

Kuskokwim River Salmon Management Working Group

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

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

July 13, 2022

On Wednesday, July 13th, 2022, the KRSMWG meeting was called to order at 10:03 a.m. and adjourned at 11:35 a.m. Meeting time was approximately 1 hour and 35 minutes. A quorum was established with 11 full voting members in attendance, and 1 alternate. Mary Peltola chaired the meeting. A conversation regarding the declining salmon runs, concern for the ecosystem and Area M dominated the meeting.

AGENDA ITEMS AND SUMMARY INFORMATION:

A. USFWS/KRITFC UPDATE: *Audio for this update begins at 10:54 – Meeting Audio – 07/13/22*

- Boyd Blihovde (USFWS) gave an update on the last few gillnet opportunities and activities the agency completed during those openings. Mr. Blihovde said that during the driftnet opportunity on July 9th, USFWS performed flights and counted 70-80 boats out fishing. The USFWS did not fly on the July 10th setnet opener, but law enforcement that was patrolling estimated about 50 setnets. Since fishing pressure has decreased, among other reasons, concern for conservation of chum salmon has also decreased. USFWS does not plan to announce any further gillnet opportunities and want to let the rest of the chum salmon pass through. Mr. Blihovde also stated that the USFWS staff and KRITFC will meet on Tuesday, July 19th and consider a date to relinquish the Emergency Orders in place and wants to be comfortable with chum passage past Bethel before relaxing conservation measures in place.
- Kevin Whitworth (KRITFC) adds that the Community-based Harvest Monitor Program has concluded, and the July 9th is the last day that will be reported in that project. *Audio for this update begins at 16:19 – Meeting Audio – 07/13/22*

B. ADF&G MANAGEMENT ACTIONS UNDER CONSIDERATION: *Audio for this update begins at 17:10 – Meeting Audio – 07/13/22*

- Nick Smith (ADFG) gives a brief recap on the recent management actions in affect in sections 4 and 5 of the Kuskokwim allowing fishing at any time with 6” or less mesh gillnets and alternate gear types with the retention of King salmon and release of chum salmon from beach seines and fish wheels upriver of Aniak and the closure of the Aniak Box to gillnets and alternative fishing gear. Mr. Smith recommends maintaining the status quo with no further restrictions in sections 4 and 5 at this time.
- Dan Esai (Nikolai) asked a question about numbers of fish passing through the Pitka Fork weir. Sean Larson (ADFG) answered that as of July 11th, 46 King salmon have passed through and 67 as of July 12th, which is low for this time of year. The average for passage of King salmon by this date for all years is 1450 and the average for the last 5 years of passage by this date is 850. Mr. Larson points out this information is also on page 21 of the information packet. *Audio for this update begins at 18:40 – Meeting Audio – 07/13/22*

C. PEOPLE TO BE HEARD:

- There were no people to be heard at this meeting.

D. CONTINUING BUSINESS:

- Subsistence Reports: Lower River, Middle River, Upper River, ONC In-season Subsistence Report

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- Lower River
 - Charlie Brown (Eek) said he had nothing to report. *Audio for this update begins at 22:47 – Meeting Audio – 07/13/22*
 - Fritz Charles (Bethel) said that he is done fishing until the silver salmon start running and has not fished since June. *Audio for this update begins at 18:40 – Meeting Audio – 07/13/22*
 - Avery Hoffman (Bethel) said that his parents fished this past weekend. He said they used a 4-inch and a 6-inch net and did good. Mr. Hoffman said on Sunday, July 10th, his parents used a setnet and caught 6 sockeye salmon. His parents were happy to fish but did not see much fishing effort when they were out. *Audio for this update begins at 24:54 – Meeting Audio – 07/13/22*
 - Albert Kawagely (Bethel) said that his granddaughter went fishing and caught 35 red salmon and has dried half to put away. He thanked ONC for the net to put around the drying rack to protect against flies. Mr. Kawagely said that he went up the Gweek River to pick berries, but there was none. He also said that his family is done fishing and may fish later in the season for silver salmon to can. *Audio for this update begins at 28:22 – Meeting Audio – 07/13/22*
 - Mike Williams (Akiak) said that it has been good drying weather this year and he is done fishing. He looks forward to berry picking. Mr. Williams stated he thinks everyone is winding down for the season and waiting for silver salmon to can. *Audio for this update begins at 22:56 – Meeting Audio – 07/13/22*
 - John Andrew (Kwethluk) said that most people are done but some are still wanting fish to jar or freeze. He said most people are done and are berry picking or waiting for silvers. Mr. Andrew said that he went out and did one drift on the July 9th opener and caught 7 reds, 5 chums, and 1 King salmon. *Audio for this update begins at 23:50 – Meeting Audio – 07/13/22*
- Middle River
 - Walter Morgan (Lower Kalskag) said that most people in his area are done fishing and are berry picking. Only a couple families are still going out. Mr. Morgan said that he went out with a 30-foot net and caught 1 large King and 2 chum salmon. Some people are going to jar salmon, but overall fishing is slow in his area. *Audio for this update begins at 18:40 – Meeting Audio – 07/13/22*
 - Allen Simeon (Aniak) said that he spent one day fishing and caught a tremendous number of red salmon on the North side of his fish camp, and about 80 red and King salmon on the South side. He caught bigger red salmon on the South side. On the North side in 10 hours, he caught 126 red, 26 King, and 6 chum salmon. He will share his catch with the community and said he was happy to catch red salmon because some people are allergic to King salmon. *Audio for this update begins at 32:05 – Meeting Audio – 07/13/22*

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- Upper River
 - There were no Working Group members from the Upper River area present for this meeting.
- Headwaters
 - Kevin Whitworth (McGrath) said that fishing has been slow, and some people were having a hard time drying their fish in the heat, so they started jarring instead. Mr. Whitworth said that very few people are fishing, some people are catching whitefish, sheefish, and pike. Others are waiting for silver salmon. *Audio for this update begins at 27:13 – Meeting Audio – 07/13/22*
 - Dan Esai (Nikolai) said that a lot of people in the headwater's needs have not been met and his family will not have any dry fish this year, only frozen. He said his family went out for berries, but it has been so dry that the salmon berries are small. Mr. Esai said that he felt disheartened because his family has been able to share fish with others in the past, but this year his family has none. He states that the last few years have been tough on him and his family. *Audio for this update begins at 29:54 – Meeting Audio – 07/13/22*
- ONC In-season Report
 - Avery Hoffman gave a brief report on surveys completed at the boat harbor in Bethel and at fish camps as well as ONC's fish distribution program. Details can be found on page 3. *Audio for this update begins at 35:20 – Meeting Audio – 07/13/22*
- Overview of the Kuskokwim River salmon run assessment
 - *Audio for this update begins at 38:33 – Meeting Audio – 07/13/22*
 - Sean Larson (ADFG) gives an overview of data collected from ADF&G projects contained on pages 6-30 of the information packet, including information from Bethel Test Fish, Sonar, and the weir projects. Page 30 of the information packet is a map of where the weirs are located.
 - Some highlights from Bethel Test Fish include that the Chinook salmon run is just under last year's numbers and is at the tail-end of the run; the chum salmon run is similar to the 2020 run and better than last years; and that the sockeye salmon run is less than last year, but it could be a late run, in which case we will see a higher CPUE. Mr. Larson said that we will know if the sockeye run is late later this week.
 - Highlights from Sonar include that the Chinook salmon run is better than last year and likely within the preseason estimates; chum salmon is below average but much better than last year, similar to 2020; and the sockeye run is less than last year but data is in agreement with Bethel Test Fish.
 - Highlights from the weir data include that the Chinook salmon goal was recently met at the George and Kwethluk weirs and may exceed our goal at the George River weir; sockeye salmon are starting to reach the weirs fine; and chum

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salmon numbers are slow as expected. One other comment that Mr. Larson made is that at the Pitka Fork weir Chinook numbers are low, but he hopes they are building.

- Boyd Blihovde asks a question regarding the chum run times leading to a brief explanation by Mr. Larson about predicting run times. *Audio for this update begins at 48:19 – Meeting Audio – 07/13/22*
- NVN Report
 - Dan Gillikin (NVN) gives a brief report stating that the Aniak Test Fish project is concluded as of July 12th and are no longer catching Chinook salmon and just a few chum salmon. The Salmon River weir is still counting fish, including some chum salmon. Lastly, Mr. Gillikin says he is preparing for the George River internship and will be out of touch for the next week. *Audio for this update begins at 49:50 – Meeting Audio – 07/13/22*
 - Boyd Blihovde asked about how rod and reel fishing is going within the Aniak Box. Mr. Gillikin responds that fishing has slowed down inside the Aniak Box with the most participation around July 4th but has tapered down since. Mr. Gillikin states that the estimate of 300 or less King salmon harvested was safe and believes that the harvest may have been even lower.
- KRITFC Working Group Representative Report
 - Lamont Albertson says that he has nothing to report but makes a comment about increased sales of chum salmon and how they have become a commercially viable product often mixed with pink salmon in products and marketed as keta salmon, meaning there is increased competition on the resource. He also thanks the Community Based Harvest Monitors and USFWS for sharing information and working together. *Audio for this update begins at 52:52 – Meeting Audio – 07/13/22*
- Sport Fish:
 - Lamont Albertson says that he is concerned about the guided fishing activity and resources on the Aniak River. *Audio for this update begins at 57:45 – Meeting Audio – 07/13/22*
- Intercept Fishery Report
 - *Audio for this update begins at 59:10 – Meeting Audio – 07/13/22*
 - Summary information can be found on page 31 of the information packet.
 - There is a discussion about Area M. Mary Peltola mentions reporting by KYUK on the issue. John Andrew and James Nicori speak about traditional knowledge and how their elders spoke about Area M. Both believe the salmon runs in the Kuskokwim River have been affected by the commercial fishery. Mr. Andrew expresses concern about how the lack of spawned out fish on the riverbank may

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affect the ecosystem. Mr. Nicori goes on to say that he does not know how the elders acquired their knowledge. He also states that he believes the chum salmon run is late this year and mentions that salmon is a main source of vitamin D for residents of the Kuskokwim. John Linderman mentions actions taken voluntarily by fishermen in Area M and by the Board of Fish that reduced fishing this year in Area M. Mary Peltola requested more information from ADFG and made statements about information she had heard naming Robert Samuelson as one source. Nick Smith asked for Ms. Peltola to share that information, which she agreed to do. Boyd Blihovde echoed John Andrew's comment about how the lack of salmon return is concerning for the ecosystem in general, as salmon are a keystone species. Lastly, Albert Kawagely mentions that other areas of the state need salmon too and feels that there should be more commercial closures.

E. OLD BUSINESS:

- No old business was addressed during this meeting

F. NEW BUSINESS:

- No old business was addressed during this meeting.

G. COMMENTS FROM WORKING GROUP MEMBERS:

- Nick Smith makes a comment that about a dozen chum salmon had been left in the fish tote after the Saturday opener on July 9th. This can lead to people getting sick. Mr. Smith reminds people to not dump unwanted salmon in the fish tote. *Audio for this update begins at 1:25:23 – Meeting Audio – 07/13/22*
- Charlie Brown makes a comment in Yupik that John Andrew translates for the group. Mr. Brown states that when he fishes the Kuskokwim, he does not catch much but is grateful for the openers so they can fish. *Audio for this update begins at 1:26:09 – Meeting Audio – 07/13/22*
- Walter Morgan makes a comment about guides on rafts using a white powder on human waste and wonders what it is and if it's safe for the ecosystem. Boyd Blihovde said that he will look into this and makes a comment that guides are regulated as to what they leave behind, what they use and what they pack out. Mr. Blihovde said that he had only heard of sawdust being used. *Audio for this update begins at 1:28:15 – Meeting Audio – 07/13/22*

The meeting was adjourned at 11:35 a.m.

WORKING GROUP MOTIONS:

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

- Motion made by Lamont Albertson, seconded by Fritz Charles

Motion 3: Adjourn at 11:35 p.m. Passed (Unanimous)

- Motion made by Avery Hoffman, seconded by Lamont Albertson

WORKING GROUP ATTENDANCE:

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MEMBER SEAT:	NAME:
DOWNRIVER ELDER	John Andrew
UPRIVER ELDER	Allen Simeon
LOWER RIVER SUBSISTENCE	Mike Williams
MIDDLE RIVER SUBSISTENCE	Walter Morgan
UPRIVER SUBSISTENCE	<i>Absent</i>
HEADWATERS SUBSISTENCE	Daniel Esai
MEMBER AT LARGE SEAT 1	Fritz Charles
MEMBER AT LARGE SEAT 2	Mary Peltola
WESTERN INTERIOR RAC	Kevin Whitworth
YK DELTA RAC	<i>Absent</i>
COMMERCIAL FISHING	Charlie Brown
SPORT FISHING	LaMont Albertson
ADF&G	Nick Smith
CHAIR	Mary Peltola
<u>ADF&G Comm. Fish:</u> Nick Smith, Ross Renick, Sean Larson, Chuck Brazil, Iris Fletcher <u>Sport Fish Division:</u> <u>Subsistence Division:</u> <u>Commissioner's Office:</u> John Linderman	
<u>USFWS:</u> Boyd Blihovde, Aaron Moses, Jaden Andrew, Emmit Nicori, Frank Harris <u>OSM:</u> Brooke McDavid, Nissa Pilcher <u>NVN:</u> Dan Gillikin <u>ONC:</u> Delen Hooper, Taj Tony <u>AVCP:</u> <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:</u> (not already listed above) Albert Kawagley (1 st Member at Large)	<u>Media:</u> Anna Rose MacArthur, Kaylee King

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**), 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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