

Kuskokwim River Salmon Management Working Group

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

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

June 5, 2019

Meeting called to order at 10:06 a.m. on Wednesday June 5, 2019 and adjourned at 12:38 p.m. Meeting time was approximately 2 hours and 30 minutes. Eight full voting members were present and a quorum was established. Alissa N. Rogers chaired the meeting.

AGENDA ITEMS:

USFWS/KRITFC Update:

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:

- Donlin Gold project impact on smelt
- KRITFC escapement goal analysis
- Update on procedure options for conducting off-season Working Group business

New Business Discussion Topics:

- Working Group Coordinator position

WORKING GROUP ACTION ITEMS:

- Distribute maps for the state's Aniak "closed waters' box" and maps for the subsistence fishing sections in the Kuskokwim River. (ADF&G)
- Distribute smelt spawning research document to Working Group members. (Dave Cannon/ADF&G)
- Draft resolution for reduction of harm for smelt. (Dave Cannon/ WG members)

WORKING GROUP MOTIONS:

1. Approve the agenda. *Passed (Unanimous)*
2. To support the USFWS Refuge Manager to include Lower Kalskag and Kalskag in management actions similar to previous years, aligning that area with Section 4 of state waters, beginning June 12. *Passed (Unanimous)*
3. Extend the June 5 Working Group meeting to 12:30 p.m. *Passed (Unanimous)*
4. To support the ADF&G recommendation to open Section 4 and Section 5 on June 12 to 6" mesh or less gillnets until further notice as long as the inseason assessment data continues to follow the current 2019 trends. *Passed (Unanimous)*
5. Table the *KRITFC escapement goal analysis* agenda item and the *update on procedure options for conducting off-season Working Group business* until the next scheduled meeting. *Passed (Unanimous)*
6. Write a letter to thank Jen Peeks for her work with the KRSMWG and offer her well wishes. *Passed (Unanimous)*
7. To schedule the next Working Group meeting for Friday June 14 at 10:00 a.m. *Passed (Unanimous)*
8. Adjourn at 12:38 p.m. *Passed (Unanimous)*

KRITFC/ USFWS UPDATE: Ray Born (USFWS, Refuge Manager) announced that on June 8 subsistence fishing with 6" mesh or less set gillnets would be allowed in federal waters for 12 hours; on June 12, June 15, and June 19 set and drift gillnets would be allowed for 12 hours in federal waters. Gary Decossas (USFWS) summarized the harvest estimates from the June 1 subsistence opening. He reported that an estimated ~190 Chinook salmon were harvested.

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ADF&G MANAGEMENT ACTIONS UNDER CONSIDERATION: Aaron Tiernan (ADF&G, Area Management Biologist) reported that Section 4 of the Kuskokwim River, from the refuge boundary at Aniak upstream to the Holitna River mouth, was scheduled to close to gillnet fishing on June 6; Section 5, the Holitna River mouth upstream to the headwaters, was scheduled to close on June 11. Mr. Tiernan announced that following the early season closure, ADF&G recommended opening Section 5 to the use of 6" or less mesh gillnets, 25 fathoms in length, and 45 meshes in depth until further notice. If inseason assessment data continued to track in a similar pattern as it had to date, ADF&G recommended opening Section 4 using 6" mesh gillnets, 25 fathoms in length, and 45 meshes in depth, until further notice. Mr. Tiernan added that ADF&G recommended maintaining the "closed waters" box" in front of Aniak to protect Aniak River bound Chinook salmon.

PEOPLE TO BE HEARD:

- Beverly Hoffman (Bethel) commented that smelt and other fish species may be impacted by the Donlin Gold project. She commented that she was interested in hearing the discussion by the Working Group and the other management agencies regarding the KRITFC recommended 22,000 Chinook salmon harvest. She asked for clarification on how subsistence harvest was tracked in state waters and if that harvest was included in the KRITFC recommended 22,000 Chinook salmon harvest. She encouraged involvement in the Fish Talk Radio shows with KYUK.
- Anna Rose MacArthur (KYUK) requested that Working Group members provide KYUK with show time preference for airing Fish Talk Radio.
- Dwayne Hoffman (Kalskag) commented that people living in the Kalskag area had difficulty harvesting fish when under the federal management due to their unique fishing area.
- Tim Zaukar (Crooked Creek) commented that a few people in his area had caught Chinook salmon and sheefish.
- Kevin Whitworth (KRITFC) reported that no Chinook salmon had been caught to date in the McGrath area. He commented that people had caught whitefish, sheefish, and pike.

SUBSISTENCE REPORTS:

- **ONC Subsistence Report:** Janessa Esquible (ONC) provided an overview of the ONC inseason harvest monitoring project. *(For more information on the ONC subsistence survey report, please see the June 5, 2019 Informational Packet.)*
- **Lower River:** Mary Peltola (Lower River Subsistence alternate) reported that prior to June 1 her fishing group caught three Chinook salmon; two were caught in a set gillnet and one was caught in a drift gillnet. Alissa N. Rogers (Lower River Subsistence alternate) reported that her family had not started fishing. Robert Lekander (KRITFC) reported that a few people had caught Chinook salmon near the bluff upstream of Bethel. Prior to the closure, Mr. Lekander caught ~seven Chinook salmon; on May 31 he reported catching a "couple" of Chinook salmon. Bob Aloysius (YK Delta RAC) reported that Evon Waska of Bethel had shared a sheefish and part of a Chinook salmon with him. Mike Williams Sr. (Lower River Subsistence) reported that the 2019 state and federal management actions had been confusing for some people. He reported that people in his area had been catching sheefish and minimal catches of Chinook salmon. Mr. Williams commented that on June 1 few people operated set gillnets.
- **Middle River:** Lisa Feyereisen (Middle River Subsistence alternate) reported that one person caught a "jack king", two whitefish, and one sheefish near Kalskag. She commented that a few Chinook salmon had been caught near Aniak.

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- **Upriver:** Mark Leary (Upriver Subsistence) commented that no salmon had been caught near Napaimute. Barbara Carlson (Member at Large alternate) reported that on May 31 she caught a small Chinook salmon in a set gillnet. Also, on May 31 two Chinook salmon were caught in a drift gillnet. People had also caught a “handful of sheefish.” Ms. Carlson commented that she had heard that a Chinook salmon had been caught near Stony River.

CONTINUING BUSINESS:

1. **Overview of Kuskokwim River Salmon Run Assessment Projects:** Ben Gray (ADF&G Assistant Area Management Biologist) provided an overview of the ADF&G assessment projects. *(For more information on the 2019 inseason assessment projects, please see the June 5 Informational Packet).*
 - **Bethel Test Fish:** Mr. Gray reported that as of June 4, the cumulative CPUE at the BTF was 17. Based on historical data, the 2019 Chinook salmon run appeared to be tracking slightly above average at this date in the season. No chum or sockeye salmon had been caught to date in the BTF.
 - **Aniak Test Fish:** The Aniak Test Fishery began operations on June 4 and caught two Chinook salmon on the morning of June 5.
 - **Sonar:** The sonar project began operations on May 31; at the time of the meeting the sonar data was preliminary.
 - **Weirs:** The escapement projects were scheduled to be installed between June 20 and June 25. At the time of the meeting, the weir crews were being trained in Bethel. USFWS commented that the Kwethluk River weir was installed as of May 6; on May 31 one chum salmon passed through the weir.
 - **Subsistence Division project update:** Chris McDevitt (ADF&G Subsistence Division) reported that ADF&G staff traveled between Lower Kalskag and Nikolai conducting outreach and providing information to communities.
2. **Sport Fishing:** LaMont Albertson (Sport Fishing) commented that he had heard of a few people rod and reeling for pike.
3. **Discussion of ADF&G Management considerations and discussion of possible alternatives:** *(Please see Motion 4 on page 3).*

OLD BUSINESS:

- **Donlin Gold project impact on smelt:** Dave Cannon (Aniak) reviewed research that had been conducted regarding Kuskokwim River smelt and the negative impacts on smelt that may occur from the proposed Donlin Gold project. Working Group members discussed options to minimize these impacts. Lisa Feyereisen requested that Mr. Cannon assist in drafting a resolution that would list possible options for harm reduction. Mr. Cannon commented that he would provide a report on the 2014–2015 Rainbow Smelt Spawning Survey to the Working Group members.
- **KRITFC escapement goal analysis:** *(See Motion 5 on page 4).*
- **Update on procedure options for conducting off-season Working Group business:** *(See Motion 5 on page 4).*

NEW BUSINESS:

- **Working Group Coordinator Position:** Jen Peeks (ADF&G) announced that she was resigning from ADF&G. She thanked the Working Group members, staff, and other agencies for their on-going participation in the Working Group process. ADF&G would continue to support the Working Group efforts and its function.

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WORKING GROUP MOTIONS:

1. **Approve the agenda. Passed (Unanimous)**
2. **To support the USFWS Refuge Manager to include Lower Kalskag and Kalskag in management actions similar to previous years, aligning that area with Section 4 of state waters, beginning June 12. Passed (Unanimous)**

Working Group members discussed concerns expressed by fishers in the Lower Kalskag and Kalskag area regarding fishing challenges while under federal management. In previous years, Lower Kalskag and Kalskag community members had requested that management in their area align with state management in Section 4 of the Kuskokwim River. The Working Group supported this request and clarified through discussion that the area included in the request should be the same area used by USFWS in 2018 for similar management actions, from a line near the bluffs below Lower Kalskag upstream to the refuge boundary at Aniak.

3. **Extend the June 5 Working Group meeting to 12:30 p.m. Passed (Unanimous)**
4. **To support the ADF&G recommendation to open Section 4 and Section 5 on June 12 to 6" mesh or less gillnets until further notice as long as the inseason assessment data continues to follow the current 2019 trends. Passed (Unanimous)**

No opposition to the ADF&G recommendation was expressed by Working Group members at the time of the meeting.

5. **Table the KRITFC escapement goal analysis agenda item and the update on procedure options for conducting off-season Working Group business until the next scheduled meeting. Passed (Unanimous)**

Due to the extended length of the June 5 meeting, Working Group members recommended tabling the KRITFC escapement goal analysis agenda item and the update on procedure options for conducting off-season Working Group business agenda item until the next scheduled meeting.
6. **Write a letter to thank Jen Peeks for her work with the KRSMWG and offer her well wishes. Passed (Unanimous)**
7. **To schedule the next Working Group meeting for Friday June 14 at 10:00 a.m. Passed (Unanimous)**
8. **Adjourn at 12:38 p.m. Passed (Unanimous)**

COMMENTS FROM THE WORKING GROUP: *No additional comments were provided from the Working Group members.*

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WORKING GROUP ATTENDANCE:

MEMBER SEAT:	NAME:
DOWNRIVER ELDER	Absent
UPRIVER ELDER	Absent
LOWER RIVER SUBSISTENCE	Mike Williams Sr.
MIDDLE RIVER SUBSISTENCE	Lisa Feyereisen
UPRIVER SUBSISTENCE	Mark Leary
HEADWATERS SUBSISTENCE	Absent
MEMBER AT LARGE	Barbara Carlson
WESTERN INTERIOR RAC	Ray Collins
YK DELTA RAC	Bob Aloysius
COMMERCIAL FISHING	Greg Hoffman Jr.
SPORT FISHING	LaMont Albertson
PROCESSOR	<i>Vacant</i>
KRITFC	Robert Lekander
ADF&G	Aaron Tiernan
CHAIR	Alissa N. Rogers

Other Participants:		
ADF&G Comm. Fish: Ben Gray, Nick Smith, Jen Peeks, Zach Liller, Chuck Brazil, Keegan Birchfield, Andrew Kastning, Bobette Dickerson Sport Fish: John Chythlook Subsistence Division: Chris McDevitt, Dave Runfola		
USFWS: Ray Born, Lew Coggins, Aaron Webber, Aaron Moses, Gary Decossas OSM: Eva Patton		
Jennifer Hooper (AVCP) John Orr (AVCP) Janessa Esquible (ONC) Avery Hoffman (ONC) Matthew Kapsner (ONC) Dan Gillikin (NVN) Bev Hoffman (Bethel) Dwayne Hoffman (Kalskag) Billie Alexie (Kalskag) Dave Cannon (Aniak)	Courtney Osolnik (GTC) Tim Zaukar (Crooked Creek) Jonathan Samuelson (GTC) Rebecca Wilmarth (NVN) Bill Bechtol (KRITFC) Kevin Whitworth (KRITFC) Jim Simon (KRITFC) Jonathan Samuelson (GTC) Gerri Sumpter (Sen. Murkowski's Office)	Courtney Carothers (UAF) Clarissa Zeller (ONC) Destiny Ropati (ONC) Orië Reich (BSFA) <u>Media:</u> Anna Rose MacArthur (KYUK) <u>WG Alternates:</u> Mary Peltola (Lower River Sub. Alt.)

GLOSSARY OF ABBREVIATIONS:

Alaska Department of Fish and Game (**ADF&G, department, State**), Orutsarmiut Traditional Native Council (**OTNC**), 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**), Native Village of Napaimute (**NVN**), Yukon Kuskokwim Health Corporation (**YKHC**), Alaska State Troopers (**AST**), University of Alaska Fairbanks (**UAF**)

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