

Kuskokwim River Salmon Management Working Group

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

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

July 5, 2017

Meeting called to order at 10:00 a.m. on Wednesday July 5, 2017 and adjourned at 12:50 p.m. Meeting time was 2 hours and 50 minutes. Ten full voting members were present and a quorum was established.

AGENDA ITEMS:

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

Continuing Business: Run assessment and management actions.

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Management Actions:

People to be Heard:

Old Business Discussion Topics:

- State and federal law enforcement updates and discussion.

New Business Discussion Topics:

- Discussion on how the Working Group fits into the USFWS management plan.

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. Extend the Working Group meeting to 12:30 p.m. *Passed (Unanimous)*
3. Support the ADF&G recommendation to open Section 4 (Refuge boundary at Aniak up to the Holitna River mouth) until further notice for 6" or less mesh gillnets, 45 meshes in depth, and 25 fathoms in length, with a closed box area near Aniak beginning July 8, 2017. *Failed (7 yeas, 3 nays)*
[The Working Group later reconsidered Motion 3. Please see Motion 6 below.]*
4. Extend the Working Group meeting to 12:45 p.m. *Passed (Unanimous)*
5. If the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) decide to have an opening in federal waters, then a similar opening be held in state waters. *Failed (7 yeas, 3 nays)*
6. **[Motion 3 Reconsidered]* Support the ADF&G recommendation to open Section 4 (Refuge boundary at Aniak up to the Holitna River mouth) until further notice for 6" or less mesh gillnets, 45 meshes in depth, and 25 fathoms in length, with a closed box area near Aniak beginning July 8, 2017. *Passed (9 yeas, 1 nay)*
7. Extend the Working Group meeting to 1:00 p.m. *Passed (Unanimous)*
8. Adjourn at 12:59 p.m. *Passed (Unanimous)*

ADF&G MANAGEMENT ACTIONS UNDER CONSIDERATION: Aaron Tiernan (ADF&G Acting Area Biologist) reported that ADF&G was considering opening Section 4 (USFWS refuge boundary at Aniak up to the Holitna River mouth) beginning on July 8, 2017 until further notice with gillnet restrictions of 6" or less mesh and 25 or less fathoms in length. In addition, ADF&G recommended a "closed waters box" near the Aniak River mouth to protect Chinook salmon destined for the Aniak River.

USFWS MANAGEMENT ACTIONS: Ken Stahlnecker (USFWS) reported that USFWS and KRITFC were scheduled to meet on July 6 to discuss management actions; there were no new management actions to date.

PEOPLE TO BE HEARD:

- Pippa Kenner (OSM) explained that the word "opportunity" used throughout the 2017 subsistence fishing season was legal language from Title 8 of ANILCA. She added that the word "opening" was often used in

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reference to commercial fishing. Ms. Kenner acknowledged Norman Ayagalria's concerns from the June 28 Working Group meeting and apologized for any negative connotation the term may have had. (*Please see the June 28 summary for more information on Mr. Ayagalria's comments*).

- Norman Ayagalria (Bethel) responded to Pippa Kenner's explanation of the word "opportunity" with appreciation. Mr. Ayagalria commented that he continued with conservation efforts.
- Dan Gillikin (NVN) commented that he appreciated the ADF&G and USFWS law enforcement efforts.
- Chariton Epchook (Kwethluk) thanked managers for the fishing openings and requested that Kuskokuak Slough be opened for fishing during future openings.
- George Guy (Kwethluk) recommended that Kuskokuak Slough be opened to fishing. He commented that the restrictions created conflict between subsistence users and that harvesting fish for the winter was part of his family's culture and tradition.
- Father Martin Nicholai (Kwethluk) recommended ending the fishing restrictions from Tuluksak down to the Kuskokwim River mouth because the majority of the Chinook salmon had passed through the lower river. He commented that he was happy to have sockeye and chum salmon in his smokehouse.
- Tim Zaukar (Crooked Creek) commented that on July 5 he caught 23 sockeye salmon and 10 chum salmon in the fish wheel. During the July 3 gillnet opportunity he reported that people caught primarily chum salmon and averaged 10 Chinook salmon.
- Bill Bechtol (KRITFC) reported on the community based monitoring program; fishers averaged four Chinook salmon per person. He commented that people were pleased to be fishing and were interested in more setnet opportunities.

SUBSISTENCE REPORTS:

- **Lowest River:** Charlie Brown (Commercial Fisher) reported that he did not fish during the July 1 or July 3 openings due to weather. John Andrew (Downriver Elder) commented that people caught ~15–20 fish; primarily chum salmon and a few sockeye salmon.
- **ONC Subsistence Report:** Alissa Rogers (ONC) reported that for the July 1 and July 3 subsistence openers ONC conducted 83 boat harbor surveys and 29 fish camp surveys. Ms. Rogers commented that fishcamps reported a range in progress toward meeting subsistence goals.
- **Lower River:** Mike Williams Sr. (Lower River Subsistence) reported that people appreciated the July 1 and July 3 fishing opportunities; the majority of people did not fish the full opportunity. Mr. Williams recommended that the Kuskokuak Slough be opened to fishing during subsistence opportunities and for the restrictions from Tuluksak down to the Kuskokwim River mouth to be rescinded to allow people to fish dependent on the weather. Bob Aloysius (YK Delta RAC) commented that he fished in the Bethel area on July 1 and caught 40 large sockeye and chum salmon. Greg Hoffman Jr. (Commercial Fishing alternate) reported that within 20 minutes of fishing his family caught 21 chum, 9 sockeye and 2 Chinook salmon; his family would delay further fishing until the coho salmon season.
- **Middle River:** Dave Cannon (Middle River Subsistence) reported that during the July 3 opening people observed that sockeye salmon numbers had increased and people caught a few Chinook salmon. One person reported incidentally catching ten Chinook salmon with rod and reel that were released. Lisa Feyereisen (Middle River Subsistence alternate) reported that her son fished on July 3 and caught primarily sockeye and chum salmon. She appreciated the law enforcement efforts in the state managed waters.

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- **Upriver:** Mark Leary (Upriver Subsistence) reported that the Napaimute fish wheel was catching several sockeye salmon. Barbara Carlson (Upriver Subsistence alternate) commented that the Sleetmute fish wheel was operating and catching a 1:1 ratio of sockeye to chum salmon; Chinook salmon numbers had decreased. Overall, she commented that people were happy with their harvests and experimenting with different processing techniques such as fewer slabs, more smoke and not fully drying them.
- **Headwaters:** Ray Collins (Western Interior RAC) reported that the total Chinook salmon catch in McGrath as of July 4 was 144; as of July 5 only one net was in the river.

CONTINUING BUSINESS:

1. **Overview of Kuskokwim River Salmon Run Assessment Projects:** Zach Liller (ADF&G Research Biologist) provided an overview of the assessment projects. *(For more information on the 2017 inseason projects, please see the July 5 Informational Packet).*
 - **Bethel Test Fish*:** As of July 4, the Chinook salmon cumulative CPUE was 280 and was tracking above the 2013 run. The 2017 Chinook salmon run appeared later than the historical average run timing. The chum salmon cumulative CPUE was 2,807. The sockeye salmon cumulative CPUE was 966. **(At the time of the July 5 meeting, BTF CPUE estimates were preliminary due to fishing only one tide on July 4.)*
 - **Aniak Test Fish:** The ATF crew began marking live released Chinook salmon by removing their adipose fin after observations indicated that Chinook salmon were staging near the mouth of the Aniak River throughout the 2017 season.
 - **Sonar:** As of July 4, the estimated passage through the sonar project site was ~34,520 Chinook salmon; ~200,460 chum salmon; and ~223,240 sockeye salmon.
 - **Radio Tagging Project:** As of July 4, the total Chinook salmon caught at the radio tagging site was 473. The largest single day catch to date during the 2017 season occurred on July 3. As of June 28, ~42 % of radio tagged fish that had been deployed were upriver from Tuluksak.
 - **Weirs:** The Takotna River weir began operation on July 1, 2017. *(For more information on the 2017 escapement projects, please see the July 5 Informational Packet).*
 - **Subsistence Division Project:** David Runfola (ADF&G, Subsistence Division) reported that lower river fishers were catching primarily chum and sockeye salmon. Middle river fishers indicated they were catching a few Chinook salmon, but primarily chum and sockeye salmon. *(For more information on the 2017 Subsistence Division projects, please see the July 5 Informational Packet).*
2. **Processor:** A processor had registered with ADF&G and was interested in buying 2017 coho salmon from the Kuskokwim River and/or Kuskokwim Bay.
3. **Discussion of ADF&G Management Consideration and Discussion of Possible Alternatives:** Charlie Brown suggested that it may be time to lift the fishing restrictions since the Chinook salmon run was historically completed in the lower river at this time. He was concerned that the Eek River remained closed to gillnets, noting that people from Eek typically fished in the Eek River to conserve boat gas. Dave Cannon commented that conservation was essential and made a motion that there be no gillnet fishing in the Kuskokwim River until July 12; the motion died due to lack of a second.

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OLD BUSINESS:

- **State and federal law enforcement updates and discussion:** Barbara Carlson reminded Working Group members to contact law enforcement if there was suspicion that people were participating in illegal fishing activities rather than taking matters into their own hands or discussing suspicions among other community members. Ms. Carlson added this was important to keep animosity from increasing. Mike Williams Sr. also encouraged people to contact law enforcement if illegal activities were observed.

NEW BUSINESS:

- **Discussion of how the Working Group fits into the USFWS management plan:** Dave Cannon requested clarification on how USFWS incorporates Working Group recommendations into their management decisions. LaMont Albertson (Sport Fishing) commented that during the 2017 season he had observed USFWS and ADF&G collaborating with the Working Group and KRITFC in order to make appropriate management decisions. Ken Stahlnecker (USFWS) reported that USFWS took Working Group recommendations and several other factors under consideration when making management decisions.

WORKING GROUP MOTIONS:

1. Approve the agenda as amended. Passed (Unanimous)
2. Extend the Working Group meeting to 12:30 p.m. Passed (Unanimous)
3. Support the ADF&G recommendation to open Section 4 (Refuge boundary at Aniak up to the Holitna River mouth) until further notice for 6" or less mesh gillnets, 45 meshes in depth, and 25 fathoms in length, with a closed box area near Aniak beginning July 8, 2017. Failed (7 yeas, 3 nays)

[The Working Group later reconsidered Motion 3. Please see Motion 6 below.]*

Mike Williams Sr. commented that people would continue to fish conservatively given the gear restrictions and that the recommendation would provide additional opportunity for those who had not yet been able to fish. Dave Cannon commented that several communities in the middle and upper river had fish wheels that could provide fish to people in need while conserving Chinook salmon. Barbara Carlson commented that she remained concerned regarding the Chinook salmon escapement and that people in her area were catching primarily sockeye and chum salmon.

4. Extend the Working Group meeting to 12:45 p.m. Passed (Unanimous)
5. If the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) decides to have an opening in federal waters, than a similar opening be held in state waters. Failed (7 yeas, 3 nays)
6. *[Motion 3 Reconsidered] Support the ADF&G recommendation to open Section 4 (Refuge boundary at Aniak up to the Holitna River mouth) until further notice for 6" or less mesh gillnets, 45 meshes in depth, and 25 fathoms in length, with a closed box area near Aniak beginning July 8, 2017. Passed (9 yeas, 1 nay)

After further discussion, the Working Group reconsidered *Motion 3*. Some members commented that the harvest pressure in Section 4 would be minimal while others commented that even a limited harvest would negatively impact the Chinook salmon. Mary Peltola discussed challenges within the 2017 management decision making process. Mark Leary commented that the upper river had had limited fishing opportunity during the 2017 season and would not be harvesting many additional fish.

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- 7. Extend the Working Group meeting to 1:00 p.m. Passed (Unanimous)**
- 8. Adjourn at 12:59 p.m. Passed (Unanimous)**

COMMENTS FROM THE WORKING GROUP:

- Bob Aloysius commented that people needed to put in additional effort if they did not want their fish to spoil. He added that, historically, some people would live in their smokehouse to ensure there was always a fire. Mr. Aloysius encouraged people to not depend on the weather but to depend on their own abilities.
- Charlie Brown commented that people depended on dry weather for the drying process and then brought the fish into the smokehouse. He added that people, historically, would live at their fish camp to “babysit” the fish.
- Ray Collins was concerned that people would be dependent on the coho salmon during the 2017 season and hoped there would be a delay in commercial coho salmon openings. He commented that he wanted to discuss using live release gear rather than drift gillnets as a long term management strategy.
- Mary Peltola commented on how people in southeast Alaska processed fish.
- Mark Leary encouraged people to keep fire going while processing fish.
- LaMont Albertson commented that there needed to be more education on the use of all salmon species and that Elders reported that, historically, people did not rely only on Chinook salmon. Mr. Albertson commented that it was also important to consider the impact of climate change.

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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.
MIDDLE RIVER SUBSISTENCE	Dave Cannon
UPRIVER SUBSISTENCE	Mark Leary
HEADWATERS SUBSISTENCE	Absent
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 Tiernan, Zach Liller, Chuck Brazil, Jordan Head, Nick Smith, Jen Peeks

Sport Fishing: John Chythlook, Tim Viavant

Subsistence Division: Lisa Olson, Dave Runfola

USFWS: Ken Stahlnecker, Lew Coggins, Ben Staton

OSM: Frank Harris, Christine Bremmer, Eva Patton

Janessa Esquible (ONC)	Dan Gillikin (NVN)	<u>WG Alternates:</u> Greg Hoffman Jr. Lisa Feyereisen Barbara Carlson Mary Peltola Alissa Rogers
Tim Andrew (ONC)	Chariton Epchook (Kwethluk)	
Jim Simon (BSFA, KRITFC)	Danielle Epchook (Kwethluk)	
Ben Anderson Agimuk (KRITFC)	Avery Hoffman (ONC)	
George Guy (Kwethluk)	Father Martin Nicolai	
Norman Ayagalria (Bethel)	<u>Media:</u>	
Orie Reich (Bethel)		

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**), Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act (**ANILCA**).

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