

Kuskokwim River Salmon Management Working Group
1 (800) 315-6338 (MEET) Code: 58756# (KUSKO)
ADF&G Bethel toll free: 1 (855) 933-2433

August 10th, 2022

On Wednesday, August 10th, 2022, the KRSMWG meeting was called to order at 10:14 a.m. and adjourned at 12:40 p.m. Meeting time was approximately 2 hours and 40 minutes. A quorum was established with 8 full voting members and 2 alternates in attendance. Barbara Carlson chaired the meeting. Quorum was lost at 12:40 and the Working Group decided to continue the meeting the next day, August 11th at 12:00. The Primary theme of the meeting on both days was the low return of coho salmon and the possible closure of the river to fishing for cohos. A summary of August 11th meeting can be found below the attendance section.

AGENDA ITEMS AND SUMMARY INFORMATION:

A. USFWS/KRITFC UPDATE: *Audio for this update begins at 13:35 – Meeting Audio – 8/10/22*

- Boyd Blihovde (USFWS) gave an update and expressed US Fish and Wildlife’s concern for the low coho salmon return this year. Mr. Blihovde states that USFWS staff and KRITFC will be meeting the following day, Thursday, August 11th to discuss and consider federal special actions on the river.

B. ADF&G MANAGEMENT ACTIONS UNDER CONSIDERATION: *Audio for this update begins at 17:05 – Meeting Audio – 8/10/22*

- Nick Smith (ADFG) recommended to keep the subsistence fishery open through the weekend, but to keep a close eye on the number of coho salmon returning to the river since numbers are below average but expecting to build. However, if CPUE at Bethel Test Fish did not reach 1,000 by the following Monday, August 15th, Mr. Smith stated that he would be looking to close the Kuskokwim River and its tributaries to all gear types until September 30th.

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
 - Lower River
 - Albert Kawagely (Bethel) states that he has not been out fishing recently and his family is done fishing. Mr. Kawagely did express his concern for others who have not yet been able to reach their subsistence needs. *Audio for this update begins at 20:22 – Meeting Audio – 8/10/22*
 - James Nicori (Kwethluk) said that he had been out fishing the day after heavy winds and caught 12 coho salmon. Mr. Nicori said that he had been fishing prior to that but only caught 4 coho and 2 chums on one trip and 2 coho and 3 chums fishing in the beginning of August. He stated that this year’s run seemed to be below average for this time of year. *Audio for this update begins at 21:28 – Meeting Audio – 8/10/22*
 - Alissa Rogers (Bethel) said that she had driftnet fished with a 6-inch mesh full shackle net by Schwabe and caught 2 chums and some small silver salmon. Ms. Rogers said that she had also fished on the Kisaralik and caught a lot of silvers, but they were mixed in with many other fish including whitefish, sheefish, pike,

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and others. Alissa states she has also heard from others that had caught little or no silver salmon. *Audio for this update begins at 24:04 – Meeting Audio – 8/10/22*

- Mike Williams Sr. (Akiak) said that some people have had setnets out, but many are not fishing. Some people are jarring fish or fishing for dinner, but overall, there is very little effort. Mr. Williams worries about a possible closure since some still need fish to put away and fish to feed their dogs. He is concerned about the low returns of coho salmon but hopes that it is just a late run. *Audio for this update begins at 30:30 – Meeting Audio – 8/10/22*
- Middle River
 - Walter Morgan (Lower Kalskag) said that fishing effort in his area has been low as it has been too rainy, bumpy, and too wet to smoke. Mr. Morgan also states that most people are concentrating on berries and getting ready for moose season at this time. *Audio for this update begins at 34:20 – Meeting Audio – 8/10/22*
 - Allen Simeon said that he has not seen boats with nets recently and there also had not been much rod and reel fishing since the water in the river was too dirty. He had seen silver salmon in some of the sloughs and the Aniak River, but the fish are not striking on lures. Mr. Simeon said that when he was young, he used to catch silvers through the ice. He believes that the run is late this year. *Audio for this update begins at 35:35 – Meeting Audio – 8/10/22*
- Upper River
 - Barbara Carlson (Sleetmute) said that she had not been running the fish wheel due to the high water. Ms. Carlson said that she had spoken to Rebecca Wilmarth (Red Devil) and that she had set-netted one day but caught no silver salmon. She said some people have been fishing by the mouth of the Holitna where the water was somewhat clear but have not been catching any silvers. She spoke to some of the guides on the Holitna and they said that they are only catching 2-3 silvers all day. Ms. Carlson said that no one is really catching much right now. *Audio for this update begins at 38:10 – Meeting Audio – 8/10/22*
 - Kevin Whitworth (McGrath) reported that he has seen high waters in his area and expects for the water to get higher soon. Mr. Whitworth said that he had fished the past couple weekends with 4 ½ inch mesh net to target humpback whitefish. He said that he was catching good numbers of whitefish and has still been catching chum salmon and a few small King salmon. Mr. Whitworth said that he had caught silver salmon; one each day on August 5, 6, and 7th. He said usually he goes down river this time of year to rod and reel fish in some of the creeks, but he probably would not be going this year since the water is so high. He only knows of one other family that is fishing in his area. *Audio for this update begins at 39:32 – Meeting Audio – 8/10/22*

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- Dan Esai (Nikolai) remembers when the coho salmon were numerous this time of year and says that he is concerned about the run size through the Pitka Fork weir and the size of the fish. He said that both salmon and blueberries were low in the area this year and worried how his family and others in the area would feed themselves for the year. Mr. Esai briefly discussed how things used to be in the past. *Audio for this update begins at 42:47 – Meeting Audio – 8/10/22*
- Overview of the Kuskokwim River salmon run assessment
 - Sean Larson (ADFG) gave an update on assessment projects on the Kuskokwim. Mr. Larson said that both the sonar project and Bethel Test Fish are showing below average runs for this point in 2022. Mr. Larson also stated that in 2018 coho escapement was not met and in 2021 the coho run was late but escapement was met. When comparing to those years the 2022 coho run is in the middle of those two years. The Department of Fish and Game was still trying to assess whether the coho run was late, low returning numbers or both, but as of August 10th, the run was below average. *Audio for this update begins at 48:00 – Meeting Audio – 8/10/22*
 - The weir goals for Chinook salmon have all been met or exceeded although escapement numbers are low at the headwater weirs. Chum salmon escapement was low for the 2022 season and the Kogrukluq weir has not yet met chum salmon escapement. There is a short discussion about the Pitka Fork weir immediately after Mr. Larson’s presentation. Sockeye salmon escapement has been met and coho salmon are just starting to arrive at the weir. The Pitka Fork, Salmon River and Takotna weirs have all concluded operations for the year. *Audio for this update begins at 51:06 – Meeting Audio – 8/10/22*
 - There is a brief conversation about the Pitka Fork weir’s low numbers and chum salmon immediately after Mr. Larson’s presentation.
- Sport Fish:
 - John Chythlook (ADFG) briefly stated that sport fishing has not been doing well on the Kuskokwim due to the high and cloudy water. Mr. Chythlook stated his intention to close the sport fishery to coho salmon; King and chum salmon are already closed. *Audio for this update begins at 1:06:10 – Meeting Audio – 8/10/22*

E. OLD BUSINESS:

- There was no old business addressed at this meeting.

F. NEW BUSINESS:

- There was no new business addressed at this meeting.

G. COMMENTS FROM WORKING GROUP MEMBERS:

- Working Group members and fishery managers discuss the possibility of closing the river to fishing with setnets and for coho. There was some concern about commercial fishing in the Kuskokwim however members were reassured that there has been no commercial fishing in the

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river or the Kuskokwim Bay in 2022. Most of the members were concerned for the low return of the coho salmon so far but some felt that the coho salmon run would be coming in late. Members from the upper river and headwaters urged managers to leave sections 4 and 5 of the river open arguing that there would be low impact and since the coho salmon had not yet reached their portion of the river they have had no time to harvest. Everyone was concerned that some families had not yet reached their subsistence needs for fish this year, especially in the headwaters area. Some alternate suggestions were rolling closures like what has been done with the Chinook run and restrictions on fishing gear. *Audio for this discussion begins at 1:10:05 – Meeting Audio – 8/10/22*

The meeting was adjourned at 12:40 p.m. and members agreed to continue the conversation the next day, August 11th, 2022.

WORKING GROUP MOTIONS:

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

- *Audio for this motion begins at 12:25 – Meeting Audio – 8/10/22*

Motion 2: To close subsistence fishing in the Kuskokwim River and its tributaries to all gear types from the Holitna river downriver to the mouth (or sections 1-4) between August 16th- September 30th, or until escapement goals are projected to be achieved, if Bethel Test Fish does not reach a CPUE of 1,000 by Monday, August 15th. *Failed (1 yes, 2 nos, 4 abstentions)*

- Motion made by Albert Kawagely and seconded by Alissa Rogers
- *Audio for this motion begins at 1:12:01 – Meeting Audio – 8/10/22*
- Alissa Rogers amended the motion to close the river downriver from the Holitna and leave section 5 open. *Audio for this amendment begins at 1:28:00 – Meeting Audio – 8/10/22*

Motion 3: To extend the meeting until 12:30 p.m. *Passed (Unanimous)*

- Motion made by Alissa Rogers and seconded by Dan Esai
- *Audio for this motion begins at 1:43:38 – Meeting Audio – 8/10/22*

Motion 4: To extend the meeting until 1:00 p.m. *Passed (Unanimous)*

- Motion made by Dan Esai and seconded by Albert Kawagely
- *Audio for this motion begins at 2:14:55 – Meeting Audio – 8/10/22*

Motion 5: To close sport fishing on the Kuskokwim River and its tributaries to coho salmon. *Failed (4 yesses, 3 abstentions)*

- Motion made by Kevin Whitworth and seconded by James Nicori
- Much of the discussion on this motion was about how closing coho salmon to sportfishing would affect the silver salmon Derby in Aniak.
- *Audio for this motion begins at 2:12:55 – Meeting Audio – 8/10/22*

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WORKING GROUP ATTENDANCE:

MEMBER SEAT:	NAME:
DOWNRIVER ELDER	John Andrew
UPRIVER ELDER	Allen Simeon
LOWER RIVER SUBSISTENCE	Mike Williams Sr.
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	Mary Peltola
WESTERN INTERIOR RAC	Kevin Whitworth
YK DELTA RAC	<i>Absent</i>
COMMERCIAL FISHING	<i>Absent</i>
SPORT FISHING	Lamont Albertson
ADF&G	Nick Smith
CHAIR	Fritz Charles
<u>ADF&G Comm. Fish:</u> Nick Smith, Ross Renick, Sean Larson, Iris Fletcher <u>Sport Fish Division:</u> John Chythlook <u>Subsistence Division:</u> <u>Commissioner's Office:</u>	
<u>USFWS:</u> Boyd Blihovde, Chris Tulik, <u>OSM:</u> Brooke McDavid, Nissa Pilcher, Kevin Foley <u>NVN:</u> <u>ONC:</u> <u>AVCP:</u> Jennifer Hooper <u>KRITFC:</u> Avery Hoffman, James Nicori <u>UAF:</u> <u>WIRAC:</u> Kevin Whitworth <u>YK Delta RAC:</u>	
<u>WG Alternates: (not already listed above)</u> Ruby Egrass (Upriver Subsistence)	<u>Media:</u> Olivia Eberts (KYUK) <u>Other:</u> Stephen Alexie

August 11th, 2022

On Thursday, August 11th, 2022, the KRSMWG meeting was called to order at 12:00 p.m. and adjourned at 2:15 p.m. Meeting time was approximately 2 hours and 15 minutes. A quorum was established with 11 full voting members in attendance. Mary Peltola chaired the meeting. This meeting was a continuation of the August 10th meeting to discuss closure of coho salmon fishing in the Kuskokwim.

AGENDA ITEMS AND SUMMARY INFORMATION:

A. USFWS/KRITFC UPDATE: *Audio for this update begins at 14:30 – Meeting Audio – 08/11/22*

- Boyd Blihovde (USFWS) gave a short update. USFWS and KRITFC had met earlier that morning and both agencies felt that protections for the coho salmon run was needed. Mr. Blihovde said

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that USFWS is intending to issue a special action and restrict fishing in the lower river sections 1-3. He stated that he hoped that they would be able to work with the state and offer some fishing opportunities, but it would take some time to work things out.

- There were some questions and conversation about different options that the refuge manager had regarding management actions, including gear types and fishing opportunities. *Audio for this discussion begins at 18:30 – Meeting Audio – 8/11/22*

B. ADF&G MANAGEMENT ACTIONS UNDER CONSIDERATION: *Audio for this update begins at 22:40 – Meeting Audio – 8/11/22*

- There is considerable conversation regarding ADF&G management actions that were recommended on the previous day, August 10th. Both USFWS and state agencies feel that restrictions are necessary.
- Allen Simeon and others ask questions about how fish are counted and when and where the test fisheries fish. His questions were answered by Nick Smith (ADFG). *Audio for this update begins at 22:40 – Meeting Audio – 8/11/22*
- Mary Peltola speaks of her concern for the low number of salmon returns of multiple salmon species but also concern for the people and the possibility of a complete closure. Others are also concerned how the public will be affected by a complete closure. This leads to a conversation about window openings if the coho salmon numbers improve or it appears that escapement goals could be met. James Nicori encourages people to be more involved with the Board of Fisheries. *Audio for this update begins at 38:30 – Meeting Audio – 08/11/22*

C. PEOPLE TO BE HEARD:

- One participant, Stephen Alexie, makes a comment that there has been bad weather and high waters on the river that have prevented people from fishing. He stated he felt that the proposed management action from the state is overkill. *Audio for this update begins at 20:24 – Meeting Audio – 8/11/22*

G. COMMENTS FROM WORKING GROUP MEMBERS:

- Working Group members offer some traditional knowledge about how subsistence users fish for coho salmon in their respective areas and the lack of pressure that they believe could be expected. Fritz Charles describes how the coho salmon run in two groups and believes that the current run is a precursor to a stronger run, yet to come. Other Working Group members concur and some feel that restrictions are premature. Mike Williams discusses concern for the people of the Kuskokwim and their health and would like to hear more options other than entirely closing the river. *Audio for this discussion begins at 27:40 – Meeting Audio – 8/11/22*
- James Nicori suggests moving to federal management of the lower river to allow for subsistence driftnet only openings and closing rod and reel fishing in the tributaries. *Audio for this discussion begins at 1:41:40 – Meeting Audio – 8/11/22*
- Martin Nicholai (Kwethluk) was in favor of Motion 6 to close sport fishing and felt that it would make a big difference in the tributaries.

The meeting was adjourned at 2:15 p.m.

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WORKING GROUP MOTIONS:

Motion 1: Approve the agenda as amended to not include continuing business. Passed (Unanimous)

- *Audio for this motion begins at 6:13 – Meeting Audio – 8/11/22*

Motion 2: For Working Group members to advise the state to not restrict coho salmon in sections 1-3 of the Kuskokwim River for at least the next 3 weeks. Failed (6 yesses, 4 nos)

- *Audio for discussion of this motion begins at 1:08:45 – Meeting Audio – 8/11/22*
- Motion made by Fritz Charles, seconded by Allen Simeon
- Fritz Charles said that he felt that the assessments for coho salmon was inadequate since projects end before the coho run is complete. There is a discussion about how the numbers are compared to the numbers at the same time of year and the importance of concern for conservation of the species.

Motion 3: To not impose any restrictions on coho salmon in sections 4 and 5, upriver of Aniak. Failed (5 yesses, 4 nos, 1 abstention)

- *Audio for discussion of this motion begins at 1:43:30 – Meeting Audio – 8/11/22*
- Motion made by Mike Williams, seconded by Fritz Charles
- Mike Williams feels that the population and take of salmon from above Aniak is not great enough to cause a conservation concern. Barbara Carlson said that although she agrees she feels that the upper river should show support to the lower river and have restrictions as well.

Motion 4: For the Working Group to support federal special actions to conserve coho salmon in sections 1-3 of the Kuskokwim River and for state management to mirror actions in sections 4 and 5 of the river. Passed (10 yesses)

- *Audio for discussion of this motion begins at 1:51:00 – Meeting Audio – 8/11/22*
- Motion made by Mike Williams, seconded by Lamont Albertson
- Mike Williams made the motion in order to keep restrictions consistent throughout the entire river.

Motion 5: To extend the meeting by 15 minutes. Passed (Unanimous)

- *Audio for this update begins at 2:00:25 – Meeting Audio – 8/11/22*
- Motion made by Barbara Carlson, seconded by Dan Esai

Motion 6: To close coho salmon sport fishing in the Kuskokwim River drainage. Withdrawn

- *Audio for this update begins at 2:01:30 – Meeting Audio – 8/11/22*
- Motion made by Barbara Carlson, and seconded by Lamont Albertson
- The motion is withdrawn after ADFG’s intention was stated that sport fishing shall be closed if Bethel Test Fish does not reach a CPUE of 1,000 by August 15th.

WORKING GROUP ATTENDANCE:

MEMBER SEAT:	NAME:
DOWNRIVER ELDER	John Andrew
UPRIVER ELDER	Allen Simeon
LOWER RIVER SUBSISTENCE	Mike Williams

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WESTERN INTERIOR RAC	Kevin Whitworth
YK DELTA RAC	<i>Absent</i>
COMMERCIAL FISHING	<i>Absent</i>
SPORT FISHING	LaMont Albertson
ADF&G	Nick Smith
CHAIR	Fritz Charles
<u>ADF&G Comm. Fish:</u> Nick Smith, Sean Larson <u>Sport Fish Division:</u> <u>Subsistence Division:</u> <u>Commissioner's Office:</u>	
<u>USFWS:</u> Boyd Blihovde, Chris Tulik, Emmit Nicori <u>OSM:</u> <u>NVN:</u> <u>ONC:</u> <u>AVCP:</u> <u>KRITFC:</u> Avery Hoffman, 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) Albert Kawagley (1 st Member at Large)	<u>Media:</u> Olivia Eberts (KYUK) <u>Other:</u> Stephen Alexie, 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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