appreciated that ADF&G sent staff to listen to the middle and upper river concerns. She reported that people were just starting to catch silver salmon. Ms. Carlson commented that many people were not expecting to dry and smoke their fish but wanted to jar and salt. Ms. Carlson said that people wanted to continue to delay commercial fishing until catch rates of silver salmon were higher in that portion of the river.

- **Headwaters Subsistence:** Ken Harper (USFWS) relayed a subsistence report from McGrath, which said that there were a few nets out catching ~10 fish a day, primarily chum and silver salmon. He said that people had not met their subsistence needs and were still fishing.

## 2. Overview of Kuskokwim River Salmon Run Assessment Projects:

- **Bethel Test Fish:** Colton Lipka (ADF&G) reported that the water temperature was average, water clarity was above average but within the historical range, and the water level was reflecting average. Mr. Lipka reviewed the daily CPUE's for the BTF. (*For more information on the BTF, please see the August 6 Informational Packet*)
- **Radio Tagging Project:** N/A
- **Weirs:** Steve Miller (USFWS) reported on the Kwethluk and Tuluksak weirs for Chinook, chum, sockeye and coho salmon. Brittany Blain (ADF&G) reported on the ADF&G weir projects. The assessment projects showed that the Chinook salmon run was over 95% complete; chum and sockeye salmon were 90% complete (*For more information on weirs, please see the August 6 Informational Packet*).
- **Aerial Survey:** Aaron Poetter (ADF&G) reported that fixed winged aerial surveys were complete. He said that Colton Lipka (ADF&G) had concluded the upriver Chinook salmon spawning ground aerial surveys (*For more information on aerial surveys, please see the August 6 Informational Packet*).

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3. **Commercial Catch Report:** N/A
4. **Processor Report:** Aaron Poetter (ADF&G) had no new report for the Kuskokwim River. He said that the commercial fishing had resumed in the Kuskokwim Bay on August 4<sup>th</sup> after a weeklong break.
5. **Sport Fishing Report:** LaMont Albertson (Sport Fishing) reported that the silver salmon derby in Aniak would be starting soon. Bev Hoffman (Sport Fishing alternate) said there were quite a few chum and some Chinook salmon in the Kisaralik River. She commented that the water was low and the trout fishing was average.
6. **Intercept Fishery Report:** N/A
7. **Weather Report:** Colton Lipka (ADF&G) reported that the weather was forecasted to be cloudy with a chance of rain; east wind 10-20 mph switching to a southwest wind.
8. **Recommendations:** Aaron Poetter (ADF&G) restated that ~40% of the coho salmon run was through the BTF. He said that the department was not recommending any additional commercial harvest opportunity at that time. He recommended that the department continue to evaluate the run on a daily basis with a possibility of a commercial opportunity as early as next week depending on the BTF and information received from middle and upriver subsistence users.
9. **Motion for Discussion and Action:** A motion was made to support the department's recommendation. The motion failed. (*See Motion #2 below*)

## OLD BUSINESS:

1. **Discussion of the dipnet fishery with Norman Ayagalria.** (*See Motion #3 below*)
2. **Continued discussion of a Tier II permit system and other fishery management options for the Kuskokwim River.** *Tabled*
3. **Follow-up on requests for federal takeover of fisheries on the Kuskokwim River:** Don Rivard (OSM) said that there had been no new action by the Federal Subsistence Board at that time.
4. **Continued discussion on a Kuskokwim Drainage exchange program:** The Working Group created a subcommittee to further explore and develop an exchange program along the Kuskokwim River. The program would be designed to allow subsistence fishers from different parts of the river to visit each other during the fishing season, to better understand the realities of subsistence fishing in each area. The Working Group accepted assistance from Jennifer Yuhas (ADF&G) in helping to build the program. Ms. Yuhas clarified that she would help the Working Group implement this program through finding funding and helping to define the parameters. She also clarified that the Working Group subcommittee would have to meet to come up with the details of the program. The subcommittee members chosen were: Dave Cannon, Lisa Feyereisen, Dan Esai, Fritz Charles, Bev Hoffman and Mark Leary.
5. **Discussion on changing the KRSMWG meeting times.** *Tabled*
6. **Discussion of current escapement goals.** *Tabled*

## NEW BUSINESS:

1. **Discussion of a letter of support for Steve Miller's (USFWS) proposed project:** Steve Miller (USFWS) discussed a proposal for a pilot study in the Kenai Refuge to "test the innovation and application of a graduated-field electric barrier for fisheries management". Mr. Miller explained that the application would eventually be directed at the Kuskokwim River.
2. **Letter from Jeff Regnart (ADF&G Commercial Fisheries Division Director) to Bev Hoffman, KRSMWG co-chair:** Jen Peeks (ADF&G) would distribute the letter to Working Group participants for review.

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## WORKING GROUP MOTIONS:

**Motion 1: To approve the agenda as amended. Motion passed (unanimously):**

**Motion 2: To support the department's recommendation to continue to assess the BTF and subsistence reports on a daily basis with a possibility of a commercial opener during the week of August 11, 2014 at the earliest. Motion failed (5 yeas, 3 nays)**

A few Working Group members expressed concern regarding the expected larger than normal subsistence harvest of coho salmon in the middle river which would not be reflected in the BTF. Some Working Group members felt that the recommendation was fair and that the department had listened to the middle and upper river subsistence concerns. There was some concern that an August 11<sup>th</sup> commercial opening would be too late in the run. Kevin Schaberg (ADF&G) said that the run timing for coho salmon from Bethel to Crooked Creek was ~14 days. He said that on average by August 11<sup>th</sup> ~60% of the run should be passed the BTF and headed upriver.

**Motion 3: Request for the department to open up a dipnet fishery all season long. Motion passed (7 yeas, 0 nays)**

Working Group members discussed that allowing a dipnet fishery to be open all season long on the Kuskokwim River would allow people additional practice and increased success. ADF&G agreed to further explore this possibility.

**Motion 5: Adjournment. Motion passed (unanimously).**

## COMMENTS FROM THE WORKING GROUP

Bev Hoffman (Co-Chair/ Sport Fishing) commented that on the recent KYUK *Yuk to Yuk* radio show people were accusing her of being responsible for the delay in commercial fishing periods. She said that as part of the Working Group, she often was not a voting member. Ms. Hoffman commented that she always thought on the side of conservation and subsistence, but had voted for commercial openers in the past. Ms. Hoffman said that the Working Group was made up of all users along the Kuskokwim River.

Fritz Charles (Member at Large) said that Bev Hoffman had addressed Kuskokwim fishing issues appropriately and professionally on Facebook. He commented that many people did not have an accurate understanding of the Working Group. Mr. Charles pointed out that it was the responsibility of the Working Group members to educate others about the fish and the meetings.

Mark Leary (Upriver Subsistence) commented that the Working Group would be monitoring the BTF closely over the following days. He respectfully asked that ADF&G notify the Working Group as soon as a commercial fishery decision had been made.

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## WORKING GROUP ATTENDANCE:

<b>MEMBER SEAT:</b>	<b>NAME:</b>
DOWNRIVER ELDER	James Charles
UPRIVER ELDER	<i>Vacant</i>
LOWER RIVER SUBSISTENCE	Casie Stockdale
MIDDLE RIVER SUBSISTENCE	Dave Cannon
UPRIVER SUBSISTENCE	Mark Leary
HEADWATERS SUBSISTENCE	<i>Absent</i>
MEMBER AT LARGE	Fritz Charles
WESTERN INTERIOR RAC	<i>Absent</i>
YK DELTA RAC	<i>Absent</i>
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 Poetter, Brittany Blain, Chris Shelden, Kevin Schaberg, Zach Liller, John Linderman, Jennifer Yuhas, Jen Peeks

Sport Fishing: John Chythlook, Tom Taube

Subsistence Division: Hiroko Ikuta, Lisa Olson

USFWS: Brian McCaffrey, Steve Miller, Neil Lalonde, Ken Harper

OSM: Don Rivard

Rebecca Frye (KNA)	Lisa Feyereisen (Middle River Subsistence alternate)
Bill Bechtol (AVCP)	Charles Enoch (KYUK Radio)
Doug Molyneaux (Unaffiliated)	Gerri Sumpter (Sen. Murkowski's Office)
Kate Schaberg (GTC)	Abel Hopson-Suvlu (Senator Begich's Office)
Norman Ayagalria (Bethel)	Schawna Thoma (Senator Begich's State Director)
Robert Lekander (Bethel)	Nathan Underwood (Aniak)
Molly Hills (Unaffiliated)	Duane Littlefish (Lower Kalskag)
Jeff Sanders (Bethel)	Adolph Lupie (Tuntutuliak)
Walter Morgan (Lower Kalskag)	Robert Enoch (Tuntutuliak)
	Alvin Jimmie (Bethel)

## 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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