

Kuskokwim River Salmon Management Working Group

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

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

June 7, 2017

Meeting called to order at 10:03 a.m. on Wednesday June 7, 2017 and adjourned at 12:40 p.m. Meeting time was approximately 2 hours and 40 minutes. Eleven full voting members were present and a quorum was established.

AGENDA ITEMS:

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

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Management Actions:

People to be Heard:

Continuing Business: Run assessment and management actions.

Old Business Discussion Topics: N/A

New Business Discussion Topics: N/A

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. To extend the Working Group meeting until 12:30 p.m. *Passed (Unanimous)*
3. To hold the next Working Group meeting on Saturday June 10, 2017 beginning at 10:00 a.m. *Passed (9 yeas, 2 nays)*
4. Support a 12-hour 4" mesh set gillnet subsistence opportunity on the mainstem of the Kuskokwim River on Saturday June 10, 2017. *Passed (10 yeas, 1 nay)*
5. To extend the Working Group meeting an additional 10 minutes [until 12:40 p.m.]. *Passed (Unanimous)*
6. Adjourn at 12:40 p.m. *Passed (Unanimous)*

ADF&G MANAGEMENT ACTIONS UNDER CONSIDERATION: Aaron Tiernan (ADF&G Assistant Area Biologist) reported that ADF&G was considering a 4" mesh setnet opportunity for June 10 and requested time and length recommendations from the Working Group. For June 12, Mr. Tiernan announced that ADF&G was considering opening the river from the Holitna River mouth to the headwaters for 6" mesh gillnets until further notice. An opportunity from Aniak to the Holitna River mouth for 6" mesh gillnets was also being considered; however, time and gear restrictions would be determined once additional information from the assessment projects was reviewed.

USFWS MANAGEMENT ACTIONS: Ray Born (USFWS) announced that USFWS would provide a 12-hour 6" mesh gillnet subsistence opportunity for federally qualified users on June 12 within the YK Delta Refuge boundaries of the Kuskokwim River. Some Working Group members expressed concern regarding the low numbers of Chinook salmon observed at the assessment projects to date and the potential effects of a 12-hour opportunity in the lower river. Mr. Born commented that a 12-hour opportunity could provide important Chinook salmon run size data.

PEOPLE TO BE HEARD:

- Bev Hoffman (Bethel) commented on historical data from the Bethel Test Fishery (BTF) and encouraged caution when looking at the numbers. Ms. Hoffman reported that some people were waiting to fish until later in the season to help conserve Chinook salmon. She commented that she felt anxious about the 2017 Chinook salmon run based on the current data from the assessment projects.

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- Moses Pavilla (Bethel) commented that he was hopeful for fishing opportunities during the 2017 season. He commented that, historically, using 6" mesh gillnets would primarily catch females and small jacks.
- Warren Nicolai (Kwethluk/ Bethel) commented that the river was low and that salmon may be able to see the nets. He commented that the fish may be waiting for a south storm to move up the river.
- Bill Bechtol (KRITFC) reported that many people chose not to fish during the June 3 opportunity. Harvest reports from seven interviews he conducted between Tuntutuliak and Akiak included 6 Chinook salmon, 1 chum salmon, 1 Sheefish, and 78 whitefish.

SUBSISTENCE REPORTS:

- **Lowest River:** Charlie Brown (Commercial Fisher) reported that a local fisher caught three whitefish. Mr. Brown commented that he had not participated in the May 27 or June 3 subsistence opportunities due to the gear restrictions. James Charles (Downriver Elder) commented that only one person in his area had a few fish backbones hanging on their fish rack. He commented that people in his area would go fishing during an opener regardless of tidal action.
- **ONC Subsistence Report:** Janessa Esquible (ONC) reported that ONC observed little processing activity along the river on June 5 and June 6. Ms. Esquible commented that on June 12, ONC planned to collect catch and effort information at the Bethel Small Boat Harbor. Charles Guest (Member at Large alternate) commented that people reported catching only whitefish during the June 3 opener.
- **Lower River:** Mike Williams Sr. (Lower River Subsistence) commented that fish camps were "dead" in the Akiak area and people were catching more pike than whitefish. Mr. Williams reported that during the 4" mesh setnet opportunities people harvested a few Chinook and chum salmon along with some Sheefish and whitefish. People in his area had commented that the May 20 closure had been too early and that they were happy for the June 12 opportunity in the lower river that was announced by USFWS. Mary Peltola (Lower River Subsistence alternate) reported that her family caught one whitefish on June 3. Alissa Rogers (Lower River Subsistence alternate) provided reports from several fishers in the lower river, all who indicated low harvest rates. She commented that some Elders were concerned that the fish would pass through the river before people had an opportunity to harvest them.
- **Middle River:** Dave Cannon (Middle River Subsistence) commented that water continued to be low and clear in the middle river. Bob Aloysius (YK Delta RAC) reported that people were waiting until the June 12 opportunity to fish.
- **Upriver:** Mark Leary (Upriver Subsistence) reported that the fishwheel was ready for use. Mr. Leary had observed eels dying on the beach, which he remarked was unusual. Barbara Carlson (Upriver Subsistence alternate) commented that the Sleetmute fishwheel had caught a few Bering cisco and some Sheefish. Ms. Carlson commented that people were also using hook and line to harvest Sheefish.
- **Headwaters:** Dan Esai (Headwaters Subsistence) reported that the water had risen ~3 feet and that it remained too clear for setnets. He commented that Elders had reported that the salmon had arrived. Ray Collins (Western Interior RAC) commented that people were waiting until June 12 to use their gillnets.

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CONTINUING BUSINESS:

1. **Overview of Kuskokwim River Salmon Run Assessment Projects:** Zach Liller (ADF&G Research Biologist) announced that the Southern Bering Sea Juvenile Chinook Salmon Survey project had been recommended for funding. *(For more information on the 2017 inseason projects, please see the June 7 Informational Packet).*
 - **Bethel Test Fish:** As of June 5, the Chinook salmon cumulative CPUE was five. Chinook salmon remained the most abundant salmon species in the river.
 - **Aniak Test Fish:** ATF caught its first Chinook salmon on June 4.
 - **Sonar:** Full sonar operation began on June 3; five Chinook salmon had been caught as of June 6.
 - **Radio Tagging Project:** To date, 18 Chinook salmon had been caught in the tagging project and their first chum salmon was caught on June 7.
2. **Sport Fishing:** LaMont Albertson (Sport Fish) commented that people were catching pike in the middle river tributaries.
3. **Intercept Fishery Report:** No new intercept fishery information was provided.
4. **Discussion of ADF&G Management Consideration and Discussion of Possible Alternatives:** *(See Motions 3 & 4).*

OLD BUSINESS: N/A

NEW BUSINESS: N/A

WORKING GROUP MOTIONS:

1. **Approve the agenda as amended. Passed (Unanimous)**
2. **To extend the Working Group meeting until 12:30 p.m. Passed (Unanimous)**
3. **To hold the next Working Group meeting on Saturday June 10, 2017 beginning at 10:00 a.m. Passed (9 yeas, 2 nays)**

Some Working Group members were concerned regarding the June 12 directed Chinook salmon harvest opportunity in federally managed waters due to low Chinook salmon numbers observed at the assessment projects to date. Dave Cannon commented that if Chinook salmon numbers did not increase by June 10, the Working Group could convey their concerns to USFWS regarding harvest opportunity in the lower river. Lew Coggins (USFWS) reported that the assessment information, to date, could not indicate the overall run size and was not compelling enough to reverse the pre-season strategy. He commented that both risks and benefits needed to be considered for the June 12 opportunity.

4. **Support a 12-hour 4" mesh set gillnet subsistence opportunity on the mainstem of the Kuskokwim River on Saturday June 10, 2017. Passed (10 yeas, 1 nay)**

While the majority of Working Group members supported a 12-hour opportunity on June 10, a few members preferred a 24-hour fishing period to allow for more harvest opportunity.

5. **To extend the Working Group meeting an additional 10 minutes [until 12:40 p.m.]. Passed (Unanimous)**
6. **Adjourn at 12:40 p.m. Passed (Unanimous)**

COMMENTS FROM THE WORKING GROUP:

- Mike Williams Sr. reported that people in his area had not harvested many whitefish and did not have anything on their drying racks or in their smokehouses. He commented that the people in his area looked forward to the 6" mesh gillnet opportunity to harvest food for the winter.

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- Lisa Feyereisen commented that it was important for Working Group members to remind people that the purpose of the 12-hour 4" mesh setnet opportunities was to have a "taste of fresh fish," not to fill their smokehouses.

WORKING GROUP ATTENDANCE:

MEMBER SEAT:	NAME:
DOWNRIVER ELDER	James Charles
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	Charles Guest
WESTERN INTERIOR RAC	Ray Collins
YK DELTA RAC	Bob Aloysius
COMMERCIAL FISHING	Charlie Brown
SPORT FISHING	LaMont Albertson
PROCESSOR	<i>Vacant</i>
KRITFC	Nick Kameroff
ADF&G	Aaron Tiernan
CHAIR	LaMont Albertson

Other Participants:

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

Sport Fishing: John Chythlook

Subsistence Division: Lisa Olson, Chris McDevitt

Commissioner's Office:

USFWS: Ray Born, Lew Coggins, Ben Staton

OSM: Pippa Kenner, Gary Decossas

Janessa Esquible (ONC) Tim Andrew (ONC) Alissa Rogers (ONC/ WG alternate) Danielle Lowry (ONC) Jim Simon (Independent Consultant) Gerri Sumpter (Sen. Murkowski's office) Madeline Jovanovich Lucy Harrison Kate Schaberg (GTC)	Dan Gillikin (NVN) Jennifer Hooper (AVCP) Gerald Kameroff (Kalskag) Bill Bechtol (KRITFC) Warren Nicolai (Bethel) Peter Lomack (Akiachak) Albert Kawagley (Bethel) Moses Pavilla (Bethel)	<u>WG Alternates:</u> Greg Hoffman Jr. Lisa Feyereisen Barbara Carlson Mary Peltola
	<u>Media:</u>	

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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