

# Kuskokwim River Salmon Management Working Group

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

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

## Month Day, 2022

On Wednesday, June 29th, 2022, the KRSMWG meeting was called to order at 10:02 a.m. and adjourned at 12:09 p.m. Meeting time was approximately 2 hours and 7 minutes. A quorum was established with 8 full voting members and 2 alternates in attendance. Fritz Charles chaired the meeting. The meeting included discussions about bycatch by the intercept fishery, the possibility of sockeye salmon taking the place of chum salmon in regard to the marine-derived nutrients that are contributed to the river at spawning grounds, and concern about heat stress this year on the river.

### **AGENDA ITEMS AND SUMMARY INFORMATION:**

#### **A. USFWS/KRITFC UPDATE:** *Audio for this update begins at 15:35 – Meeting Audio – 06/29/22*

- Boyd Blihovde speaks about recent special actions including 2 setnet openers and the opening of the Aniak Box to rod and reel subsistence fisherman with a King salmon retention limit of two per day with no size limit and a requirement to release all chum salmon. Mr. Blihovde states that he knows people want a driftnet opening in the lower river, but he states the refuge is being cautious since Chinook salmon are still a concern. He hopes to provide an opening sometime around July 5<sup>th</sup>, but this has not yet been decided.
- Aaron Moses adds that the recorded line has been updated and people can leave messages on that line, and someone will call them back. The phone number is (907)543-1008.
- There is some discussion in the group about which agency has jurisdiction and authority over the Aniak Box area of the river. *Audio for this update begins at 24:16 – Meeting Audio – 06/29/22*

#### **B. ADF&G MANAGEMENT ACTIONS UNDER CONSIDERATION:** *Audio for this update begins at 27:57 – Meeting Audio – 06/29/22*

- Nick Smith updates the Working Group about the ongoing lawsuit involving KRITFC and USFWS against the Alaska Department of Fish and how the recent injunction requires him to only make recommendations for Section 4 and 5 of the river. Mr. Smith recommends requiring the release of chums and King salmon from fish wheels and beach seines.
- John Chythlook makes comment that there will be an upcoming announcement that chum salmon will be closed to sport fishing on the entire river and reminds the group that sport fishing is already closed to King salmon.
- Dan Esai asks if subsistence rod and reel fishing is still open in the upper portions of the river and states that people usually release females. Mr. Smith confirms that subsistence rod and reel fishing is still open in the upper portion of the river.

#### **C. PEOPLE TO BE HEARD:**

- Albert Kawagley makes a comment that working people have not had time to subsistence fish because they are off at 5:00 each day and asks for management to consider some weekend openers. *Audio for this update begins at 32:49 – Meeting Audio – 06/29/22*
- Alissa Rogers makes comment as a member of the public, not representing any agencies or groups. Ms. Rogers speaks about her disappointment with management and feels that there has not been enough caution for King salmon conservation and points out that it is time to harvest for red salmon. *Audio for this update begins at 34:15 – Meeting Audio – 06/29/22*

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## D. CONTINUING BUSINESS:

- Subsistence Reports: Lower River, Middle River, Upper River, ONC In-season Subsistence Report
  - Lowest River
    - James Charles (Tuntutuliak) said that good numbers of salmon have been seen running. Mr. Charles grandkids have been out fishing 3 times and he believes that their catch is good enough for the season. *Audio for this report begins at 38:54 – Meeting Audio – 06/29/22*
  - Lower River
    - Fritz Charles (Bethel) said that he went fishing below Napakiak during the last opener and caught about 37 fish total; 2 sheefish, 20 King salmon and approximately 15 sockeyes. He was not able to fish the previous opener. Mr. Charles said that he had been unable to fish the previous opener due to work. He stated he did go down river on the weekend and caught a total of about 70 salmon total: about half and half King and red salmon. He has stated that his family is done fishing for the season and has what his family needs. Mr. Charles believes that most people are finished for the season, except those who work. *Audio for this update begins at 40:00 – Meeting Audio – 06/29/22*
    - Avery Hoffman (Bethel) said his family has not fished but he hopes to go today, June 29<sup>th</sup>. Mr. Hoffman said he has seen a lot of reds jumping. *Audio for this update begins at 42:15 – Meeting Audio – 06/29/22*
    - Mike Williams (Akiak) appreciates the last few fishing openers and believes that they have been timed well. Mr. Williams said that he has seen more King salmon than last year, and an increased amount of sockeye salmon swimming. Mr. Williams agrees that most people are getting the fish they need, but the number of fish caught is still below ANS for King salmon. There should be concern for chum salmon now. He stated that when he set his net that morning, he caught 20 sockeyes within 15 minutes and will be checking on his net again around noon. He may pull his net at that time. Mr. Williams states he believes that closing the river to driftnet fishing was the right choice and doing so allows the opportunity to harvest reds, while conserving King and chum salmon which are pushed to the middle of the river during the sockeye run. Mr. Williams comments that we need to consider working people when thinking about openers by scheduling openers for the weekends. Lastly, he states that he has been praying for the kind of salmon returns that we are seeing this year. *Audio for this update begins at 42:55 – Meeting Audio – 06/29/22*
    - Albert Kawagley (Bethel) said that he has not yet been out fishing because he has been in meetings but will go soon. Those Mr. Kawagley have spoken to say that some people have reached their quota, while others have not. People with big families or are unable to afford the gas prices still need to catch more fish. He proposes splitting the cost of gas with members of the family and go out.

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That is what he plans on doing. *Audio for this update begins at 48:35 – Meeting Audio – 06/29/22*

- Alissa Rogers (Bethel) said that her family went out for one driftnet opportunity for a couple hours between Shwalbe and Church slough with 5 ¼ mesh net. They caught 1 small King and 4 sockeye salmon. Ms. Rogers stated that her family usually waits until mid-July to target sockeye. *Audio for this update begins at 50:15 – Meeting Audio – 06/29/22*
- John W. Andrew (Kwethluk) said that he has only been out fishing twice and did not go out for the most recent opener on June 22nd. Mr. Andrew stated he fished on June 12th for 3 hours and caught mostly jacks and 1 red. He went out again on the 16<sup>th</sup> with a smaller mesh size and only 35 meshes deep and said that he caught 12 King jacks, 7 reds, and 1 chum salmon. Mr. Andrew stated that other people he spoke to have caught half and half Chinook and sockeye salmon, and most fish caught were jacks. Mr. Andrew stated that in Kwethluk most people drift as there are not very many places that people can legally place a setnet and the water is too murky for dipnets and beach seines. He has yet to put away any fish for his own family. *Audio for this update begins at 1:03:30 – Meeting Audio – 06/29/22*
- Middle River
  - Dan Gillikin (NVN) said there has been mixed success in the village. The ladies have a table set up to cut up fish on the beach. Mr. Gillikin believes most people are holding off until the salmon numbers are better since gas prices are so high. *Audio for this update begins at 57:12 – Meeting Audio – 06/29/22*
  - Walter Morgan (Lower Kalskag) said that he felt most people have what they need. He had drifted yesterday, June 28<sup>th</sup>, and caught 3 red salmon and 7 King salmon. Mr. Morgan said that they are no longer targeting King salmon. Mr. Morgan stated that gas prices are rising so he expects to see less fisherman headed out. With the higher gas prices, it isn't worth it to fish at this time and will wait on reds. *Audio for this update begins at 58:20 – Meeting Audio – 06/29/22*
- Upper River
  - Barbara Carlson (Sleetmute) said that she and others from the village have been picking her fish wheel. The morning of the meeting 12 Kings had been caught and half a dozen reds, all of decent size. Ms. Carlson stated that she has not seen many boats on the river. Ms. Carlson stated the culture of the river is changing and there are not as many smokehouses going this year. Ms. Carlson added that there has been no chum salmon seen. *Audio for this update begins at 54:40 – Meeting Audio – 06/29/22*
- Headwaters

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- Kevin Whitworth (McGrath) said people were catching pike and sheefish on rod and reel, but sheefish has been slow because of the dirty water coming from the creeks. Mr. Whitworth said the water in his area is still not clear and there are lots of sticks in the water. Mr. Whitworth has only seen 3 or 4 setnets which are catching sheefish and white fish, but he heard one guy caught 5 salmon. Mr. Whitworth said that fishing has been slow and hopes that it will pick up. *Audio for this update begins at 1:00:05 – Meeting Audio – 06/29/22*
- Dan Esai (Nikolai) said that he hears from locals that the Chinook salmon run is about 5-7 days late, but some fish are being caught in McGrath and some small salmon have shown up at Pitka's fork. Mr. Esai hopes the whitefish make a comeback and has only heard of one whitefish being hooked. He also cautions people about being safe in their boats because he had recently been in a boating accident and lost all his fishing gear, but he is lucky to be alive. *Audio for this update begins at 1:01:30 – Meeting Audio – 06/29/22*
- Sport Fish
  - Lamont Albertson (Aniak) said that sport fishermen near Aniak are catching primarily pike. Some sheefish are being caught on the Aniak River with rod and reel. Mr. Albertson stated that chum and King salmon are not being caught by sport fisherman. There is opportunity to fish sockeye with rod and reel, but they do not intentionally hit on lures. *Audio for this update begins at 52:27 – Meeting Audio – 06/29/22*
- ONC In-season Report
  - Taj Tony (ONC) gives a brief report about harvest surveys conducted by ONC, average harvests and fish distribution from Bethel Test Fish. Detailed information can be found on pages 4-5 of the information packet. *Audio for this update begins at 1:05:55 – Meeting Audio – 06/29/22*
- KRITFC In-season Report
  - Therese Schomogyi gave a report of harvest estimates made by KRITFC based on community-based harvest surveys between Eek and Akiak and boat and net counts performed by USFWS. Ms. Schomogyi reported estimates of 28,670 salmon caught; 14,000 Chinook, 950 chum and 13,720 sockeye. USFWS counted 572 people out driftnet fishing on the last opener and 17 setnets between Tuntutuliak and Akiak. In interviews that were conducted by community harvest monitors, people said they were starting to reach their goals for Chinooks and are switching to target sockeye salmon. *Audio for this update begins at 1:11:00 – Meeting Audio – 06/29/22*
  - Lamont gives a report about KRITFC meetings and likens them to the Working group meetings. Mr. Lamont talks about some of the subjects that are discussed in the meetings and makes a comment that he hopes someone from USFWS or ADF&G can provide information and speak about how reds and chums compare

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when considering delivery of marine derived nutrients to spawning grounds and if reds are taking the place of chums in that regard.

- Mr. Albertson also makes comment that he is pleased with the thorough meetings that have been occurring with USFWS and KRITFC. Some other concerns that have been discussed are chum salmon conservation and heat stress. *Audio for this update begins at 1:29:19 – Meeting Audio – 06/29/22*
- Overview of the Kuskokwim River salmon run assessment
  - *Audio for this update begins at 1:14:25 – Meeting Audio – 06/29/22*
  - Sean Larson gave a report on the salmon run assessment that can be found on pages 8-13 of the information packet. Some information that is not included in the packet is that the Chinook salmon run is occurring mostly as forecasted and should be in range; the chum salmon run is lower so far than last year but hopefully this week they will start to pick up; and the sockeye salmon is the highest since 2017 at this point. Sonar passage has the largest passage to date since the start of the project as of June 26<sup>th</sup>.
  - There is some discussion between Boyd Blihovde, Keegan Birchfield who heads the sonar project and Dan Gillikin about the confidence intervals for sonar and Bethel Test Fish and how that equates to escapements. There is also mention of an anomaly in the data that seemed suspicious. Keegan stated he felt the data from that day seemed suspect to him, but he believes that there was a big push of Chinook that day, possibly due to heavy fishing. Keegan accounts for this anomaly by giving a wide range in the estimate. *Audio for this update begins at 1:22:00 – Meeting Audio – 06/29/22*
  - NVN Report
    - Dan Gillikin said they have been seeing more sockeye and some chum. Salmon River weir crew has begun setting up and hope to have it operational in the next few days.
    - *Audio for this update begins at 1:28:27 – Meeting Audio – 06/29/22*
- Intercept Fishery Report
  - There is a discussion between working group members about the intercept fishery and a call to action by Lamont Albertson and Fritz Charles to learn as much as they can about the fishery as well as representation on the North Pacific Fishery Management Council (NPFMC). There is a conversation that follows about numbers of bycatch, different agencies that are involved, lack of concern by involved parties, and lack of representation for subsistence users on the NPFMC. Jim Simon (KRITFC) mentions that the intercept fishery and Area M is managed by the Board of Fisheries and ADFG. Bycatch will be discussed at the BOF meeting in 2023. NPFMC manages high sea trawlers and is concerned with other issues as well. *Audio for this report begins at 1:37:15 – Meeting Audio – 06/29/22*

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## E. OLD BUSINESS:

- Barbara Carlson stated she was unaware of the Aniak Box being opened already or the injunction against the state. She is concerned with the lack of size limit on King salmon retention from the Aniak Box and hopes that someone will be keeping close track of the number of fish and size of salmon being taken, so that regulations can be adjusted quickly if necessary.
- *Audio for this report begins at 2:00:14 – Meeting Audio– 06/29/22*

## F. NEW BUSINESS:

- No new business was addressed.

## G. COMMENTS FROM WORKING GROUP MEMBERS:

- Mr. Charles comments that he was taught to only fish three times to conserve and share with others. He also states that the fish were more abundant then. There is some additional commentary from Mr. Albertson to clarify what Mr. Charles had said and adds that he believes KRITFC has done a good job being cautious to conserve the Chinook salmon. *Audio for this report begins at 1:32:40 – Meeting Audio – 06/29/22*
- Barbara Carlson makes a comment that she is also curious about the biomass of the fish traveling up the river and how they bring marine derived nutrients upriver and how sockeye compare to chum salmon. She is also curious about the difference in return of both species to specific versus general areas and tributaries of the river. *Audio for this report begins at 1:35:05 – Meeting Audio – 06/29/22*
- Mike Williams mentions that he traveled to Sitka recently to testify on behalf of the commission over concerns of the impact that bycatch has on the salmon populations. He stated that NOAA will be visiting the region because of the salmon population crashes on the Kuskokwim, Norton Sound, and the Bering Sea. *Audio for this report begins at 2:02:45 – Meeting Audio – 06/29/22*

**The meeting was adjourned at 12:09 p.m.**

## WORKING GROUP MOTIONS:

**Motion 1: Approve the agenda as amended.** *Passed (Unanimous)*

- Barbara Carlson moves to include a discussion about the Aniak Box to allow rod and reel subsistence fishing with the retention of 1 King salmon daily with a size limit of 24 inches or less.
- Motion made by Lamont Albertson and seconded by Barbara Carlson.
- *Audio for this request and motion begins at 12:22 – Meeting Audio – 07/29/22*

**Motion 2: To accept ADF&G recommendation to keep Sections 4 & 5 of the Kuskokwim open to subsistence fishing with beach seines and fish wheels but require the release of chum salmon.** *Passed (9 yes, 1 no)*

- Motion made by Barbara Carlson and seconded by
- There is a brief discussion about dip net fishing and the reason for its omission in the recommendations.
- *Audio for this report begins at 1:51:05 – Meeting Audio – 06/29/22*

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**Motion 3: To extend meeting until 12:30.** *Some opposition, but majority in agreement. No roll call taken.*

- Motion made by Lamont Albertson and seconded by Albert Kawagley
- *Audio for this report begins at 1:58:45 – Meeting Audio – 06/29/22*

**Motion 3: Adjourn at 12:09 p.m.** *Passed (Unanimous)*

- Motion made by Lamont Albertson and seconded by Avery Hoffman

## **WORKING GROUP ATTENDANCE:**

<b>MEMBER SEAT:</b>	<b>NAME:</b>
DOWNRIVER ELDER	James Charles
UPRIVER ELDER	<i>Absent</i>
LOWER RIVER SUBSISTENCE	Mike Williams
MIDDLE RIVER SUBSISTENCE	Walter Morgan
UPRIVER SUBSISTENCE	Barbara Carlson
HEADWATERS SUBSISTENCE	Daniel Esai
MEMBER AT LARGE SEAT 1	Fritz Charles
MEMBER AT LARGE SEAT 2	<i>Absent</i>
WESTERN INTERIOR RAC	Kevin Whitworth
YK DELTA RAC	John W. Andrew
COMMERCIAL FISHING	<i>Absent</i>
SPORT FISHING	LaMont Albertson
ADF&G	Nick Smith
CHAIR	Fritz Charles
<u>ADF&amp;G Comm. Fish:</u> Nick Smith, Sean Larson, Chuck Brazil, Keegan Birchfield, Iris Fletcher, Bobette Dickerson <u>Sport Fish Division:</u> John Chythlook, Klaus Wuttig, Jeff Estensen <u>Subsistence Division:</u> <u>Commissioner's Office:</u> John Linderman, Ben Mulligan <u>USFWS:</u> Boyd Blihovde, Aaron Moses, Jaden Andrew <u>OSM:</u> Brooke McDavid, Nissa Pilcher, Kevin Foley <u>NVN:</u> Dan Gillikin <u>ONC:</u> Jamin Crow, Danielle Lowery, Delen Hooper, Jamin Crow, Taj Tony <u>AVCP:</u> Jennifer Hooper <u>KRITFC:</u> Jim Simon, Terese Schomogyi, Avery Hoffman <u>UAF:</u> <u>WIRAC:</u> Kevin Whitworth <u>YK Delta RAC:</u> John Andrew	
<u>WG Alternates: (not already listed above)</u> Alissa Rogers (YK Delta RAC), Albert Kawagley (1 <sup>st</sup> Member at Large)	<u>Media:</u> Olivia Eberts

## **GLOSSARY OF ABBREVIATIONS:**

Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ADF&G), Orutsarmiut 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),

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ADF&G Sport Fisheries Division (**SF**), ADF&G Subsistence Division (**SD**), 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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