

Kuskokwim River Salmon Management Working Group

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

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

March 30-31, 2017

Meeting called to order at 9:00 a.m. on Thursday March 30, 2017; broke for lunch between 12:20 p.m. and 1:24 p.m.; recessed at 5:20 p.m. Meeting reconvened on Friday March 31, 2017 at 9:00 a.m. and adjourned at 12:50 p.m. Meeting time was approximately 11 hours. Ten full voting members were present and a quorum was established.

AGENDA ITEMS:

People to be Heard:

Agency Presentations:

- Commercial Processor
- CSRI Genetics
- Subsistence Division projects
- Community-Based projects
- Commercial Fish Division projects

2017 Fishery Management:

- Board of Fish (BOF) Actions
- 2017 Chinook Salmon Forecast
- Discussion on Specific Management Actions for 2017
- Update on Kuskokwim River Partnership Project

Working Group Business:

- Discussion of Co-Chair Letter that was Distributed
- Election of Co-Chairs
- Discussion of Vacant Seats
- Discussion of Adding Kuskokwim River Inter-Tribal Fish Commission Seats to the Working Group
- Working Group InSeason Meeting Schedule

Miscellaneous:

- SB 92– Derelict Vessels

WORKING GROUP ACTION ITEMS: *No Action Items at the time of this meeting.*

WORKING GROUP MOTIONS:

1. Approve the agenda as amended. *Passed (Unanimous)*
2. Start early closure on May 20, 2017, for Sections 1 & 2 with Sections 3, 4 and 5 closing in five day increments (e.g., May 25, 30, June 4), with a contingency that if the river has not broken up by May 20 the Working Group can reconsider the closure date. *Passed (Unanimous)*
3. Recess the meeting until March 31, 2017, at 9:00 a.m. *Passed (Unanimous)*
4. To add *Miscellaneous Items: SB 92– Derelict Vessels* to the meeting agenda. *Passed (Unanimous)*
5. To allow two 12-hour openings per week during the early season closure, up until June 1, 2017. *Failed (6 yeas, 4 nays)*
6. Accept 5AAC 07.365 Kuskokwim River Salmon Management Plan, Section (3) (C): “*notwithstanding (c) (3) (A) of this section, before June 12 the commissioner shall, by emergency order, open at least one fishing period per week with four inch or smaller mesh gillnets; the gillnet may only be operated as a set gillnet and no part of the set gillnet may be more than 100 feet from the ordinary high water mark.*” *Passed (Unanimous)*
7. Support the closure of the tributaries (i.e., Kwethluk, Kisaralik, Kasigluk, Tuluksak and Aniak Rivers) to gillnet fishing. *Passed (Unanimous)*
8. Support the use of live release gear including fish wheels, dipnets, beach seines and hook and line. *Passed (Unanimous)*

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9. Support the continuation of the recommended Federal Advisory Committee Act (FACA) process. *Passed (Unanimous)*
10. For Dave Cannon, Barbara Carlson, Bev Hoffman and Dan Esai to represent the Working Group throughout the FACA process. *Passed (Unanimous)*
11. To request that the Kuskokwim River Inter-Tribal Fish Commission appoint a representative to join the Kuskokwim River Salmon Management Working Group once a seat has been created. *Passed (Unanimous)*
12. The KRSMWG will meet weekly during the 2017 inseason on Wednesdays from 10:00 a.m.–12:00 p.m. *Passed (Unanimous)*
13. Support SB 92 [addresses derelict vessels]; and direct the Working Group Co-Chairs to draft a letter of support. *Passed (Unanimous)*
14. To adjourn the meeting at 12:50 p.m. on March 31, 2017. *Passed (Unanimous)*

PEOPLE TO BE HEARD:

- Evon Waska: Mr. Waska commented that people from the villages rely on subsistence foods and that people hurt during closures. He suggested that there be setnet opportunities to allow people to get fish for their table. Mr. Waska also stated his concerns regarding the Donlin Gold mine.
- Scott Kelly (ADF&G, Director of Commercial Fisheries): Mr. Kelly addressed members' concerns regarding future commercial openers, noting the importance of taking Working Group recommendations into consideration. Several members requested that the preliminary pre-season Chinook salmon fishery forecast be available to the public earlier than in previous years.

AGENCY PRESENTATIONS

- **Commercial Processor:** James Gonzalez from Pacific Harvest Seafood (PHS) discussed their plan to buy Kuskokwim River coho salmon during the 2017 fishing season with 1–2 tenders located below Bethel. Mr. Gonzalez commented that PHS was a fresh market operation and all fish would be processed on the processing vessel stationed in Bethel.
- **CSRI Genetics:** Kyle Shedd (ADF&G) summarized the findings from the Chinook Salmon Research Initiative project. The study examined 12 indicator stocks with the goal to better understand stock of origin within commercial salmon fisheries. He commented that, although there were no directed king salmon fisheries in Western Alaska, king salmon were incidentally caught during directed sockeye, pink and coho salmon fisheries. Mr. Shedd reported that due to budget cuts there was only one year of data available for the Chignik and South Peninsula samples. Mr. Shedd reported that the majority of the 12,000 fish harvested from that region were of southern stocks; 2,500 were from stocks ranging from the Norton Sound to Bristol Bay region. (*For more information on Mr. Shedd's presentation, please visit: <http://www.adfg.alaska.gov/static/regulations/regprocess/fisheriesboard/pdfs/2016-2017/kodiak/FMS16-11.pdf>*)
- **Subsistence Division projects:** Lisa Olson (ADF&G) provided an overview of the Subsistence Division's role within ADF&G. Dave Runfola (ADF&G) summarized the inseason subsistence salmon feasibility projects in the Lower and Middle Kuskokwim River. The lower river project worked with local subsistence fishers to record harvest and fishing effort in order to provide an inseason index of harvest and catch rates. The middle river project examined fishing effort, similar to the information gathered in the lower river project, and recorded households' qualitative assessments regarding meeting their salmon subsistence needs.

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- **Community-Based projects:** Joe Spaeder (Bering Sea Fisheries Association) presented on using existing projects to improve stock assessment while building capacity. These projects would seek to maximize community engagement. Janessa Esquible (ONC) discussed ONC's role with subsistence salmon survey efforts and ASL data collection in the lower river during the 2017 inseason.
- **Commercial Fish Division projects:** Zach Liller (ADF&G) presented information on the Kuskokwim River projects and assessments. Mr. Liller provided an overview of the Kuskokwim River Sonar Project located below Kwethluk. The sonar project would help to provide reliable and timely inseason abundance estimates and total run and escapement estimates for all Kuskokwim River fish species. Mr. Liller provided an overview of the Kuskokwim Management Area 2016 salmon escapement data and reviewed the Chinook salmon age and sex data. He discussed the 2016 run reconstruction model results, consideration of the mark-recapture studies in regards to the model and summarized model reviews and updates. ADF&G relied on an inter-agency review team to evaluate the run reconstruction model and to make recommendations for future improvement.

2017 FISHERY MANAGEMENT

- **Board of Fish (BOF) Actions:** Lisa Olson (ADF&G) summarized the 2017 BOF actions on Proposals 275, 276 and 279. Proposal 275, which would have created a Tier II subsistence king salmon fishery in the Kuskokwim River, failed to pass. Proposal 276, which would establish a permit system for regulating a king salmon subsistence fishery during times of low king salmon runs, passed with amended language. Proposal 279, which clarified when 4-inch mesh set gillnets may be used during the early season king salmon subsistence fishery closure, passed with amended language. *(For more information on Proposals 275, 276 and 279 please visit: <http://www.adfg.alaska.gov/index.cfm?adfg=fisheriesboard.meetinginfo>)*
- **2017 Chinook Salmon Forecast:** Aaron Poetter (ADF&G) provided an overview of the 2017 Chinook salmon forecast. The run reconstruction model indicated that the 2017 Chinook salmon forecast was between 132,000–222,000 fish. He commented that the mark-recapture data would be incorporated as an independent source that would help inform the management strategy for the 2017 Chinook salmon fishery. Zach Liller commented that, to date, the mark-recapture study was not ready to be formally incorporated into the run reconstruction model. Mr. Poetter commented that Kuskokwim River Chinook salmon remained in a re-building phase.
Bill Bechtol (KRITFC) presented his independent assessment of the Kuskokwim River Chinook salmon run reconstruction and the potential effects of including mark-recapture data.
- **Discussion on Specific Management Actions for 2017:**
 - **Date to begin early season closure:**
Aaron Poetter summarized the 2016 early closure implementation and dates. The 2017 closure date was discussed among the Working Group members. *(See Motion 2 on page 5)*
 - **Use of 4-inch mesh gillnets during early season closure:**
Working Group members discussed concerns regarding the use of 4" mesh gillnets to target Chinook salmon. Some members commented that residents would like an opportunity for a "taste of fresh fish" during the early closure. Mike Williams Sr. (Lower River Subsistence) commented that two openings per week would be sufficient. Members commented that Chinook salmon conservation was still important. *(See Motions 5 and 6 on page 5)*
 - **Tributary closures:** *(See Motion 7 on page 5)*
 - **Use of live release gear:** *(See Motion 8 on page 5)*

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- **Update on Kuskokwim River Partnership Project:** Ken Stahlnecker (USFWS) provided an overview of the Kuskokwim River Partnership Project process. Phase one had focused on formalizing the management relationship between USFWS and KRITFC. Phase two would expand the management relationship to include non-tribal interests on the river. A planning committee was formed in November 2016 by the regional USFWS office to review Phase 2 options and work toward creating a group that would go through the Federal Advisory Committee Act (FACA) approval process. This FACA approved group would be structured to advise the USFWS and the State of Alaska in fishery management issues. Aaron Poetter commented that a FACA approved group would satisfy the Board of Fish requirement for an inseason Kuskokwim River fishery advisory committee. Working Group members provided suggestions on the overall structure of the proposed group and requested additional Working Group member representation on the planning committee. *(See Motions 9 and 10 on page 5).*

WORKING GROUP BUSINESS:

- **Discussion of Co-Chair Letter that was distributed:** Bev Hoffman (Sport Fishing, Co-Chair) summarized the Co-Chair letter, which was sent to Commissioner Cotton and ADF&G Kuskokwim Area Fishery Management staff, to address Co-Chair concerns regarding fish management decisions and communication. Ms. Hoffman informed the Working Group that the letter resulted in a meeting with Commissioner Cotton and others. Some Working Group members expressed concern over the lack of consultation by the Co-Chairs with all Working Group members regarding the content and distribution of the letter. Members discussed the desired process for addressing future issues that are on behalf of the Working Group. Some members commented that it was important for all Working Group members to have opportunity to provide input on future documents and exchanges that occur on behalf of the Working Group members. Working Group members agreed to work toward improving communication and transparency within the group.
- **Election of Co-Chairs:** LaMont Albertson (Sport Fishing), Barbara Carlson (Upriver Subsistence alternate & Member At Large alternate), Fritz Charles (Member At Large) and Bev Hoffman (Sport Fishing alternate) were nominated as Working Group Co-Chairs.
- **Discussion of Vacant Seats:** *This item was postponed to the next Working Group meeting, which will be at the call of the Co-Chairs.*
- **Discussion of Adding Kuskokwim River Inter-Tribal Fish Commission Seats to the Working Group:** *(See Motion 11 on page 6)*
- **Working Group InSeason Meeting Schedule:** *(See Motion 12 on page 6)*

MISCELLANIOUS ITEMS:

- **SB 92– Derelict Vessels:** Greg Roczicka (Lower River Subsistence alternate & YK Delta RAC alternate) summarized SB 92 and commented on local concerns regarding derelict vessels. *(See Motion 13 on page 6)*

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WORKING GROUP MOTIONS:

1. Approve the agenda as amended. Passed (Unanimous)

ADF&G Sonar Project presentation was included under *Commercial Fish Division projects*; Bill Bechtol's Kuskokwim River Inter-Tribal Fish Commission presentation was included under the *2017 Chinook Salmon Forecast. Miscellaneous Items* was added to the agenda with discussion item *Senate Bill (SB) 92*.

2. Start early closure on May 20, 2017 for Sections 1 & 2 with Section 3, 4 and 5 closing in five day increments (e.g., May 25, 30, June 4), with a contingency that if the river is not broken up by May 20 the Working Group can reconsider the closure date. Passed (Unanimous)

Working Group members discussed historical fishing practices following breakup. Different sections of the river were considered in regards to run-timing. Uncertainty of the 2017 breakup date was noted by several Working Group members.

3. Recess the meeting until March 31, 2017 at 9:00 am. Passed (Unanimous)

4. To add Miscellaneous Items: SB92– Derelict Vessels to the meeting agenda. Passed (Unanimous)

5. To allow two 12-hour openings per week during the early season closure, up until June 1, 2017.

Failed (6 yeas, 4 nays)

A few members commented that two openers per week were too many during the early closure. Mike Williams Sr. commented that prior to May 30, near Akiak, there were few king salmon and two periods a week would not negatively impact whitefish.

6. Accept 5AAC 07.365 Kuskokwim River Salmon Management Plan, Section (3) (C):“notwithstanding (c) (3) (A) of this section, before June 12 the commissioner shall, by emergency order, open at least one fishing period per week with four inch or smaller mesh gillnets; the gillnet may only be operated as a set gillnet and no part of the set gillnet may be more than 100 feet from the ordinary high water mark.” Passed (Unanimous)

7. Support the closure of the tributaries (i.e., Kwethluk, Kisaralik, Kasigluk, Tuluksak and Aniak Rivers) to gillnet fishing. Passed (Unanimous)

John Chythlook (ADF&G) reported that, effective May 1, 2017; the Sport Fish Division would close sport fishing to king salmon throughout the entire Kuskokwim River drainage including tributaries. Aaron Poetter clarified that the subsistence tributary closure would be for gillnet fishing only. LaMont Albertson (Sport Fishing) commented that there were several non-salmon spawning tributaries on the Aniak River where subsistence fishing should be allowed. A few members commented that physical markers would be helpful for fishers.

8. Support the use of live release gear including fish wheels, dipnets, beach seines and hook and line. Passed (Unanimous)

Bob Aloysius (YK Delta RAC) suggested that barbless hooks be required for hook and line use. Aaron Poetter commented that the use of barbless hooks would remain at the discretion of each fisher. Several members discussed the use of dipnets.

9. Support the continuation of the recommended Federal Advisory Committee Act (FACA) process. Passed (Unanimous)

10. For Dave Cannon, Barbara Carlson, Bev Hoffman and Dan Esai to represent the Working Group throughout the FACA process. Passed (Unanimous)

Some Working Group members were concerned that the planning committee developing the FACA group did not have sufficient Working Group representation. Working Group representatives were chosen based on their willingness to participate and their limited conflict of interests with other groups or organizations.

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11. To request that the Kuskokwim River Inter-Tribal Fish Commission appoint a representative to join the Kuskokwim River Salmon Management Working Group once a seat has been created.
Passed (Unanimous)
12. The KRSMWG will meet weekly during the 2017 in-season on Wednesdays from 10:00 a.m.– 12:00 p.m. *Passed (Unanimous)*
13. Support SB 92 [addresses derelict vessels]; and direct the Working Group Co-Chairs to draft a letter of support. *Passed (Unanimous)*
14. To adjourn the meeting at 12:50 p.m. on March 31, 2017. *Passed (Unanimous)*

COMMENTS FROM THE WORKING GROUP:

- **Fritz Charles:** Mr. Charles discussed changes to his employment schedule and concerns regarding full attendance during the 2017 inseason. He commented that 2017 fishing may be challenging and encouraged teamwork.
Mr. Charles thanked the Working Group participants for their efforts and commented that it was important to be optimistic.
- **Mike Williams Sr.:** Mr. Williams had requested to be excused during the March 30, 2017 afternoon meeting session.
Mr. Williams thanked the collaborative management efforts and commented that he looked forward to a productive summer.
- **LaMont Albertson:** Mr. Albertson thanked the ADF&G and USFWS staff for their continued work.
- **Bob Aloysius:** Mr. Aloysius requested that Working Group materials be mailed to him or faxed to the Kalskag Tribal office.
- **Barbara Carlson:** Ms. Carlson thanked the meeting attendees for the work that they accomplished.
- **Greg Roczicka:** Mr. Roczicka commented that he looked forward to the state and federal collaborative processes during the 2017 season.
- **Ray Collins:** Mr. Collins thanked the Working Group members and ADF&G staff for a good meeting.
- **Aaron Poetter:** Mr. Poetter thanked the Working Group participants for their input. Mr. Poetter reported that he was the Working Group contact during the off-season. He reminded the group that processes were in place for information dissemination and consensus building in regards to the Kuskokwim area fisheries.
- **Nick Kameroff:** Mr. Kameroff thanked ADF&G and USFWS staff and commented that he looked forward to the 2017 fishing season.
- **Greg Hoffman Jr:** Mr. Hoffman commented that he looked forward to possible commercial fishing opportunities during the 2017 season.
- **John Andrew:** Mr. Andrew thanked the Working Group members and ADF&G staff. He commented that in the past it was difficult representing the villages and he appreciated the processes in place. He commented that there was a derelict barge in front of his community of Kwethluk and several abandoned fishing boats that were of concern to local residents.
- **Dan Esai:** Mr. Esai thanked the Working Group participants for their involvement in the meeting.
- **Dave Cannon:** Mr. Cannon discussed the importance of conservation and commented that he looked forward to the 2017 summer season. He also appreciated the continuity of Working Group members.
- **Bev Hoffman:** Ms. Hoffman commented on the need to remind community members of the importance of conservation and to share Working Group motions and discussion items with the public.

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WORKING GROUP ATTENDANCE:

MEMBER SEAT:	NAME:
DOWNRIVER ELDER	John Andrew
UPRIVER ELDER	<i>Vacant</i>
LOWER RIVER SUBSISTENCE	Mike Williams Sr./ <i>Greg Roczicka (March 30 afternoon)</i>
MIDDLE RIVER SUBSISTENCE	Dave Cannon
UPRIVER SUBSISTENCE	Barbara Carlson
HEADWATERS SUBSISTENCE	Dan Esai
MEMBER AT LARGE	Fritz Charles
WESTERN INTERIOR RAC	Ray Collins
YK DELTA RAC	Bob Aloysius
COMMERCIAL FISHING	Greg Hoffman Jr.
SPORT FISHING	LaMont Albertson
PROCESSOR	<i>Vacant</i>
ADF&G	Aaron Poetter
CHAIR	Bev Hoffman

Other Participants:

ADF&G Comm. Fish: Scott Kelly, John Linderman, Charles Brazil, Aaron Tiernan, Zach Liller, Kyle Shedd, Jordan Head, Nick Smith, Jen Peeks

Sport Fish Division: John Chythlook, Tim Viavant

Subsistence Division: Lisa Olson, Dave Runfola, Chris McDevitt

USFWS: Ken Stahlnecker, Ray Born, Aaron Webber

OSM: Gary Decossas

Media: Lisa Demer (ADN), Anna Rose MacArthur (KYUK)

Dan Gillikin (Napaimute)

Jennifer Hooper (AVCP)

Pat Samson (Yupik Translator)

Kate Schaberg (Georgetown)

Janessa Esquible (ONC)

Bill Bechtol (KRITFC)

Janelle Carl

Orrie Reich (KRITFC)

James Gonzalez (Pacific Harvest Seafood)

Evan Waska

Jamie Gonzalez (Pacific Harvest Seafood)

GLOSSARY OF ABBREVIATIONS:

Alaska Department of Fish and Game (**ADF&G**), Orutsarmiut 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**), Law Enforcement (**LE**), Kuskokwim River Inter-Tribal Fish Commission (**KRITFC**)

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