

Kuskokwim River Salmon Management Working Group

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

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

July 28, 2021

This meeting of the Kuskokwim River Salmon Management Working Group was called to order at 10:00 a.m. and adjourned at approximately 11:15 a.m. A quorum was established with 8 full voting members present during the meeting. LaMont Albertson (Sportfishing) 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) said there was not much to report since the Chinook special action has ended. He and his staff are working to summarize the summer season for Regional Advisory Council and other meetings. He said that Refuge staff will be looking at the data provided by ADF&G for the remainder of the season.

A. ADF&G MANAGEMENT ACTIONS UNDER CONSIDERATION:

- Nick Smith (ADF&G) stated that there were no new management actions under consideration for this week. He did reiterate from last week that the river would open 24/7 to 50 fathom nets and unrestricted mesh size starting July 31.

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:
 - No report given this meeting.
 - Lower River
 - Mary Peltola (Bethel; 2nd Member at Large) fished during the past weekend openers, both drift (Friday) and set net (Saturday and Sunday). She said she caught a few reds and silvers, fewer chums, and noted that there were more pink salmon this year than in past.
 - Albert Kawagely (Bethel; 1st Member at Large, alt.) fished this past weekend and caught some whitefish, reds, and slivers. He said he fished closer to the beach to try and catch whitefish.
 - John Andrew (Kwethluk; Downriver Elder / YK Delta RAC) fished this past weekend near the Kwethluk Y and caught some silvers and other species.
 - Middle River
 - LaMont Albertson (Sportfishing) said that the water has been coming down in the middle river. People are catching pike, sheefish, and a few silvers.
 - Upper River
 - No report given this meeting.
 - Headwaters
 - Kevin Whitworth (McGrath; WIRAC, Headwaters alt.) said that most people were out picking berries. No one has been catching coho yet.
 - Inseason Harvest Report (ONC/KRITFC):
 - No report given this meeting.
- Overview of Kuskokwim River salmon run assessment: *Audio for this presentation begins at 57:50– Meeting Audio - 07/28/21; Also see the Information Packet – 07/28/21 pages 4–28.*
 - 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.
 - Notably, chum salmon cumulative CPUE at the BTF is the lowest on record. He stated

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that the chum salmon run was about 93% done in the lower river (based on average run timing).

- He said that BTF was still picking up some sockeye, but that the run was pretty much finished at this point. The sonar project estimates about 700,000 sockeye have passed through the Bethel area, which is about 30,000 above the 2018 to 2020 average.
- Coho salmon are starting to enter the river and BTF had a large CPUE of coho for tides occurring on July 26, relative to other years. Coho are currently the dominant species in BTF and sonar catches/passage estimates.
- Weir projects are showing below average Chinook passage at all projects, but the George River escapement goal has been met. Chum salmon passage at weirs is very low. Sockeye salmon passage at KogrukluK and Aniak is low, but the goal has been met at KogrukluK. Telaquena sockeye passage has been above the long-term average.
- Kevin Whitworth (WIRAC) questioned Mr. Larson about his opinion on whether or not the chum salmon goal would be met at the KogrukluK River weir. Mr. Larson replied that it looks unlikely.
- Subsistence Division Project Update.
 - No report given this meeting. .
- NVN Report:
 - No report given this meeting. .
- Working Group KRITFC Representative Report
 - LaMont Albertson (Sportfishing, KRITFC) had nothing to report at this meeting.
- Sportfish Report
 - LaMont Albertson (Sportfishing) Stated that water levels have been gotten lower in the middle river and that there were some coho being caught by rod and reel. He said that there needed to be a law enforcement presence on the Aniak River.
- Trawl Bycatch Report
 - Sean Larson (ADF&G) presented a weekly trawl bycatch report. *Please see the Information Packet – 07/28/21 page 29 for more information.*
- Donlin Gold
 - No report given this meeting.
- Discussion of ADF&G Management considerations and discussion of possible alternatives
 - There was no further discussion regarding this topic.
- Motion for Discussion and Action.
 - See below summary of Working Group motions.

D. OLD BUSINESS: Audio for this topic begins at xx:xx – Meeting Audio – 07/28/21

- Chum salmon conservation

E. NEW BUSINESS:

- Working Group letter to Governor

Discussions on both Old and New Business primarily took place between Mary Peltola, LaMont Albertson, and Boyd Blihovde and centered around chum salmon conservation and the Area M fishery. Mary Peltola laid out the concern of Area M intercepting chum salmon bound for the Kuskokwim River and asked that more data be made available to the group and public. Mary Peltola also shared a letter she had written to Governor Dunleavy on behalf of the Working Group (see pages 30-31 of informational packet), which, in short, asked that more information be made available regarding the Area M fishery and Bering Sea trawl fleet. Motion 2 (see below) to support the letter was made and passed unanimously.

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WORKING GROUP MOTIONS:

Motion 1: For the Working Group to send an official letter to Governor Dunleavy requesting information regarding the interception of chum salmon bound for the Kuskokwim River in Area M commercial fisheries harvests, and information regarding the role and impact on Bering Sea bycatch of Kuskokwim River Chinook and chum salmon. Passed (Unanimous)

Motion 2: To adjourn. (Passed, Unanimous)

COMMENTS FROM THE WORKING GROUP:

- Mary Peltola (2nd Member at Large) thanked ADF&G for their professionalism and courtesy throughout the meetings this season
- There was further discussion among Mary Peltola and LaMont Albertson (Sportfishing) regarding the timing of the next meeting. The decision was for the next meeting time to be call of the chair and to occur at such time more information came from the letter to Governor Dunleavy.

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WORKING GROUP ATTENDANCE:

MEMBER SEAT:	NAME:
DOWNRIVER ELDER	Absent
UPRIVER ELDER	Allen Simeon
LOWER RIVER SUBSISTENCE	Absent
MIDDLE RIVER SUBSISTENCE	Walter Morgan
UPRIVER SUBSISTENCE	Absent
HEADWATERS SUBSISTENCE	Absent
1 st MEMBER AT LARGE	Albert Kawagley
2 nd MEMBER AT LARGE	Mary Peltola
WESTERN INTERIOR RAC	Kevin Whitworth
YK DELTA RAC	John Andrew
COMMERCIAL FISHING	Absent
SPORT FISHING	LaMont Albertson
KRITFC	Avery Hoffman
ADF&G	Nick Smith
CHAIR	LaMont Albertson

Other Participants:		
<u>ADF&G</u> <u>Comm. Fish:</u> Ben Gray, Sean Larson, Nick Smith, Chuck Brazil		
<u>USFWS:</u> Boyd Bilhovde, Aaron Moses, Ray Born, Eva Patton		
Jaden Andrew (ONC)	Terese Schomogyi (KRITFC)	<u>Media:</u> Anna Rose MacAuthor (KYUK)
		<u>WG Alternates:</u>

GLOSSARY OF ABBREVIATIONS:

Alaska Department of Fish and Game (**ADF&G, department, State**), Orutsaranmiut 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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