

# Kuskokwim River Salmon Management Working Group

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

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

August 19, 2015

Meeting called to order at 10:00 a.m. on Wednesday August 19, 2015 and adjourned at 11:25 a.m. Total meeting time was one hour and 25 minutes. The meeting was conducted as an executive session.

## AGENDA ITEMS:

### People to be Heard:

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

### Old Business Discussion Topics:

### New Business Discussion Topics:

- Upriver Elder member seat

**WORKING GROUP ACTION ITEMS:** *There were no action items at the time of this meeting.*

**WORKING GROUP MOTIONS:** *There were no motions made during this meeting.*

## CONTINUING BUSINESS:

1. **ADF&G Management Actions under consideration:** Aaron Poetter (ADF&G) reported that BTF had exceeded the performance benchmark of 2,000 CPUE for coho salmon; and the department recommended a commercial harvest in Subdistrict 1-B on Friday, August 21. Mr. Poetter commented that the department expected the harvest to decrease in relation to run timing. He added that the department was not considering additional commercial opportunities after the August 21 opening at this time.
2. **Overview of Kuskokwim River Salmon Run Assessment Projects:**
  - **Bethel Test Fish:** Brittany Blain (ADF&G) reported that the daily CPUE for coho salmon had increased since August 12. Coho salmon at the BTF to date was tracking below the 5 and 10-year averages. Ms. Blain commented that current BTF projections, using both average and late run timing projections, indicated a below average run size with an end of season estimated CPUE range of 2,500-3,000. She added that BTF will end on August 24. *(For more information on the BTF, please see the August 19 Informational Packet).*
  - **Weirs:** Brittany Blain reported that it was still early in the season to assess coho salmon escapement at the weirs. The KogrukluK escapement goal range was 13,000-28,000 and the Kwethluk River escapement goal was to exceed 19,000. Ms. Blain commented that at this time, KogrukluK was projected to meet its escapement goal based on average run timing; and approximately 25-30% of the run had passed the Kwethluk weir with a projected peak run passage around August 26. *(For more information on weirs, please see the August 19 Informational Packet)*
3. **Subsistence Reports:**
  - **Down River:** James Charles (Downriver Elder) reported that the majority of people in his area were done fishing for their subsistence needs. Charlie Brown (Commercial Fishing) commented that people in the Eek area were done fishing.
  - **Lower River:** Mike Williams Sr. (Lower River Subsistence) reported that the majority of residents in Akiak and the surrounding villages were finished subsistence fishing except for getting fresh fish for dinner or jarring. Bev Hoffman (Sport Fishing alternate) commented that her family was done fishing, but others were still harvesting fish for jarring.
  - **Middle River:** Lisa Feyereisen (Middle River Subsistence alternate) commented that people were still fishing due to the low run strength. Dave Cannon (Middle River Subsistence) reported that on August 18 he observed three people drifting near Aniak; and that residents of Crooked Creek were still fishing.
  - **Headwaters:** Dan Esai (Headwaters Subsistence) reported, prior to the meeting, that chum and coho salmon were increasing in his area and that he would support another commercial opener if the numbers looked good. Ray Collins (Western Interior RAC) commented that silver salmon were just starting to show

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in his area. He commented that people did not typically start using nets until there were more coho salmon compared to chum salmon in his area.

4. **Commercial Catch Report:** Aaron Poetter reported that during the August 17 commercial fishing opportunity ~27,500 coho salmon were harvested, which was above average for this time of year. He commented that 239 permit holders participated in the opening with a CPUE of ~19.2, which was above the historical average.
5. **Processor:** Henry Mitchell (Processor) commented that CVS member villages were also subsistence users and the commercial opportunities provided in 2015 supported their ability to conduct subsistence activities. Mr. Mitchell reported that CVS was ready for an additional opener and was supportive of the department's recommendation.
6. **Sport Fish:** John Chythlook (ADF&G) reported a mixture of fishing success for sport fishing. He commented that many of the fishing derbies occurring on the Kuskokwim River were subsistence derbies, not sport fish. Mr. Chythlook reminded members that in most areas of the Kuskokwim River, the sport fishing bag limit for coho salmon was five fish with the exception of the Aniak River, which was three fish. The bait restriction remained in effect.
7. **Discussion of ADF&G Management consideration and discussion of possible alternatives:** Bev Hoffman commented on the amount of people who continued to fish for coho salmon in the Bethel area. Ray Collins commented that he was concerned about focusing only on a single species when making management decisions and wondered how the low chum and coho salmon runs would affect the overall health of the river system. Several Working Group members commented on the low coho salmon escapement to date at the Kwethluk weir and were concerned about enough fish escaping to the spawning grounds. Other members supported the department's recommendation since it was nearing the end of the coho salmon run in the lower river. Out of the eight Working Group members unofficially polled regarding support of the department's recommendation, five members supported and three did not support the August 21 commercial harvest opportunity. No management motions were made due to the meeting being conducted as an executive session.

## PEOPLE TO BE HEARD:

- Dustin Wagner (ONC) commented that he wanted to hear from upriver residents regarding meeting their subsistence needs.
- Bill Bechtol (AVCP) commented that he was concerned about the Kwethluk River coho salmon escapement, and added that the daily counts would most likely drop off quickly.
- Dan Gillikin (NVN) supported Mr. Bechtol's comments and was also concerned about the Kwethluk escapement numbers. He reported that the >19,000 SEG for coho salmon on the Kwethluk River was established based on the lowest run ever observed that sustained a return. He was also concerned regarding the performance benchmark relationship between the BTF and escapement; and that there appeared to be a different type of fishing "regime" in 2015 for coho salmon, which could create greater uncertainty.

**OLD BUSINESS:** N/A

## NEW BUSINESS:

- **Upriver Elder Member Seat:** Bev Hoffman recommended that the Upriver Elder seat have an alternate member and requested that upriver and headwater members suggest possible alternates. Chris Shelden (ADF&G) commented that "upriver" was considered to begin around Chuathbulak.

**WORKING GROUP MOTIONS:** N/A

## COMMENTS FROM THE WORKING GROUP:

- Dave Cannon (Middle River Subsistence) requested that the department notify Working Group co-chairs if additional openings were considered between August 21 and the next Working Group meeting.
- LaMont Albertson (Sport Fishing) requested that BSFA be placed on the next Working Group agenda. He commented that in his opinion it was a mistake to support the department's recommendation; and that if the fishery were managed by the subsistence division, management decisions would be different. Mr. Albertson added that the commercial opportunity would be fishing on fish needed for escapement and that

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it appeared, to him, that neither the Kwethluk nor the Kogruluk escapement would be met in 2015. *Note: subsistence division is a non-management arm of the Alaska Department of Fish and Game. The purpose of the subsistence division is to collect information regarding subsistence use of resources as a data source to inform managers and improve management decisions.*

- Bev Hoffman (Sport Fishing alternate) reported that she would be attending the Pacific States Marine Fishery Commission in Anchorage. She also commented on her concern that the August 21 commercial opening would be fishing on fish needed for escapement.
- Mike Williams Sr. (Lower River Subsistence) suggested that Bev Hoffman request the possibility of declaring a disaster season for chum and coho salmon to the Pacific States Marine Fishery Commission.

## **WORKING GROUP ATTENDANCE:**

<b>MEMBER SEAT:</b>	<b>NAME:</b>
DOWNRIVER ELDER	James Charles
UPRIVER ELDER	Absent
LOWER RIVER SUBSISTENCE	Mike Williams- 10:30am
MIDDLE RIVER SUBSISTENCE	Dave Cannon
UPRIVER SUBSISTENCE	Mark Leary
HEADWATERS SUBSISTENCE	Dan Esai
MEMBER AT LARGE	Absent
WESTERN INTERIOR RAC	Ray Collins
YK DELTA RAC	Absent
COMMERCIAL FISHING	Charlie Brown- 10:30am
SPORT FISHING	LaMont Albertson
PROCESSOR	Henry Mitchell
ADF&G	Aaron Poetter
CHAIR	Bev Hoffman

## **Other Participants:**

ADF&G Comm. Fish: Aaron Poetter, Brittany Blain, Chris Shelden, Jan Conitz, John Linderman, Jen Peeks

Sport Fishing: John Chythlook, Tom Taube

Subsistence Division: Odin Miller, Hiroko Ikuta

USFWS: Aaron Webber, Ken Harper

OSM:

Dan Gillikin (NVN)

Jonathon Samuelson (Georgetown)

Bill Bechtol (AVCP)

Lisa Feyereisen (Middle River Subsistence alternate)

## **GLOSSARY OF ABBREVIATIONS:**

Alaska Department of Fish and Game (**ADF&G**), Orutsararmiut Native Council (**ONC**), 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**), Law Enforcement (**LE**), Inter-Tribal Fish Commission (**ITFC**), Native Village of Napaimute (**NVN**)

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