

Kuskokwim River Salmon Management Working Group

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

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

July 14, 2021

This meeting of the Kuskokwim River Salmon Management Working Group was called to order at 10:03 a.m. and adjourned at approximately 11:30 a.m. A quorum was established with 7–10 full voting members present throughout the meeting. Fritz Charles (1st Member at Large) chaired the meeting.

AGENDA ITEMS

A. USFWS/KRITFC UPDATE: *Audio for this update begins at 14:50 – Meeting Audio – 07/14/21*

- Boyd Bilhovde (USFWS) stated that there were discussions between USFWS and KRITFC on the steps to take next. He said they are still looking at Chinook passage and would like to see about 90% passage of chums before getting out of conservation mode. He said that there would be aerial and boat harbor surveys for the openings this week.
- Mary Peltola (KRITFC; 2nd Member at Large) stated that the KRITFC feels there is a responsibility towards the conservation of chums. She said that the KRITFC needed to partner with the USFWS and ADF&G to conserve the few chums in the river while still providing people the opportunity to fish. She stated that there are still people that need to fish due to spoilage or other reasons.

A. ADF&G MANAGEMENT ACTIONS UNDER CONSIDERATION: *Audio begins at 22:20– Meeting Audio - 07/14/21*

- Nick Smith (ADF&G) gave an overview of what management actions are currently in place. He recommended that we follow a similar opening schedule as has been recently announced (Friday drift/set, weekend set) until the end of July, which would be where historically the chum salmon run was >95% through Bethel. At that time (July 31), he recommended that the lower river be opened 24/7 using similar gillnet restrictions as enacted in the past.
- Until the end of July, Mr. Smith's next proposed drift/set period would be a 6 am to 10 pm Friday, July 23 period. Set net only periods would occur Saturday and Sunday, July 24 and 25. He also suggested that the timing of the July 23 opener be as such that those that had set nets during that period would not have to remove them only to set them again early on a Saturday.
- Lastly, Mr. Smith informed the group that the single registered catcher/seller had received his interim use CFEC dipnet only permit. He said that he would like to issue an announcement later in the day to allow that permit holder to commercial fish under the stipulation of the permit.
- There was some discussion between Nick Smith, Mary Peltola, James Charles, and Boyd Blihovde about chum salmon run timing and strength and how that factored into the proposed opening of the river by July 31 (*Please refer to the meeting audio for this discussion*)

B. PEOPLE TO BE HEARD: *None for this meeting.*

C. CONTINUING BUSINESS: *Audio for subsistence reports begins at 30:50 – Meeting Audio – 07/14/21*

- Subsistence Reports: Lowest River, ONC Inseason Subsistence Report, Lower River, Middle River, Upper River, Headwaters
 - Lowest River
 - No report given this meeting.
 - ONC Inseason Subsistence Report:
 - Deja Jackon (ONC) gave the report (*Please see pages 3–5 of the Information Packet – 07/14/21*)
 - Lower River
 - Fritz Charles (Bethel; 1st Member at Large) reported that he had fished upriver of Bethel during the past weekend setnet opening and got 30 reds, a few kings, and fewer chums.
 - Mary Peltola (Bethel; 2nd Member at Large) caught 26 reds during the Friday drift period. She set her small setnet over the weekend and caught 25 more reds. She stated that she was fishing mostly for family and friends.
 - Albert Kawagely (Bethel; 1st Member at Large, alt.) did not fish much during the past openings. He stated that his family had lots of fish go sour due to the bad weather. He said that this happened

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to other families as well.

- Avery Hoffman (Bethel, KRITFC) was working during the Friday drift opening. His parents fished the entire opening and caught 80 reds and froze or gave away those fish. His dad set a net over the weekend and caught 18 reds. He stated that the red run was starting to slow down but that people had seen fish jumping in the river on Tuesday.
- Mike Williams, Sr. (Akiak, Lower River Subsistence) fished for 6 hours during the Friday opening and caught 100 reds, 13 kings, and 1 chum. He said that he did not see many people drifting on Friday because of the weather. He agreed with others that the weather was making it hard to keep fish from spoiling. He participated in the weekend set net opening and caught 7 more kings. He stated concern about the chum salmon run and how no one had been catching many. He said he was thankful for the good red run though.
- John Andrew (Kwethluk; Downriver Elder / YK Delta RAC) said he did well on the previous openings. He stated that this year we had a heavy run of reds, a late run of kings, and very few chums. He also reiterated others about fish spoiling due to bad weather. He spoke to people in Tuluksak that said black bears were raiding fish camps and that there had been brown bears sighted in Kwethluk.
- Middle River
 - No report given this meeting.
- Upper River
 - Barbara Carlson (Sleetmute; Upriver Subsistence) said that the fish wheel was operating but there had been some issues with high water. They have been catching good numbers of kings and even better numbers of reds. She noticed about a 30 to 1 red to chum ratio in the fish wheel catches. She said that the cold weather has kept the reds in really good shape. People had also been doing good drifting for reds.
- Headwaters
 - Dan Esai (Nicolai; Headwaters) said that not much fishing was going on in Nicolai. People hoped to get about 10 kings per household and some sheefish.
- Inseason Harvest Report (ONC/KRITFC):
 - *Please see the Information Packet – 07/14/21 pages 6–8 for this presentation.*
- Overview of Kuskokwim River salmon run assessment: *Audio for this presentation begins at 57:50–Meeting Audio - 07/14/21; Also see the Information Packet – 07/14/21 pages 10–22.*
 - Test Fisheries (Bethel and Aniak):
 - Sonar/Weirs/Aerial Surveys/Other:
 - Sean Larson (ADF&G) gave an update on the status of ADF&G assessment programs. He stated that the Chinook salmon run appears about 90% complete through the lower river, with BTF still picking up a few daily. The cumulative BTF CPUE of 503 is above what it was this time last year. He stated that when all said and done, this year's king run will likely have been several days late compared to historical average run timing.
 - Chum salmon cumulative CPUE at the BTF is the lowest on record. He stated that it is shaping up to be a very small run.
 - Sockeye salmon are dominating catches at the BTF and it looks like it will be a good, strong run. The same strength is evident at the sonar project as well. Sonar counts for sockeye are about 150,000 more than this time last year.
 - Weir projects were underway and have been passing kings and few chums. There have been issues with high water at the Salmon (Aniak), Kogrukluuk, and Takotna River weirs. To this date, the George River weir had passed over 1,000 kings and 243 chums. The Telaquana River weir is in place but still waiting on sockeye to arrive. The Salmon (Pitka) Fork River weir is operating well and has counted about 100 kings and 4 chums..

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- Subsistence Division Project Update.
 - Nick Smith (ADF&G) relayed a report that the lower river non-salmon spawning tributary had been finished for the year and that data were currently being compiled.
- NVN Report:
 - Dan Gillikin (NVN) informed the group that the Aniak Test Fishery had completed operations. Technicians are now focused on getting the Salmon (Aniak) River weir installed. He stated that the water level was dropping a bit and that they hoped to fully install the weir by today or tomorrow.
- Working Group KRITFC Representative Report
 - LaMont Albertson (Sportfishing, KRITFC) had little to report. He said the KRITFC and USFWS were very concerned about the chum salmon.
- Sportfish Report
 - LaMont Albertson (Sportfishing) Stated that water levels have been high. Pike fishing has been good in lower Aniak River.
- Trawl Bycatch Report
 - Sean Larson (ADF&G) presented a weekly trawl bycatch report. *Please see the Information Packet – 07/14/21 page 23 for more information.*
- Donlin Gold
 - No report given this meeting.
- Discussion of ADF&G Management considerations and discussion of possible alternatives (recommendations from the Working Group): *Audio begins at 1:20:10 – Meeting Audio - 07/14/21*
 - Mike Williams, Sr. (Lower River Subsistence) said he was hesitant to make a decision on the current management recommendations at the time of this meeting because there was a USFWS and KRITFC meeting scheduled for Tuesday and there would be more data available then.
 - Fritz Charles, Barbara Carlson, and Mary Peltola each agreed with Mike Williams, Sr. that no action should be taken at this time and that the group should wait to see more data.
 - These discussions led to Motion 2.
 - Additional discussion was had regarding the interim use dipnet catcher/seller permit, and this led to Motion 3.
- Motion for Discussion and Action.
 - See below summary of Working Group motions.

D. OLD BUSINESS: None at this meeting

E. NEW BUSINESS: None at this meeting

WORKING GROUP MOTIONS:

Motion 1: To approve the agenda. Passed (Unanimous)

Motion 2: For the Working Group to take no action on ADF&G management recommendations until next Wednesday. Passed (7 yes, 1 no)

- **Motion was made by Mike Williams, Sr. and seconded by LaMont Albertson. The majority of Working Group members wanted to wait to see more data over the upcoming week before taking action on ADF&G's management recommendations for this week.**

Motion 3: For Working Group to support ADF&G's recommendation to move forward with the interim dipnet catcher/seller commercial permit for sockeye salmon. Passed (Unanimous)

- **Motion was made by Mary Peltola and seconded by Barbara Carlson. There was unanimous support for offering this opportunity for those registered as catcher/sellers and who held the dipnet permit.**

Motion 4: To adjourn. Passed (Unanimous)

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COMMENTS FROM THE WORKING GROUP: *Audio begins at 1:33:50 – Meeting Audio - 07/14/21*

- John Andrew (Downriver Elder; YK Delta RAC) thanked the USFWS and ADF&G for fishing opportunities during the summer.
- Mary Peltola (2nd Member at Large) Thanked ADF&G Bethel Sonar for helping a family out, whose fish camp had burned down, by donating them reds caught by the sonar apportionment fishery. She also thanked the Bethel Test Fishery for the fish they donate to people in the lower river.
- Avery Hoffman (KRITFC) asked for an update on the Subsistence Division's non-salmon spawning tributaries research and Dave Runfola (ADF&G) stated that the project was over and that there will be a summary next spring in the preseason meeting.

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WORKING GROUP ATTENDANCE:

MEMBER SEAT:	NAME:
DOWNRIVER ELDER	James Charles
UPRIVER ELDER	Absent
LOWER RIVER SUBSISTENCE	Mike Williams, Sr.
MIDDLE RIVER SUBSISTENCE	Walter Morgan
UPRIVER SUBSISTENCE	Barbara Carlson
HEADWATERS SUBSISTENCE	Dan Esai
1 st MEMBER AT LARGE	Fritz Charles
2 nd MEMBER AT LARGE	Mary Peltola
WESTERN INTERIOR RAC	Absent
YK DELTA RAC	John Andrew
COMMERCIAL FISHING	Charlie Brown
SPORT FISHING	LaMont Albertson
KRITFC	Avery Hoffman
ADF&G	Nick Smith
CHAIR	Fritz Charles

Other Participants:		
<u>ADF&G</u>		
<u>Comm. Fish:</u> Ben Gray, Sean Larson, Nick Smith		
<u>Sport Fish:</u> John Chythlook		
<u>Subsistence Division:</u> Dave Runfola		
<u>Commissioner's Office:</u> Ben Mulligan		
<u>USFWS:</u> Boyd Bilhovde		
<u>OSM:</u> Cory Graham		
Danielle Lowery (ONC)	Terese Schomogyi (KRITFC)	<u>Media:</u> Greg Kim (KYUK)
Jaden Andrew (ONC)	Jim Simon (KRITFC)	
Deja Jackson (ONC)	Dan Gillikin (NVN)	<u>WG Alternates:</u> Albert Kawagely (1 st Member at Large)

GLOSSARY OF ABBREVIATIONS:

Alaska Department of Fish and Game (**ADF&G, department, State**), Orutsararmiut 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**), Alaska Wildlife Troopers (**AWT**)

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