

# Kuskokwim River Salmon Management Working Group

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

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

**July 20th, 2022**

On Wednesday, July 20th, 2022, the KRSMWG meeting was called to order at 10:00 a.m. and adjourned at approximately 11:15 a.m. due to telephone connection issues. Meeting time was approximately 1 hour and 15 minutes but was continued the next day. A quorum was established with 8 full voting members in attendance. Lamont Albertson chaired the meeting. Primary discussion consisted of the USFWS rescinding their Emergency Orders in place and recommendations from ADF&G going forward.

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

### **A. USFWS/KRITFC UPDATE:** *Audio for this update begins at 11:39 – Meeting Audio – 07/20/22*

- Boyd Blihovde (USFWS) announced that he will be rescinding the 5 Emergency Orders involving salmon conservation in the Kuskokwim River beginning July 21<sup>st</sup>. Mr. Blihovde feels that 90% of the chum salmon run is through and knows that ADF&G intend to keep the river closed for the time being anyway. He hopes the coho salmon will come in strong.
- Kevin Whitworth (KRITFC) adds that the rationale used to come to the decision is that 95% of the Chinook, 95% of the sockeye, and 90% of the chum salmon run is past. Fishing effort on the salmon has also waned as many are getting ready for berry picking. Mr. Whitworth also believes that this is about the same timing as last year when the federal special actions were rescinded.
- Lamont Albertson states that the Community Based Harvest Monitor project has been completed and there will be a closing celebration this Friday, July 22<sup>nd</sup> at the KRITFC office at the college in the afternoon.

### **B. ADF&G MANAGEMENT ACTIONS UNDER CONSIDERATION:** *Audio for this update begins at 18:37 – Meeting Audio – 07/20/22*

- Nick Smith (ADFG) recommends maintaining the status quo to keep the river closed to allow for the chum salmon through since they are dominating the catch at Bethel Test Fish. Mr. Smith recommends opening the river on July 31<sup>st</sup> at which time he believes that the 96-98% of the chum salmon will have passed through Bethel. Mr. Smith recommends keeping the spawning tributaries closed until August 31<sup>st</sup>. Lastly, Mr. Smith mentions the possibility of opening a commercial gillnet period for a single catcher/seller on August 10<sup>th</sup>.
- Immediately after Nick Smith's recommendations there is considerable discussion from members of the Working Group, the public and agency staff mostly surrounding the potential commercial fishing period. Commercial gear and regulations were discussed. There were some concerns voiced over the lack of salmon in the Yukon and upriver and if and how a commercial fishery would affect the Kuskokwim salmon numbers. There were some suggestions to close the entire river until the coho run can be assessed. *Audio for this discussion begins at 22:00 – Meeting Audio – 07/20/22. There are some disruptions of the discussion due to connectivity issues beginning at 44:05 – Meeting Audio – 07/20/22. Connection disruptions continue throughout the remaining part of the discussion.*

**Telephone connection problems ended the meeting early and continuation of the meeting was scheduled for the following morning, Thursday July 21<sup>st</sup>, 2022.**

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## **WORKING GROUP MOTIONS:**

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

## **WORKING GROUP ATTENDANCE: July 20<sup>th</sup>, 2022**

<b>MEMBER SEAT:</b>	<b>NAME:</b>
DOWNRIVER ELDER	John Andrew
UPRIVER ELDER	Allen Simeon
LOWER RIVER SUBSISTENCE	Mike Williams
MIDDLE RIVER SUBSISTENCE	Walter Morgan
UPRIVER SUBSISTENCE	<i>Absence</i>
HEADWATERS SUBSISTENCE	Daniel Esai
MEMBER AT LARGE SEAT 1	Albert Kawagely
MEMBER AT LARGE SEAT 2	Mary Peltola
WESTERN INTERIOR RAC	Kevin Whitworth
YK DELTA RAC	Robert Hoffman
COMMERCIAL FISHING	<i>Absent</i>
SPORT FISHING	LaMont Albertson
ADF&G	Nick Smith
CHAIR	Lamont Albertson
<u>ADF&amp;G Comm. Fish:</u> Nick Smith, Ross Renick, Sean Larson, Iris Fletcher <u>Sport Fish Division:</u> John Chythlook <u>Subsistence Division:</u> Chris McDevitt <u>Commissioner's Office:</u> John Linderman	
<u>USFWS:</u> Boyd Blihovde, Chris Tulik, Emmit Nicori <u>OSM:</u> Nissa Pilcher <u>NVN:</u> <i>Absent</i> <u>ONC:</u> Avery Hoffman <u>AVCP:</u> Jennifer Hooper <u>KRITFC:</u> Jim Simon, Terese Schomogyi, Avery Hoffman <u>UAF:</u> <u>WIRAC:</u> Kevin Whitworth, Rebecca Wilmarth <u>YK Delta RAC:</u> John Andrew, Robert Hoffman	
<u>WG Alternates: (not already listed above)</u> Alissa Rogers (YK Delta RAC), Albert Kawagely (1 <sup>st</sup> Member at Large)	<u>Media:</u> Anna Rose MacArthur, KYUK <u>Other:</u> Stephen Alexie, Napaskiak

## **July 21st, 2022**

On Thursday, July 21st, 2022, the KRSMWG reconvened, and the meeting was called to order at 10:00 a.m. and adjourned at 11:35 a.m. Meeting time was approximately 1 hours and 35 minutes. A quorum was established with 9 full voting members in attendance, however some members joined in later. There was a total of 12 full voting members that joined into the meeting. Lamont Albertson chaired the meeting. The Working Group resumed where they had left off the day before, beginning with People to Be Heard.

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## C. PEOPLE TO BE HEARD:

- Two tribal council members from Kwethluk joined the teleconference to express their concern that the river may be closed to subsistence fishing because approximately many have not met their needs for dried fish. *Audio for this update begins at 6:51 – Meeting Audio – 07/21/22*

## D. CONTINUING BUSINESS:

- Subsistence Reports: Lower River, Middle River, Upper River, ONC In-season Subsistence Report
  - Lower River
    - Charlie Brown (Eek) says that silver salmon will come anytime and when he used to test fish it was usually late July and continue until September. Mr. Brown said that he had heard some people were catching a few silvers in Tuntutuliak with 4-inch nets. He also said that he disagrees with closing the fishing season early and mentioned that right now most people are getting berries and camping. *Audio for this update begins at 9:18 – Meeting Audio – 07/21/22*
    - Albert Kawagely (Bethel) said that his family got about 8 gallons of berries, but it has been dry. He hopes the rain helps; the rain has helped put out the fires. Mr. Kawagely said that he hopes that fishing stays open since some people have not met their subsistence goals. He adds that he doesn't believe that the Kuskokwim can handle commercial fishing because of how crowded and thin the river is. *Audio for this update begins at 14:45 – Meeting Audio – 07/21/22*
    - John Andrew (Kwethluk) said that he hadn't been out fishing and most families are done fishing, but some families do not have much or anyone to fish for them. Mr. Andrew says he fishes for some of them. He said yesterday he received calls from people that were disappointed about possible river closures, among other reasons the price of groceries and commercial dog food. Many are waiting for silvers. Mr. Andrew said that alternative fishing methods are not very effective in his area, but he would be happy with smaller mesh size or nets if the river opened. However, he feels that if the lower Kuskokwim is closed the middle and upper river should also be closed. *Audio for this update begins at 17:05 – Meeting Audio – 07/21/22*
    - James Nicori (Kwethluk) said that he had not been fishing but he did fish before the rainy season started. In talking to others from his village, Mr. Nicori said that most people have taken what fish they needed but would still appreciate some openers for fresh fish dinners. Most people are going out for berries and have put their fish away. *Audio for this update begins at 20:06 – Meeting Audio – 07/21/22*
  - Middle River
    - Walter Morgan (Kalskag) said that he had not done much fishing and has only seen one setnet out in his area, and no one between Kalskag and Aniak. He said people would still like to have fishing opportunity. Mr. Morgan said there is very

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little pressure, and the focus of most people is on berry picking or people are waiting on silver salmon and moose. The berries have been scattered and mostly dry, but there are some good spots. *Audio for this update begins at 22:00 – Meeting Audio – 07/21/22*

- Allen Simeon (Aniak) said that he had not been drifting this week. Mr. Simeon said that some people have tried fishing last week but were catching mostly chum salmon, with driftnets and rod and reel, so they stopped fishing. He said the water is high and dirty, so nobody has been fishing. Mr. Simeon said the berries weren't quite ready yet. *Audio for this update begins at 24:45 – Meeting Audio – 07/21/22*
- Lamont Albertson (Aniak) said that he had nothing to report since he had been in Bethel. *Audio for this update begins at 26:26 – Meeting Audio – 07/21/22*
- Upper River
  - Barbara Carlson (Sleetmute) said that the water has been high, and she has spent some time cleaning up the wheel. She said that there have been lots of chum salmon in the river and there have been much fewer red salmon. She said she hasn't seen any silver salmon yet. She is happy to see the chum salmon, but they are a pain to catch and release. *Audio for this update begins at 26:50 – Meeting Audio – 07/21/22*
- Headwater
  - Kevin Whitworth (McGrath) said that there had been very little fishing in his area but lot of water and debris. He had heard a friend of his who is a Takotna homesteader had caught a few, but few people are able to catch what they need. *Audio for this update begins at 29:23 – Meeting Audio – 07/21/22*
  - Dan Esai (Nikolai) said that for the last two or three years in a row people in his area have not been able to meet their subsistence needs and he heard that at Pitka weir salmon are not coming back. Mr. Esai said that the river used to be closed May 25<sup>th</sup> and that seemed to help salmon reach the spawning grounds upriver and in the headwaters. Mr. Esai said that the elders are worried. *Audio for this update begins at 32:20 – Meeting Audio – 07/21/22*
- ONC In-season Report
  - No report given this meeting.
- KRITFC In-season Report
  - Kevin Whitworth said that the Community-based Harvest monitor program was done, and he had nothing to report. *Audio for this update begins at 37:10 – Meeting Audio – 07/21/22*
- Overview of the Kuskokwim River salmon run assessment

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- Sean Larson gives a brief report. Details can be found on pages 5-15 of the information packet. Weir data can be found on pages 16-30. *Audio for this update begins at 38:35 – Meeting Audio – 07/21/22*
- Some highlights of Mr. Larson's report are that Bethel Test Fish is catching almost exclusively chum salmon right now; the sockeye salmon are at the end of their run and numbers are slightly behind last years, and not many coho salmon have been caught yet but we can expect to see more in August. Sonar data supports the same information.
- There was a short discussion about the low number of salmon counted at the Pitka Fork weir. Possible explanations could be that the productivity in the region may not have been as good or early fishing opportunities may have affected the salmon passage to headwaters. The past few days may have been attributed to the high waters. *Audio for this update begins at 45:09 – Meeting Audio – 07/21/22*
- Subsistence Division Project Update
  - Chris McDevitt (ADFG) gives a brief update on the ethnography project in progress that had been started this spring and will be continued in August. *Audio for this update begins at 49:22 – Meeting Audio – 07/21/22*
- NVN Report
  - No report given this meeting
- Sport Fish:
  - Lamont Albertson did not have anything to report but commented that the water has been cloudy, and people are waiting on silver salmon. John Chythlook (ADFG) had nothing to add. *Audio for this update begins at 53:55 – Meeting Audio – 07/21/22*
- Intercept Fishery Report
  - No report given this meeting

## E. OLD BUSINESS:

- None to address

## F. NEW BUSINESS:

- None to address

## G. COMMENTS FROM WORKING GROUP MEMBERS:

- A discussion concerning ADF&G Management considerations is taken up by Working Group members and members of the public. Most participants said they wanted the river to be open but had questions concerning the chum salmon. ADF&G representatives felt that most of the chum had passed through Bethel. Some felt that if the lower river remained closed to conserve chums, then the whole river should close. People from the Upriver, reminded the group that many have not been able to meet their subsistence needs and have gotten very few or no fish. Some members suggested a smaller mesh size. Another member felt that if the river were

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opened to subsistence fishing that there would not be a lot of pressure since it was berry picking time and the weather has not been good for drying fish. This discussion resulted in Motion 2 below. *Audio for this update begins at 54:40 – Meeting Audio – 07/21/22*

- Allen Simeon (Aniak) asked a question about the upcoming Silver Derby in Aniak and if it would be legal to do activities planned. *Audio for this update begins at 1:29:20 – Meeting Audio – 07/21/22*

**The meeting was adjourned at 11:35 p.m.**

## **WORKING GROUP MOTIONS:**

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

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**Motion 2: To open the mainstem Kuskokwim with gillnets (drift or set) up to 50 fathoms in length and no mesh restriction on July 23<sup>rd</sup> until further notice.** *Passed (10 yes, 1 no)*

- Motion made by Barbara Carlson, seconded by Avery Hoffman
- *Audio for this update begins at 1:12:18 – Meeting Audio – 07/21/22*

**Motion 3: Adjourn at 11:35 p.m.** *Passed (Unanimous, July 21st)*

- Motion made by Mary Peltola, seconded by Albert Kawagely
- *Audio for this update begins at 1:32:22 – Meeting Audio – 07/21/22*

## **WORKING GROUP ATTENDANCE: July 21<sup>st</sup>, 2022**

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LOWER RIVER SUBSISTENCE	Alissa Rogers
MIDDLE RIVER SUBSISTENCE	Walter Morgan
UPRIVER SUBSISTENCE	Barbara Carlson
HEADWATERS SUBSISTENCE	Daniel Esai
MEMBER AT LARGE SEAT 1	Albert Kawagely
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	Lamont Albertson
<u>ADF&amp;G Comm. Fish:</u> Nick Smith, Ross Renick, Chuck Brazil, <u>Sport Fish Division:</u> John Chythlook <u>Subsistence Division:</u> Chris McDevitt <u>Commissioner's Office:</u>	

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<u>OSM:</u>	
<u>NVN:</u>	
<u>ONC:</u>	
<u>AVCP:</u>	
<u>KRITFC:</u> James Nicori	
<u>UAF:</u>	
<u>WIRAC:</u> Kevin Whitworth	
<u>YK Delta RAC:</u> John Andrew	
<u>WG Alternates:</u> (not already listed above) Alissa Rogers (YK Delta RAC), Albert Kawagley (1 <sup>st</sup> Member at Large)	<u>Media:</u> Anna Rose MacArthur (KYUK) <u>Other:</u> Maridon Boario (Senator Hoffman's office) Stephen Alexie (Napaskiak), Chariton Epchok (Kwethluk), Martin Nicholai (Kwethluk)

## GLOSSARY OF ABBREVIATIONS:

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