

Kuskokwim River Salmon Management Working Group

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

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

May 31, 2017

Meeting called to order at 10:02 a.m. on Wednesday May 31, 2017 and adjourned at 12:45 p.m. Meeting time was approximately 2 hours and 45 minutes. Eight full voting members were present and a quorum was established.

AGENDA ITEMS:

Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ADF&G) Management Actions Under Consideration:

People to be Heard:

Continuing Business: Run assessment and management actions.

Old Business Discussion Topics:

- Update on the FACA group's progress
- Discussion of Working Group vacant seats and alternates
- Amend Working Group By-Laws to include a KRITFC seat
- Update on the Working Group exchange program

New Business Discussion Topics:

- Discussion on the NCEAS meeting, March 8&9, 2017

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

WORKING GROUP MOTIONS:

1. Approve the agenda. *Passed (Unanimous)*
2. Support a 4" mesh set gillnet opening on the main stem of the Kuskokwim River on Saturday June 3, 2017 from 9:00 a.m. to 9:00 p.m. *Passed (Unanimous)*
3. To extend the Working Group meeting until 12:30 p.m. *Passed (Unanimous)*
4. Elect Charles Guest to replace Mary Peltola on the Working Group as a Member At Large alternate. *Passed (Unanimous)*
5. Elect Alissa Rogers to the Working Group as a Lower River Subsistence alternate. *Passed (Unanimous)*
6. Amend the Working Group By-Laws to include one representative from the Kuskokwim River Inter-Tribal Fish Commission (KRITFC) to serve as a voting member on the Working Group. *Passed (Unanimous)*
7. To extend the Working Group meeting until 12:45 p.m. *Passed (Unanimous)*
8. Adjourn at 12:45 p.m. *Passed (Unanimous)*

ADF&G MANAGEMENT ACTIONS UNDER CONSIDERATION: Aaron Poetter (ADF&G Area Management Biologist) reported that the Kuskokwim River was closed to subsistence fishing with gillnets from the YK Delta Refuge boundary near Aniak to the boundary near the mouth of the Kuskokwim River. Additional closures would occur on June 1 and June 4 in the upper portions of the river. ADF&G was considering 4" mesh setnet opportunities to comply with the Board of Fish management regulations.

PEOPLE TO BE HEARD:

- Alissa Rogers from Bethel informed the Working Group of her interest in becoming an alternate member on the Working Group.
- Charles Guest from Bethel commented that he had set his net in Straight Slough on May 27 for ~11 hours. He reported that people in Kasigluk had observed fewer whitefish than in previous years.

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- Gerald Kameroff from Kalskag reported that during the May 27 subsistence opener few people had set nets. Of those who fished, he commented that few people caught fish. He observed low water and limited places to set nets. He added that some of the communities were running out of fuel.

SUBSISTENCE REPORTS:

- **Lowest River:** Charlie Brown (Commercial Fisher) commented that he noticed a decline in song birds in the Eek area. Mr. Brown reported that no salmon had been harvested to date from his area and some residents wanted to harvest herring.
- **ONC Subsistence Report:** Janessa Esquible (ONC) reported that ONC was distributing Bethel Test Fishery (BTF) fish to Elders, the disabled and widowed residents. ONC was scheduled to start fish camp surveys on June 8.
- **Lower River:** Mike Williams Sr. (Lower River Subsistence) reported that residents had harvested smelt and had caught two chum salmon in setnets prior to the May 20 closure. During the May 27 subsistence opener no king salmon were caught and fishers averaged 3–4 whitefish per net. Mr. Williams commented that the amount of fish being caught could not sustain the local dog teams. Mr. Williams reported that some residents commented that the May 20 closure in the lower river was too early. Mary Peltola (Member at Large) reported that her family caught no fish during the May 27 subsistence opener and that other people indicated low harvest numbers. John Andrew (Downriver Elder alternate) commented that he had not observed many smelt during the 2017 season. During the May 27 opener, he observed few people fishing on the mainstem of the river. Mr. Andrew reported that many of the lakes where people set whitefish nets were muddy or dry. He commented that many people were waiting for more fish in the river in order to go fishing.
- **Middle River:** Dave Cannon (Middle River Subsistence) reported that a king salmon had been caught near Aniak a few days prior to May 31. He commented that people were catching Sheefish with rod and reel and that the water was exceptionally low. Lisa Feyereisen (Middle River Subsistence alternate) commented that people had caught Sheefish, pike and whitefish in their setnets. Nick Kameroff (Middle River Subsistence alternate) commented that there had been a lot of Sheefish in the river prior to the fishing closure. Bob Aloysius (YK Delta RAC) commented that there were “fish robbers” in his area so people were hesitant to leave their nets unattended. He commented that fish have their own way of traveling when the water is clear and low.
- **Upriver:** Mark Leary (Upriver Subsistence) reported that one large king salmon had been caught near Chuathbaluk around May 29. He commented that he traveled from Bethel to Napaimute on May 27 and observed few people participating in the subsistence opener. Barbara Carlson (Upriver Subsistence alternate) reported that her fishwheel had been operating for one week and had caught a king salmon on May 30, which was live released back into the river. She commented that the river was low and clear.
- **Headwaters:** Dan Esai (Headwaters Subsistence) reported that some people were damaging their lower boat units due to the low river water and that snow melt from the Alaska Range may increase the water level. Ray Collins (Western Interior RAC) commented (prior to the meeting) that the water level was low and, to date, there were no king salmon. He reported that there were no nets out in his area and the water was clear.

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CONTINUING BUSINESS:

1. **Overview of Kuskokwim River Salmon Run Assessment Projects:** Zach Liller (ADF&G Research Biologist) reported that, as of May 31, staff was transitioning into the field and installing the research projects. He commented that during the 2017 inseason ADF&G and USFWS would collaboratively produce a daily assessment document that would be available to the public. *(For more information on the 2017 inseason projects, please see the May 31 Informational Packet).*
 - **Bethel Test Fish:** Mr. Liller reported that early season operations began on May 25, 2017 and would run through ~August 20. Species information would be collected on Chinook, chum, sockeye and coho salmon.
 - **Aniak Test Fish:** ATF would be operated by the Native Village of Napaimute (NVN). The project was scheduled to operate from June 1 to July 15. CPUE information would be collected on Chinook, chum and sockeye salmon.
 - **Sonar:** The 2017 season would be the first year of full sonar operation. The project was scheduled to operate from June 1 to July 26. Daily estimates would be collected for Chinook, chum, and sockeye salmon and whitefish.
 - **ASL:** Age, sex and length (ASL) data would be collected from fishers near Bethel and in the lower river.
 - **Weirs:** A total of nine weirs were scheduled to operate during the 2017 season.
 - **Radio Tagging Project:** Radio tagging operations began on May 28 and were scheduled to run until July 20. The project's goal was to estimate the total number of Chinook salmon that passed through that particular location of the river and collect information on distribution, migration speed and run timing of Chinook salmon. The tagging lottery would operate during the 2017 season.
 - **Subsistence Harvest Surveys:** Several local entities would be conducting inseason subsistence fishing harvest surveys throughout the 2017 inseason in the lower and middle portions of the river.
2. **Processor:** Aaron Poetter reported that there was no additional processor information to date.
3. **Sport Fishing:** John Chythlook (ADF&G, Sport Fish Division) reported that, effective May 1, the Kuskokwim River drainage was closed to sport fishing for king salmon. Some Working Group members expressed concern regarding jet boats on the Aniak River.
4. **Intercept Fishery Report:** No new intercept fishery information was provided.
5. **Discussion of ADF&G Management Consideration and Discussion of Possible Alternatives:** *(See Motion 2)*

OLD BUSINESS:

- **Update on the FACA group's progress:** Aaron Poetter reported that the FACA group continued to work on a draft charter. Barbara Carlson commented on the importance of Working Group members to provide their input during the FACA process.
- **Discussion of Working Group vacant seats and alternates:** *(See Motions 4 & 5)*
- **Amend Working Group By-Laws to include a KRITFC seat:** *(See Motion 6)*
- **Update on Working Group exchange program:** Jen Peeks (ADF&G, Working Group Coordinator) provided an overview of the Working Group Exchange Program that was discussed in 2014. Working Group members were supportive of the program and requested that further discussion be tabled to a later date.

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NEW BUSINESS:

- **Discussion on the NCEAS meeting, March 8&9:** LaMont Albertson (Sport Fish/ Co-Chair) commented that the National Center for Ecological Analysis and Synthesis (NCEAS) had grant money available for projects that supported ecological research. Mike Williams Sr. commented that NCEAS had formed a working group to discuss informational needs and research options for the AYK region.

WORKING GROUP MOTIONS:

1. Approve the agenda. Passed (Unanimous)
2. Support a 4" mesh set gillnet opening on the main stem of the Kuskokwim River on Saturday June 3, 2017 from 9:00 a.m. to 9:00 p.m. Passed (Unanimous)
3. To extend the Working Group meeting until 12:30 p.m. Passed (Unanimous)
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COMMENTS FROM THE WORKING GROUP:

- Mark Leary commented that he was interested in learning about regional differences in fish processing practices along the river. Mr. Leary expressed concern regarding the May 30 USFWS announcement for a 6" mesh gillnet subsistence opportunity on June 12, commenting that the announcement may be too far in advance. LaMont Albertson responded that the USFWS could rescind the opportunity if BTF indicated a weaker than expected run. Mary Peltola commented that the KRITFC supported the early announcement.
- Charlie Brown reported that people in the Eek area requested that regulatory markers be made with both English and Yupik text.

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WORKING GROUP ATTENDANCE:

MEMBER SEAT:	NAME:
DOWNRIVER ELDER	John W. Andrew
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	Mary Peltola
WESTERN INTERIOR RAC	Absent
YK DELTA RAC	Bob Aloysius
COMMERCIAL FISHING	Charlie Brown
SPORT FISHING	LaMont Albertson
PROCESSOR	<i>Vacant</i>
ADF&G	Aaron Poetter
CHAIR	LaMont Albertson

Other Participants:

ADF&G Comm. Fish: Aaron Poetter, Aaron Tiernan, Zach Liller, Chuck Brazil, Jen Peeks

Sport Fishing: John Chythlook

Subsistence Division: Dave Runfola

Commissioner's Office:

USFWS: Ken Stahlnecker, Lew Coggins, Ben Staton, Aaron Webber, Frank Harris

OSM: Eva Patton, Gary Decossas

Janessa Esquible (ONC)	Dan Gillikin (NVN)	<u>WG Alternates:</u> Greg Hoffman Jr. Lisa Feyereisen Barbara Carlson Nick Kameroff
Alissa Rogers (ONC)	Jennifer Hooper (AVCP)	
Charles Guest (ONC)	Gerald Kameroff (Kalskag)	
Ben Anderson (ONC)	<u>Media:</u> Anna Rose MacArthur	
Jim Simon (Independent Consultant)	(KYUK)	

GLOSSARY OF ABBREVIATIONS:

Alaska Department of Fish and Game (**ADF&G, department, State**), 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**), Kuskokwim River Inter-Tribal Fish Commission (**KRITFC**)

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