

Kuskokwim River Salmon Management Working Group

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

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

Meeting Agenda

Date: May 25, 2023

Time: 9:00am–5:00pm*

Place: Bethel, AK

**The Group may choose to take breaks when needed.*

Time Called to Order:

Chair:

Time Adjourned:

ROLL CALL TO ESTABLISH QUORUM:

Upriver Elder:

Downriver Elder:

Commercial Fisher:

Lower River Subsistence:

Middle River Subsistence:

Upper River Subsistence:

Headwaters Subsistence:

QUORUM MET? Yes / No

Processor:

Member at Large:

Sport Fisher:

Western Interior RAC:

Y-K Delta RAC:

KRITFC:

ADF&G:

INTRODUCTIONS:

INVOCATION:

APPROVAL OF AGENDA: *the agenda may be amended at this time.*

PEOPLE TO BE HEARD:

A. Bering Sea Juvenile Salmon Report

B. 2022 Season Recap

- Assessment projects review (Weirs, Aerial, ASL) (Sean Larson, ADF&G)
- Chinook salmon total run and drainage wide escapement estimate
- 2023 Chinook Salmon Forecast

C. 2023 Fishery Management:

- 2023 Assessment projects
 - ADF&G
 - NVN
 - USFWS
 - KRITFC
 - ONC
- ADF&G Management Presentation & Discussion on Specific Management Actions For 2023 (Nick Smith, ADF&G)
 - Date to begin early season closure
 - Set gillnet fishing periods during early season closure
 - Tributary Management
 - Salmon Tributaries (Eek, Kwethluk, Kisaralik, Kasigluk, Tuluksak, and Aniak Rivers)
 - Non-Salmon Tributaries (i.e. Gweek, Tunt, Johnson Rivers)
 - Use of live release gear (fish wheels, dip nets, beach seines, and hook and line)
 - Sport Fishing (John Chythlook, ADF&G)
- Yukon Delta National Wildlife Refuge (Boyd Blihovde, USFWS)

D. WORKING GROUP BUSINESS:

- Election of Co-Chairs
- Working Group In-Season Meeting Schedule
- Nominate WG representative to serve at KRITFC inseason meetings

E. COMMENTS FROM WORKING GROUP MEMBERS:

NEXT MEETING DATE: _____ Time: _____ Place: _____

Informational Packet

Information Packets *ARE*:

- Intended to help inform Working Group discussions.
- To be viewed and used in context with Working Group meetings only.

Packets *ARE NOT*:

- To be viewed as standalone documents.
- A final say on fisheries management decisions.

Please use this information responsibly:

Packet information is an incomplete snapshot of an ongoing discussion and changing conditions. Packet information should not be reproduced for any purpose other than to describe Working Group meeting discussions.

Misuse of Packet information can contribute to misunderstandings that can **cause harm to salmon users** and potentially **damage salmon resources**.

Ask Questions: ADF&G staff will be happy to answer biology and management questions. Please call **1-855-933-2433** to reach ADF&G Kuskokwim Area staff.

Attend Meetings: Each Working Group meeting is announced at least 48 hours prior to time and date of meeting. In addition, each meeting is recorded. Recordings can be found here:
http://www.adfg.alaska.gov/index.cfm?adfg=commercialbyarea_kuskokwim.kswg

Viewing the information packet while listening to meetings/recordings will provide a better understanding of the information presented in this packet.

Thank you,
Savannah Hollingworth
Working Group Coordinator

Southern Bering Sea Salmon Survey

Survey Background

The goal of the Southern Bering Sea Salmon survey is to study juvenile salmon from the Kuskokwim River and Bristol Bay to understand what happens to these fish in the ocean.



What is a juvenile salmon?

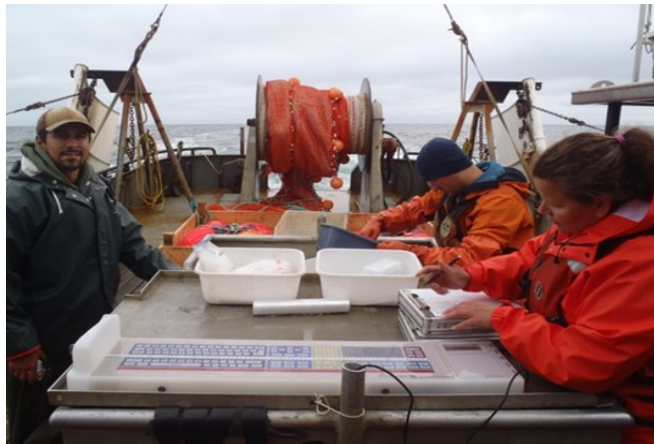
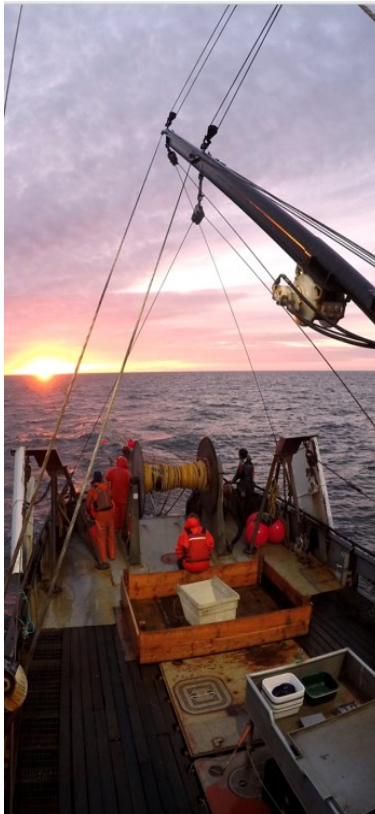
A juvenile salmon has spent its first summer in the marine environment.

Survey Objectives

- 1) Assess juvenile salmon abundance and distribution;
- 2) Evaluate juvenile salmon health;
- 3) Measure ocean temperature impacts on juvenile salmon;
- 4) Monitor availability of juvenile salmon food.

Sampling Design

Monitor sites between Nunivak Island and the Alaska Peninsula for juvenile salmon throughout the month of September.



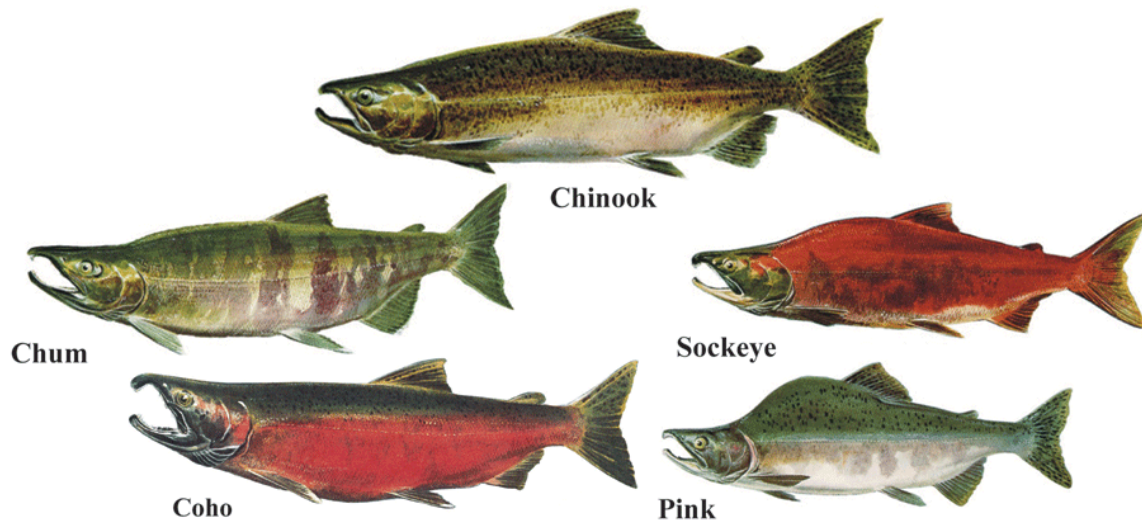
Want more information? Have questions? Reach out to the survey leads:

Sabrina Garcia and Ben Gray

sabrina.garcia@alaska.gov; ben.gray@alaska.gov

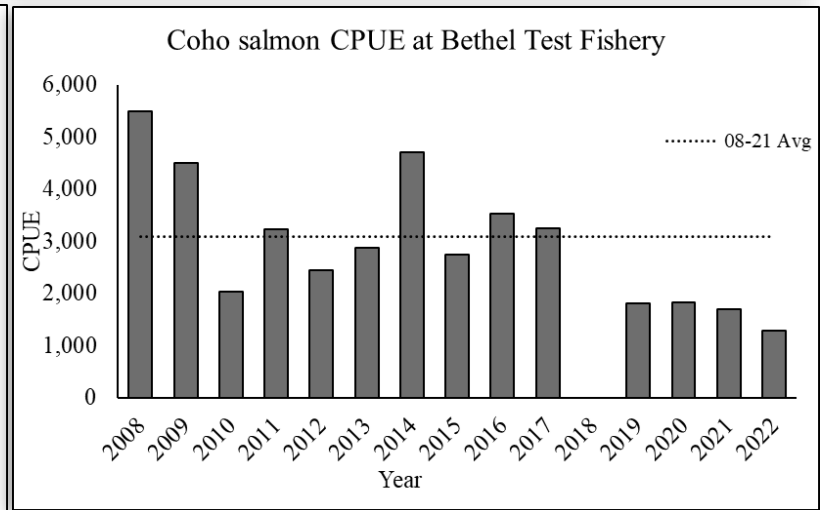
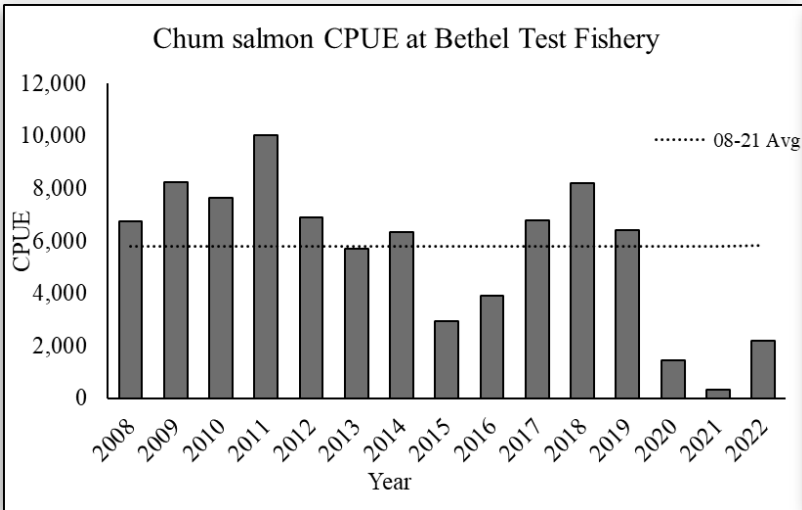
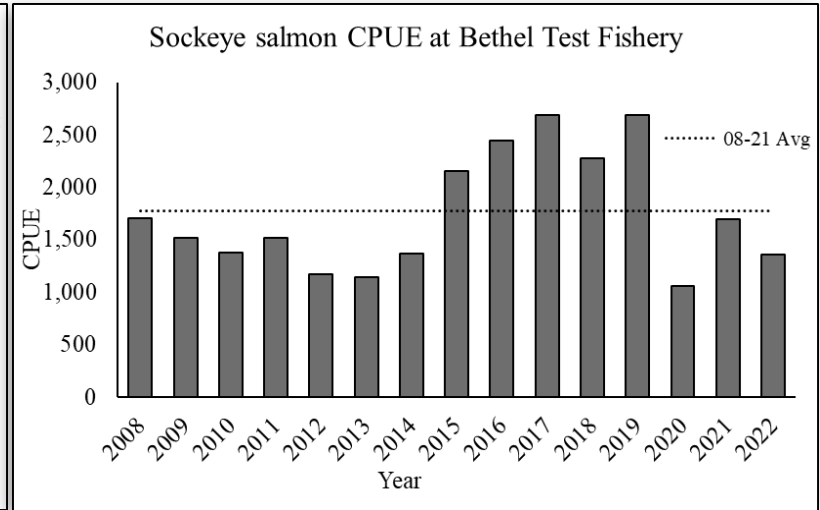
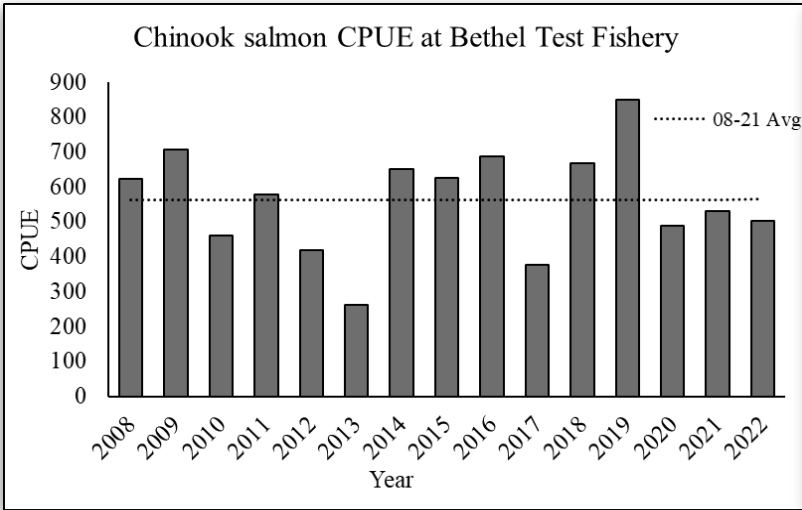


Kuskokwim River Salmon Assessment

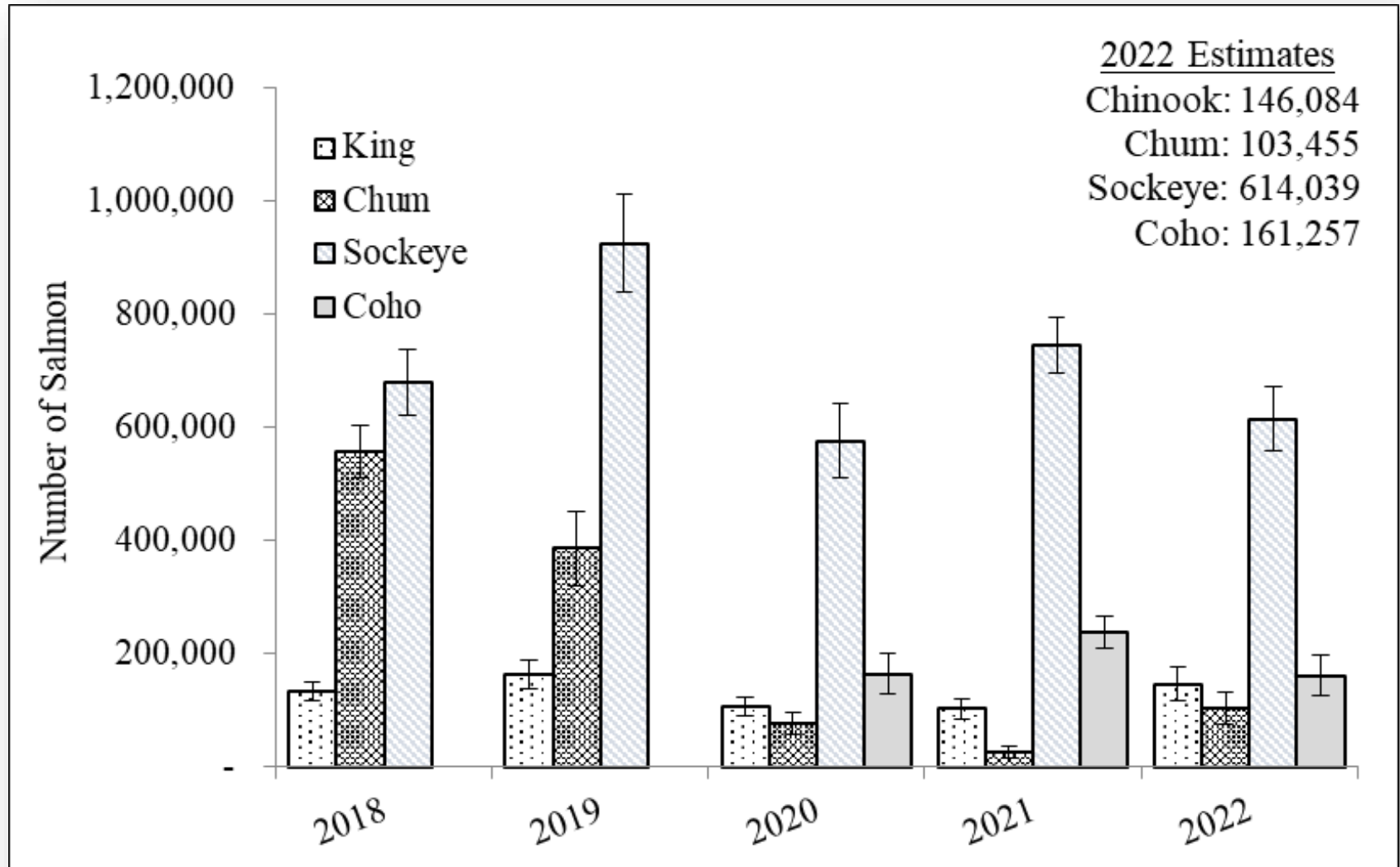


Spring 2023 Working Group
Sean Larson
Alaska Dept. Fish and Game

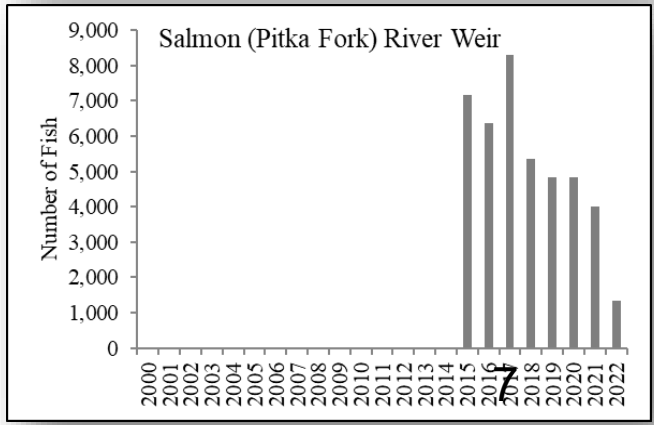
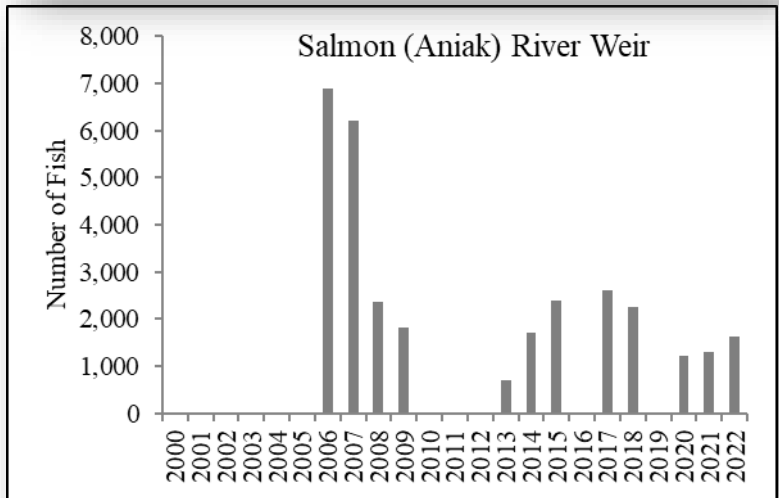
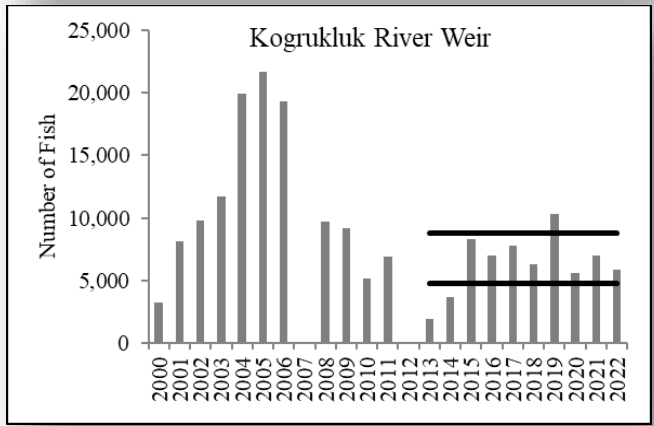
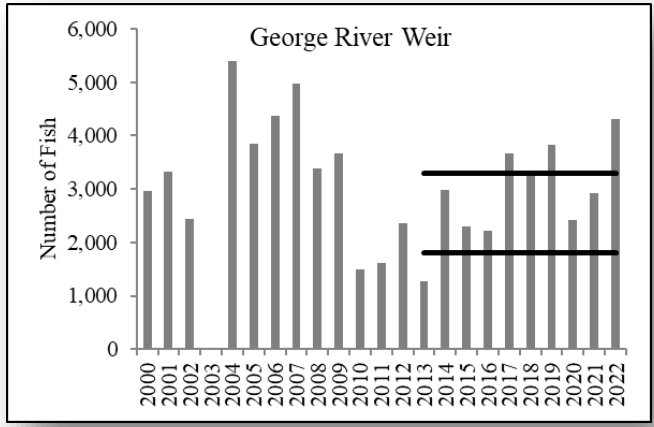
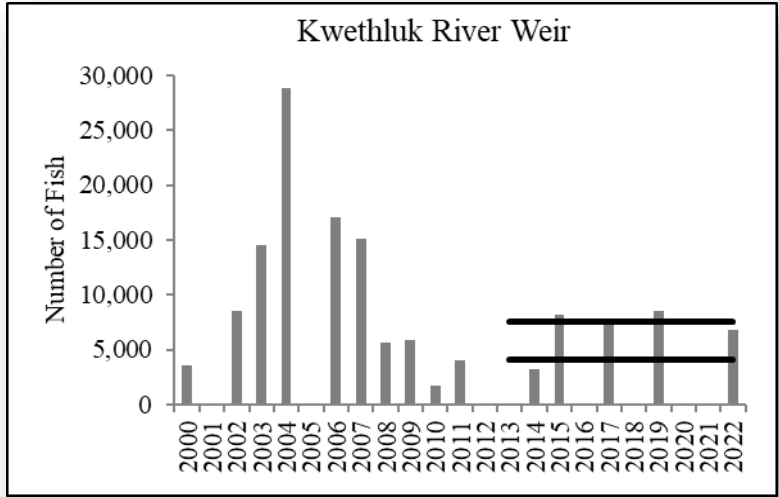
BTF Results



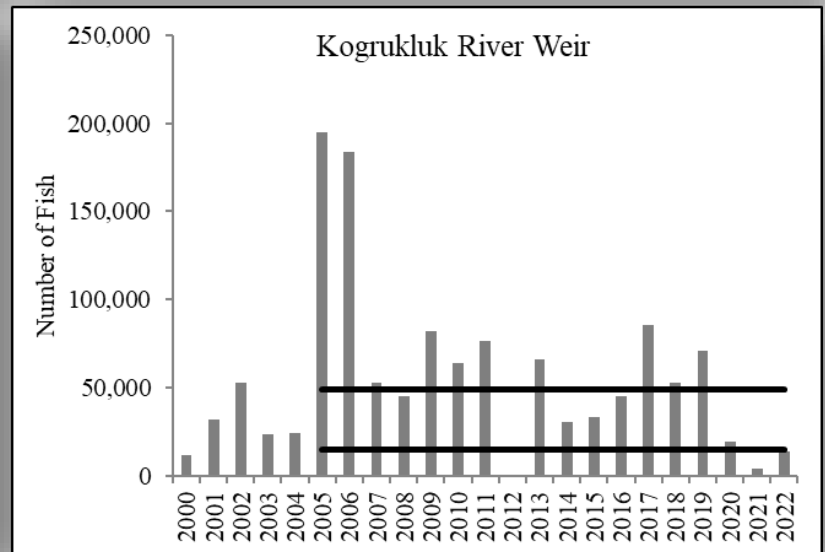
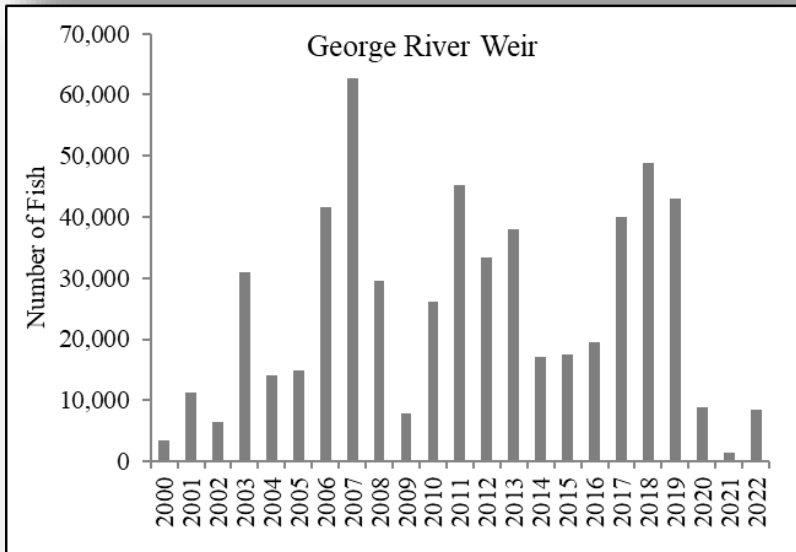
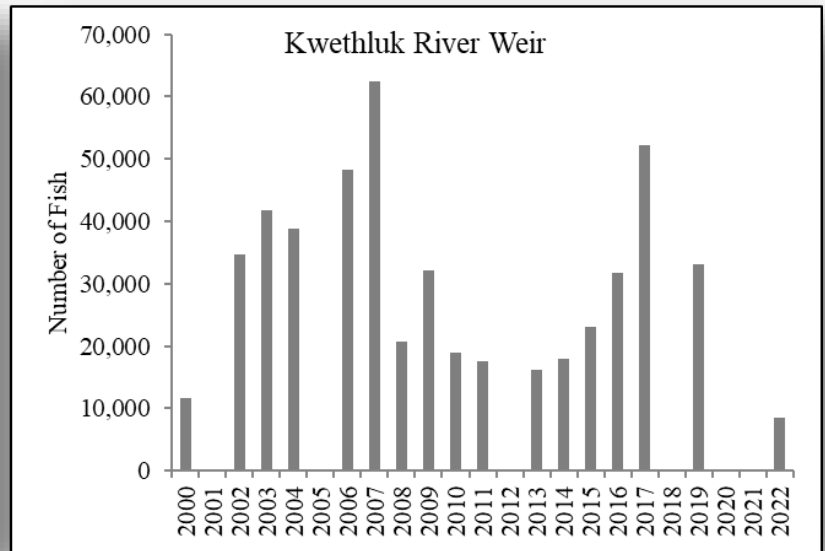
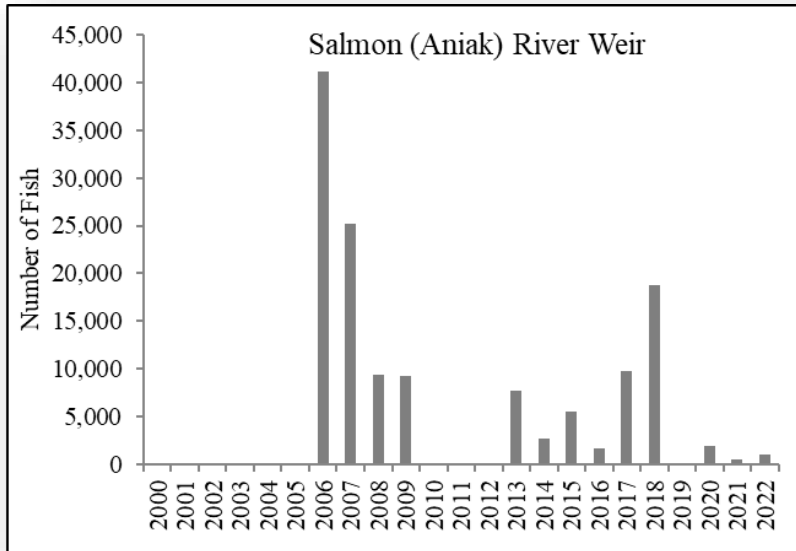
Sonar Results



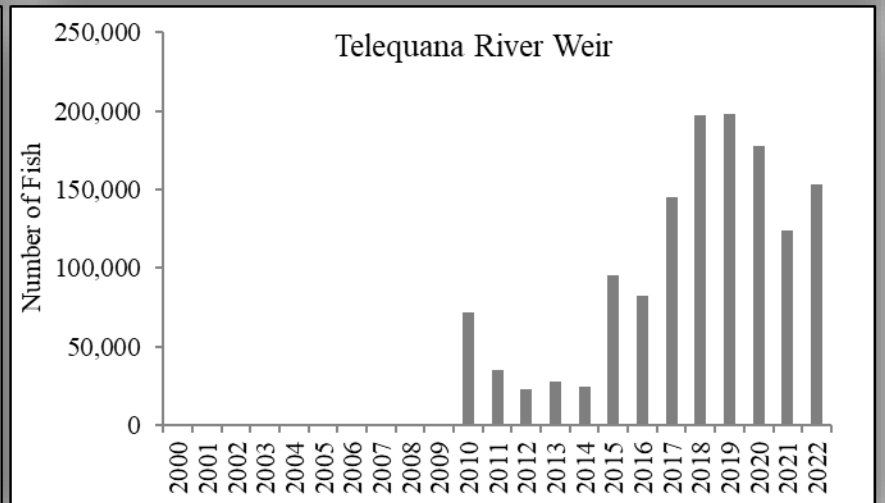
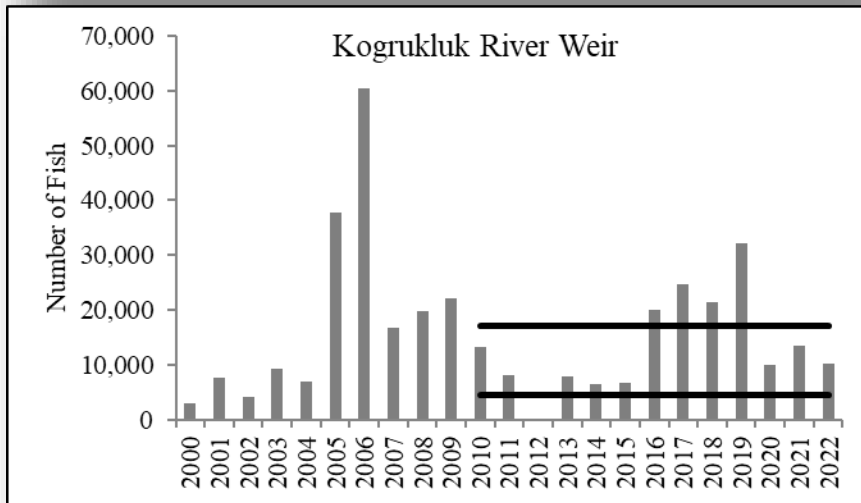
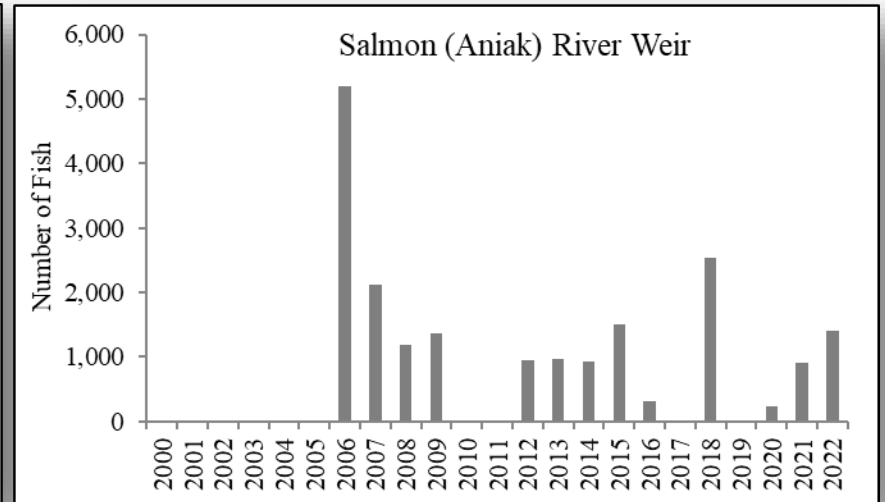
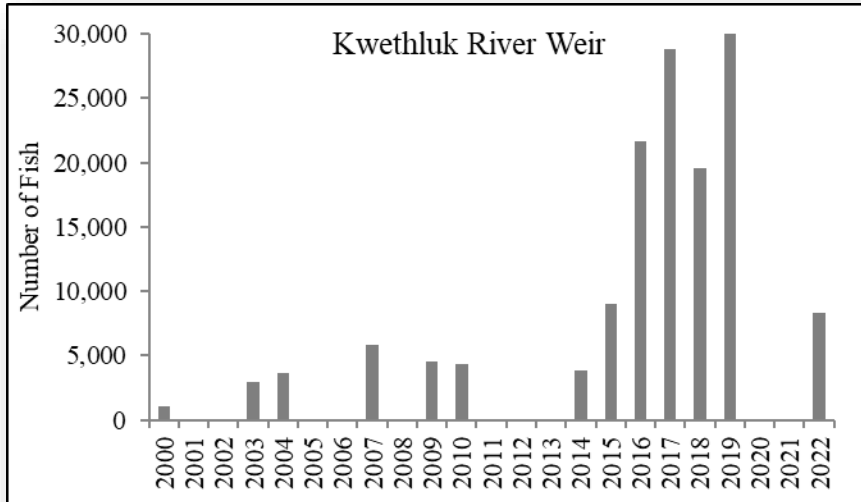
Weirs: Chinook Salmon



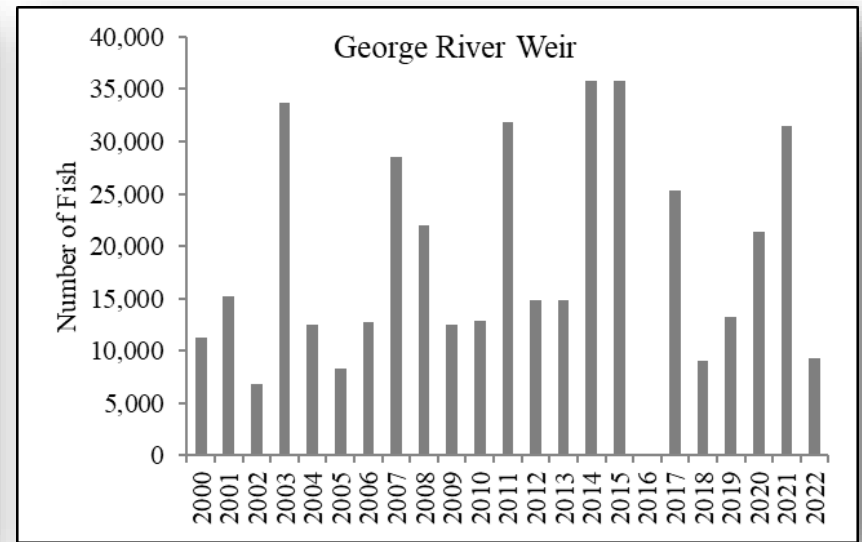
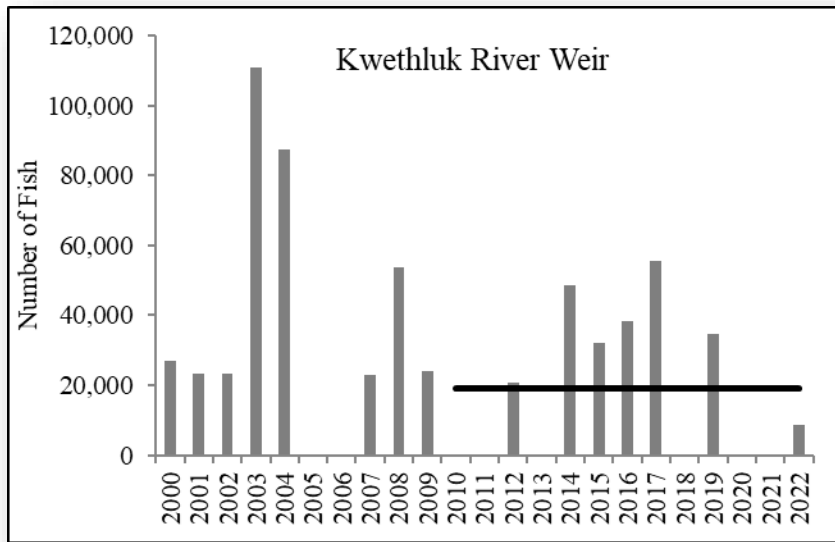
Weirs: Chum Salmon



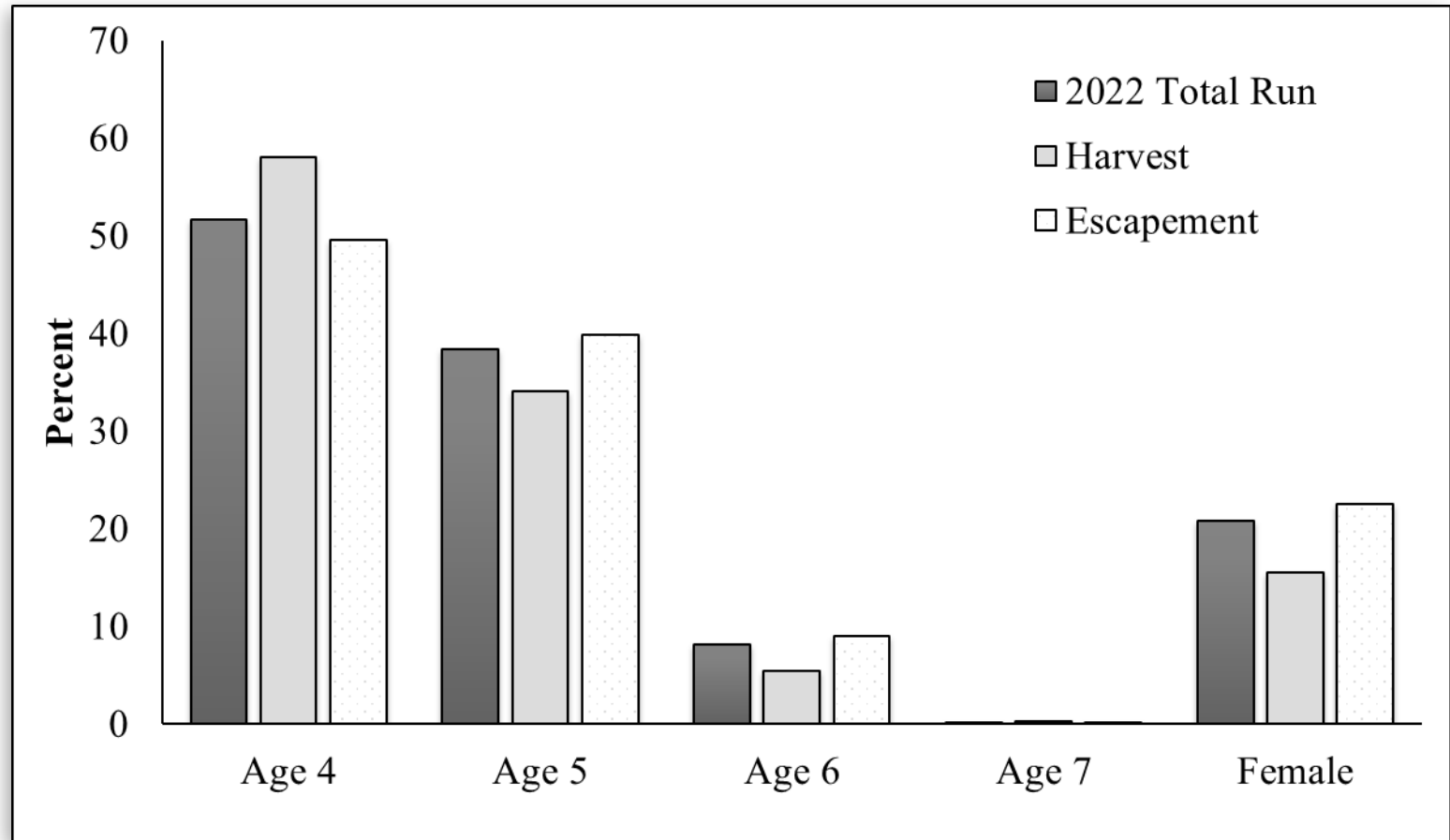
Weirs: Sockeye Salmon



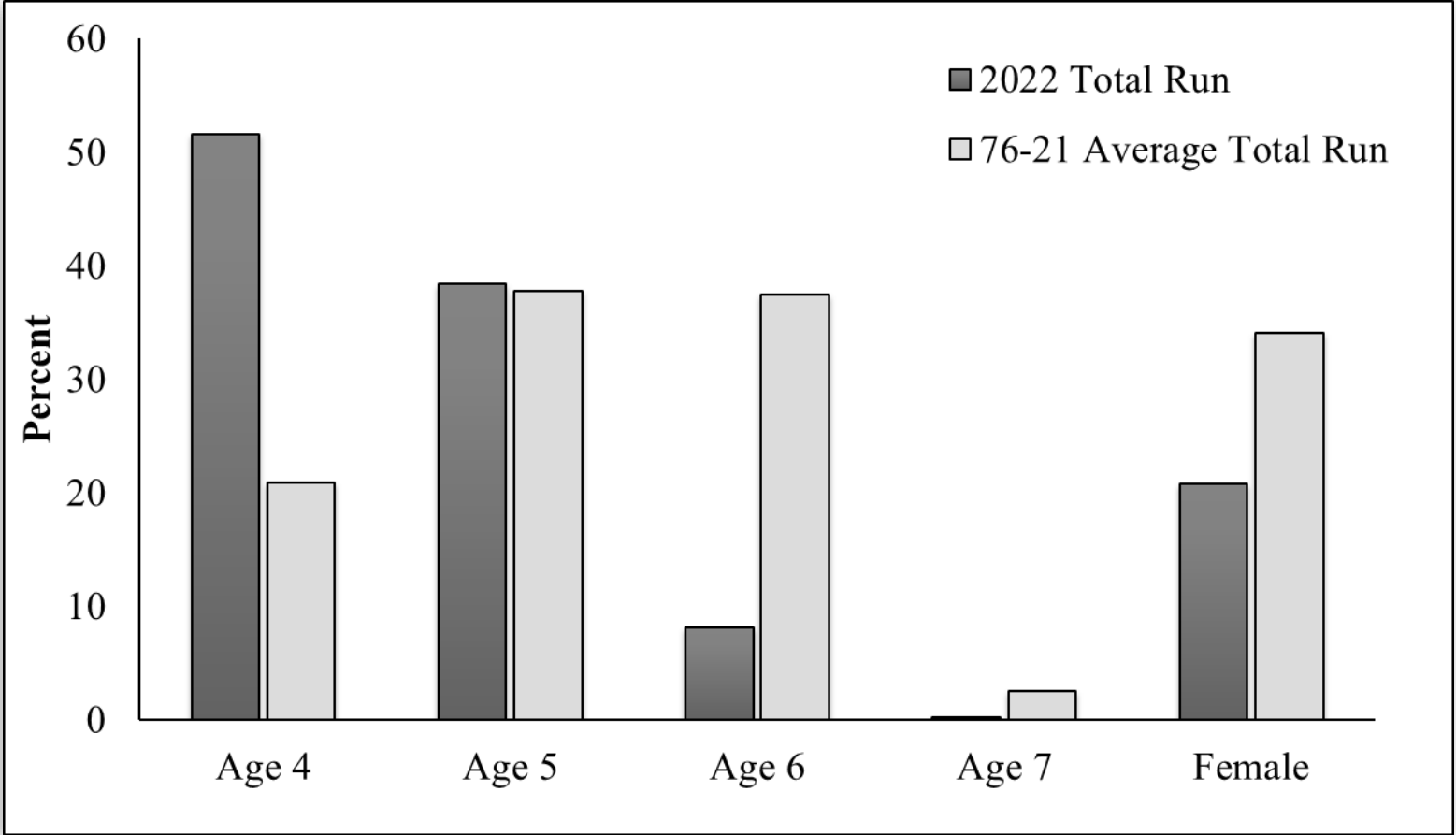
Weirs: Coho Salmon



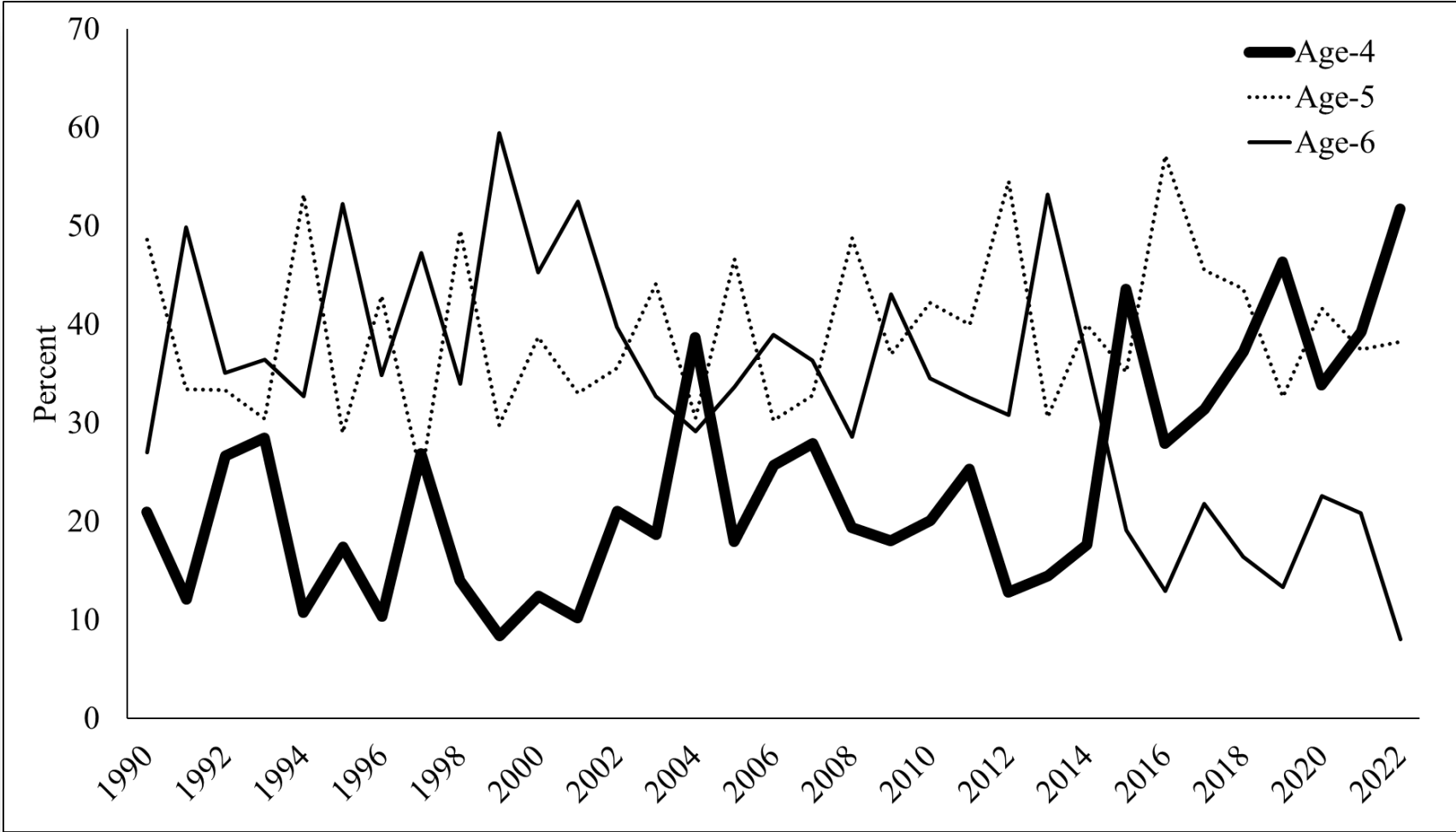
Chinook Salmon - Age/Sex Composition



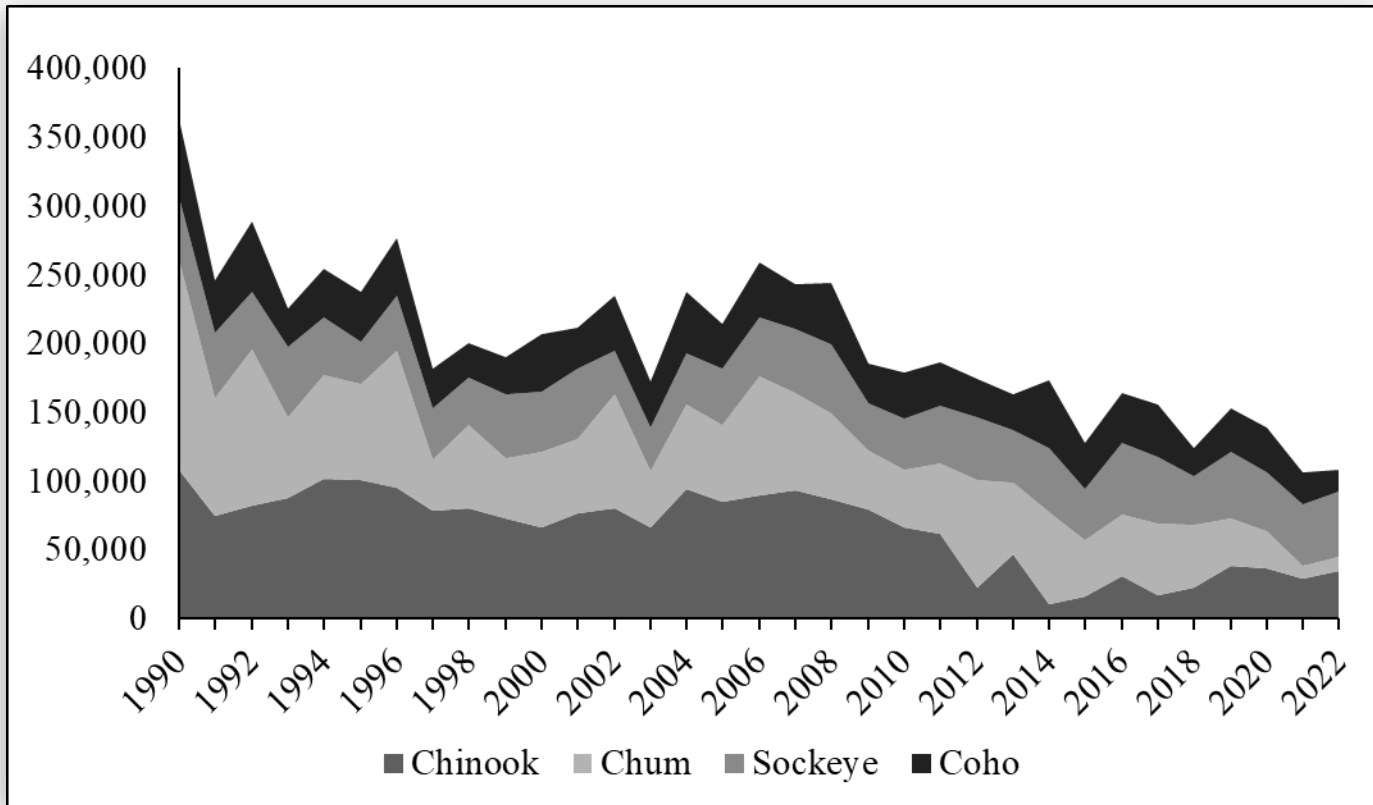
Chinook Salmon - Age/Sex Composition



Chinook Salmon - Age/Sex Composition

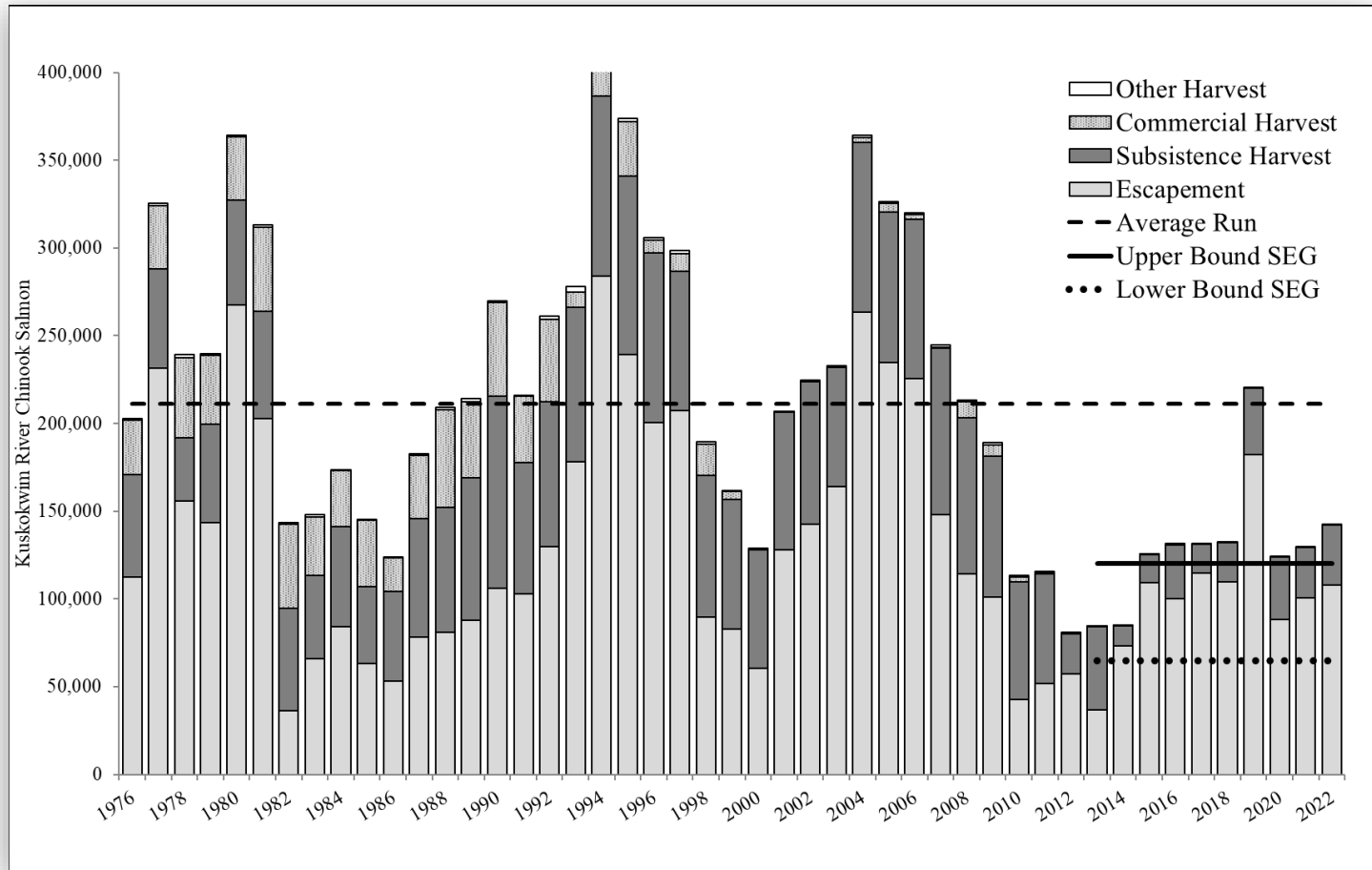


Kuskokwim River Subsistence Harvest



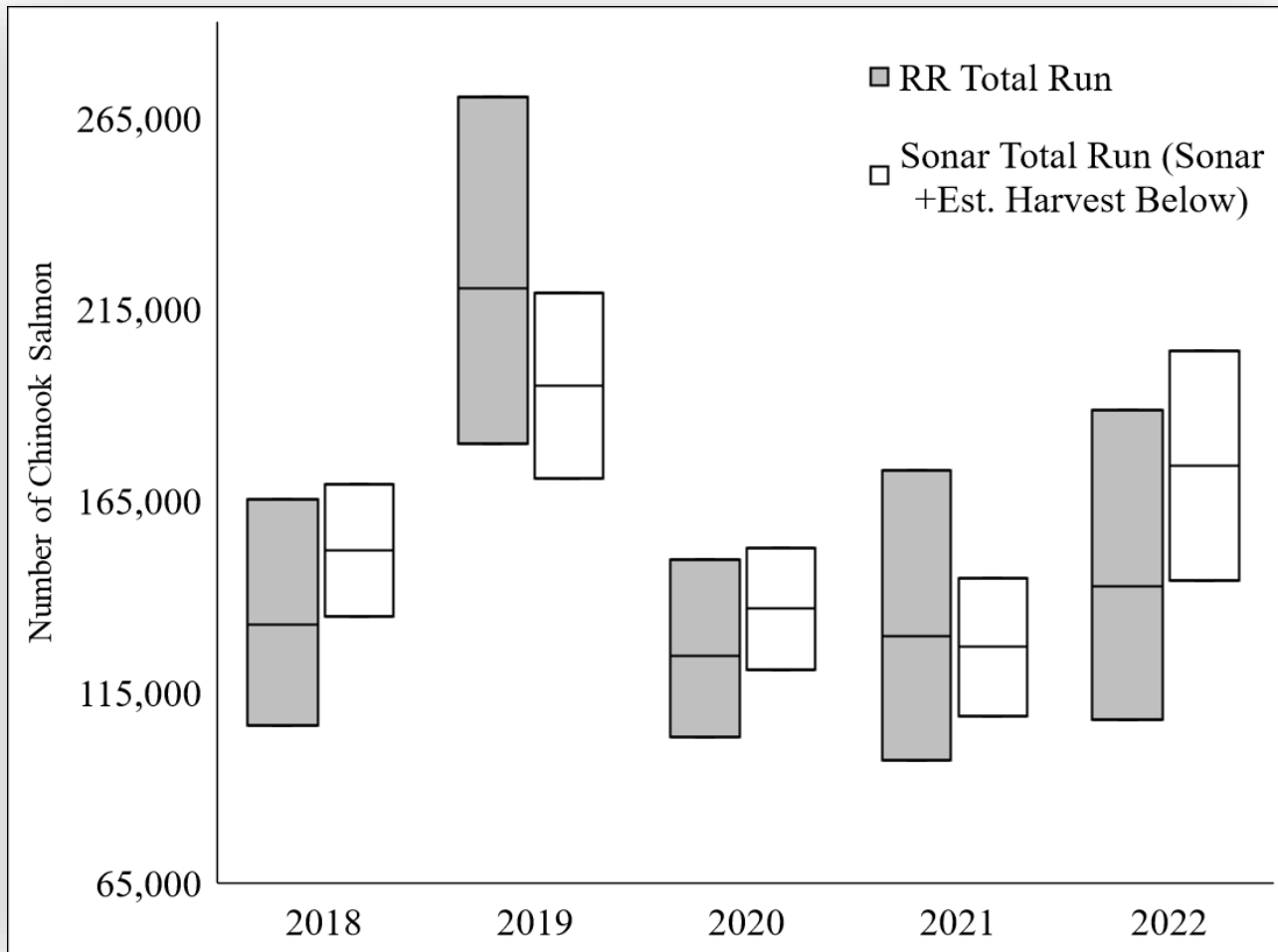
	2022 Harvest	90-21 Avg
Chinook	34,134	65,224
Chum	10,864	61,194
Sockeye	47,432	42,080
Coho	15,401	35,007

Chinook Salmon Run Reconstruction

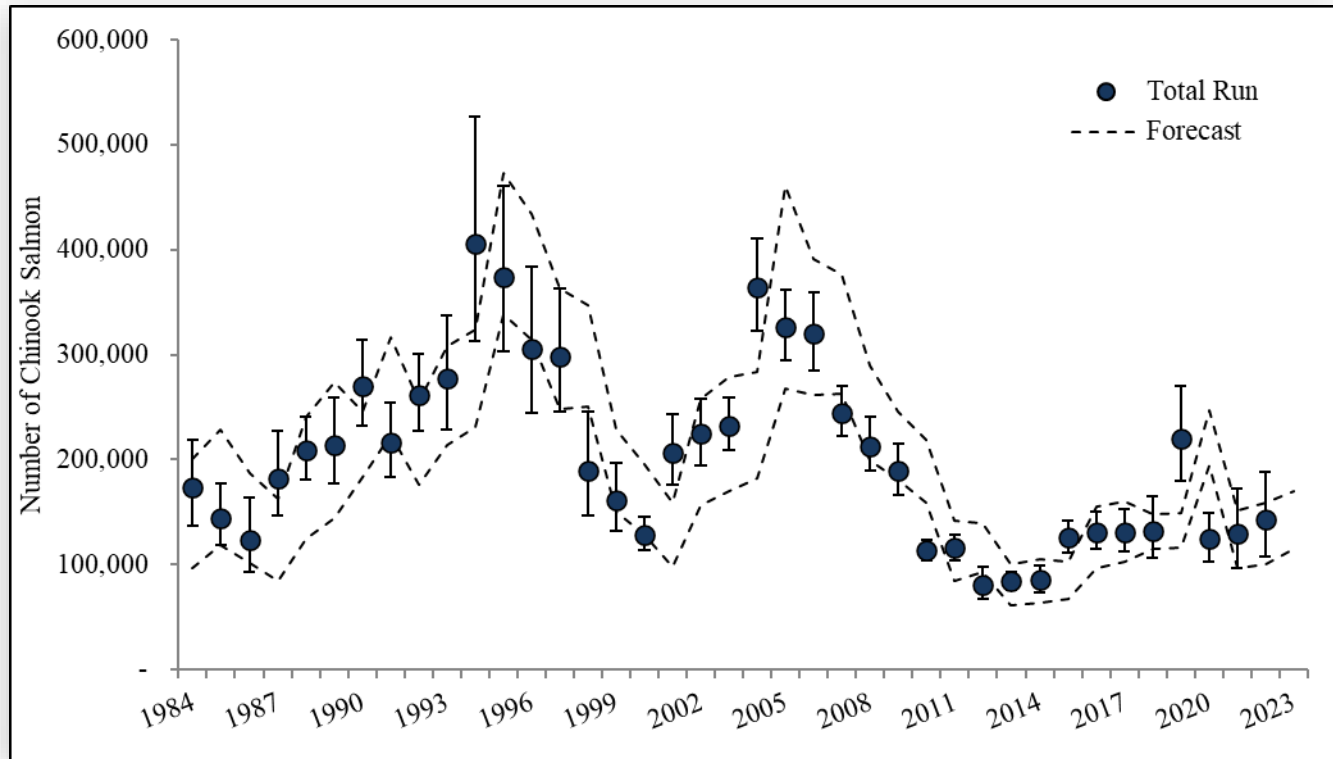


- Total Run Size – 142,000 (95% CI: 108,000–189,000)
- Total Escapement – 108,000 (95% CI: 73,000–154,000)
- Total Harvest – 34,000 (95% CI 31,000–38,000)

Run Reconstruction vs Sonar



Chinook Salmon Forecast



Forecast Range: 115,000–170,000

Summary

- Escapement goals
 - Chinook: All goals met or exceeded
 - Chum: Goal *not* met
 - Sockeye: Goal met
 - Coho: Goal *not* met
- Ages
 - Percentage of age-4 Chinook salmon was above average
 - Percentage of age-6 Chinook salmon was below average
- Total Run Size ~ 142,000
 - Below the 211,000 fish average
- Total Escapement ~ 108,000
- Total Harvest ~ 34,000
- Forecast Range ~ 115,000 – 170,000

2023 Kuskokwim River Assessment Projects

Overview:

Project	Location	Start Date	End Date	Species	Data Availability	Organization
<u>Test Fishery</u>						
Bethel Test Fishery	Bethel	June 01	August 20	K, C, R, S	Daily	ADF&G
Aniak Test Fishery	Aniak	June 01	July 15	K, C, R	Daily	NVN
<u>Mainstem</u>						
Sonar	Bethel	June 01	August 26	K, C, R, W, S	Daily	ADF&G/ONC
<u>Harvest</u>						
Subsistence Surveys	Bethel	May 29	July 15	K, C, R	Weekly	ONC/ADF&G
Subsistence Surveys	Lower River	June 12	Open	K, C, R, W	As needed	KRITFC
Subsistence ASL	Bethel	June 01	Open	K	End of season	ONC/ADF&G
Subsistence ASL	Lower River	June 02	Open	K	End of season	KRITFC
<u>Weir</u>						
Kwethluk River	Lower River	June 01	Sept. 10	K, C, R, S	Daily	USFWS/Kwethluk
Salmon (Aniak) River	Middle River	June 15	Sept. 20	K, C, S	Daily	NVN
George River	Middle River	June 15	Sept. 20	K, C, S	Daily	ADF&G
Kogruklu River	Holitna River	June 26	Sept. 20	K, C, R, S	Daily	ADF&G
Telaquana River	Stony River	July 03	August 15	R	Daily	NPS/ADF&G
Takotna River	Upper River	June 24	August 15	K, C	Daily	KRITFC
Salmon (Pitka) Fork	Upper River	June 20	August 15	K	Daily	ADF&G/MTNT
<u>Air Survey</u>						
	Drainage	July 17	August 05	K	End of season	ADF&G

Species Key: **K** = "King" or Chinook; **C** = chum; **R** = "Red" or sockeye; **S** = "Silver" or coho; **W** = whitefish.

Daily Assessment Document:

- USFWS and ADF&G will continue to produce a daily assessment document summarizing the most relevant inseason data about Chinook, chum, sockeye, and coho salmon run timing and abundance.
- This document will focus exclusively on inseason data from Bethel Test Fishery, Aniak Test Fishery, harvest estimates, and mainstem sonar.
- The assessment documents will be publicly available via email and posted online. ADF&G will distribute the document to the Kuskokwim River Salmon Management Working Group email distribution list. Contact Sean Larson (sean.larson@alaska.gov) or Nick Smith (nick.smith@alaska.gov) if you want to be added or removed from this list.

- **Weirs** – A total of six weirs will be operated (3 – ADF&G; 1 – NVN; 1 – NPS; 1 – KRITFC) to monitor salmon escapement throughout the lower, middle, and upper portions of the Kuskokwim River drainage. Final estimates of escapement for each location will be made post-season. Daily escapement counts will be updated on the ADF&G Fish Counts webpage daily by 10AM, Monday through Friday:
<http://www.adfg.alaska.gov/index.cfm?adfg=commercialbyareakuskokwim.salmon#fishcounts>
- **Aerial Surveys** – Surveys will be flown throughout select lower, middle, and upper river tributaries to index Chinook salmon escapement in late July. Aerial survey results will be provided post-season once surveys are completed.

Project Descriptions:

- **Bethel Test Fishery** – ADF&G, Division of Commercial Fisheries will operate the Bethel Test Fishery in the same location and use the same methods as in prior years. This project will produce daily catch-per-unit-effort (CPUE) for Chinook, chum, sockeye, and coho salmon. Data will provide information about inseason run timing, relative abundance (e.g., species ratios), and run strength. Data will be included in the daily assessment update and posted to the ADF&G Fish Counts webpage by 10AM, Monday through Friday:
<http://www.adfg.alaska.gov/index.cfm?adfg=commercialbyareakuskokwim.salmon#fishcounts>

Note: The top of the head will be removed from all Chinook salmon to collect otoliths (ear bones) for a separate study designed to determine where each fish was born.

- **Aniak Test Fishery** – Native Village of Napaimute will operate the Aniak Test Fishery in the same location and use the same methods as in 2015 – 2021. This project will produce daily catch-per-unit-effort (CPUE) for Chinook, chum, and sockeye salmon. Data will provide information about inseason run timing and relative abundance (e.g., species ratios). Data will be included in the daily assessment update.
- **Kuskokwim Sonar** – ADF&G, Division of Commercial Fisheries will operate sonar upriver from Bethel near the upper end of Church Slough and just downriver from the Kwethluk “Y”. Orutsarmiut Native Council (ONC) is a partner on this project and will assist with project operations in August. This project will produce daily inseason estimates of abundance for Chinook, chum, sockeye, coho, whitefish, and other species passing the sonar site. Total cumulative abundance with 95% confidence intervals will be estimated daily. Data will be included in the daily assessment update.
- **Subsistence Harvest Surveys** – There will be several overlapping and complimentary efforts to collect inseason information about subsistence harvest, catch, and effort. Information will be used to monitor fishing progress as the salmon run develops. In addition, detailed catch and effort information may be used by USFWS to estimate inseason subsistence harvest within specific areas of the Yukon Delta National Wildlife Refuge during specified fishery openers.
 - ONC – will conduct weekly fish camp surveys throughout the Bethel area similar to past years. Additional survey effort will be conducted at the Bethel boat harbor as needed and provided to USFWS for estimating inseason subsistence harvest. A summary of survey results will be presented weekly at scheduled Working Group meetings.
 - Kuskokwim River Intertribal Fish Commission (KRITFC) – will collect catch and effort information from several communities.
- **Subsistence Age-Sex-Length (ASL) Sampling** – As in past years, ONC will recruit and train subsistence fishers to collect scales, sex, and length data from Chinook salmon harvested by subsistence fishers in the Bethel area. KRITFC will also assist with collection of Chinook salmon ASL from lower river communities through their community monitoring program. ASL summaries will be generated post-season.

2023 Kuskokwim River Management Outlook and Strategy

Nick Smith ADF&G

2023 BOF Actions

Kuskokwim River

1. Management tools to use when conservation is needed for chum, sockeye or coho.
2. Establish dipnets as a legal gear for commercial fishing.
3. Allow a rope to be attached to a dipnet handle.

Kuskokwim Bay

1. District 4 subsistence and commercial fishing is closed on Sundays between June 1 and July 15.
2. Only one gillnet may be operated per boat between June 1 and July 15 in District 4.

Kuskokwim River Litigation

ADF&G is still enjoined from managing fisheries within the YDNWR

- What does that mean for 2023?
 - While a Federal Special Action is in place:
 - **What cannot happen:**
 - ADF&G will not be discussing any management recommendations or taking any management actions within the YDNWR to open a subsistence fishery.
 - The KRSMWG is a state ADF&G advisory body and therefore, cannot make management recommendations within the YDNWR to open a subsistence fishery.
 - **What can happen:**
 - ADF&G will manage all waters that fall outside the YDNWR boundary (i.e., upriver from Aniak).
 - ADF&G will close state subsistence and sport fishing within YDNWR following the stipulations of the injunction.
 - The KRSMWG can advise ADF&G on management actions that fall outside the YDNWR boundary.
 - Hear from USFWS on the actions they will be taking within the YDNWR and ask any questions.



Front End Closure Discussion

- Forecast (115,000–170,000 fish)
- Management plan requires that the King salmon fishery be close until June 11.
- At least one weekly setnet fishing period be provided.

Front
End
Closure

Start Date –
June 11

Pre-season Management Discussion

- **Mainstem river closed to gillnets**
 - Roll closure upriver
 - At least one weekly 6” set gillnet fishing period
 - Selective legal methods with no King and chum retention
- **Lower Kuskokwim River spawning tributaries**
 - Closed to gillnets
 - Selective legal methods with no King or chum retention
- **Non-spawning tributaries**
 - Closed to gillnets from their confluence with the Kuskokwim River upstream 100 yards
- **Sport fishing for King and chum salmon** closed by Emergency Order in alignment with the management plan

Review of 2022 actions

1. Starting Date(s) of Front-End Closure

- Roll closure upriver in mainstem and spawning tributaries.
 - Sections 1-3 – **June 1**
 - Section 4 – **June 9**
 - Section 5 – **June 9**

2. Front-End Setnet 6” Fishing Periods

- One or more weekly
 - Dates - **June 1, 4, 8**
- Duration of fishing periods - **16 hrs**

3. Non-Spawning Tributaries

- Closed to gillnets from their confluence with the Kuskokwim River upstream 100 yards.

4. Selective Gear Types

- Allow use with King release
 - Mainstem - **YES**
 - Spawning Tributaries - **YES**

ADF&G Front End Recommendation

1. Starting Dates of Front-End Closure

- Roll closure upriver in mainstem and spawning tributaries.
 - Sections 1-3 – **June 1**
 - Section 4 – **June 7**
 - Section 5 – **June 7**

2. Front-End Setnet Fishing Periods

- Section 4 and 5 only – **Open June 7**
- Duration of fishing period – **Continuous**

3. Non-Spawning Tributaries

- Close to gillnets from their confluence with the Kuskokwim River upstream 100 yards.

4. Selective Gear Types

- Allow use with Chinook and chum Release
 - Mainstem - Yes
 - Spawning Tributaries - Yes

Working Group Decisions and Input- Front End

1. Starting Date (s) of Front-End Closure
 - Roll Closure Upriver?
 - Sections 1-3 -
 - Section 4 -
 - Section 5 -
2. Front-End Setnet Fishing Periods
 - Section 4 and 5
 - Date(s) - ?
 - Duration of fishing period(s)? (6, 12, 16, Continuous)
3. Non-Spawning Tributaries
 - Close to gillnets from their confluence with the Kuskokwim River upstream 100 yards?
4. Selective Gear Types
 - Allow use with Chinook and Chum Release
 - Mainstem?
 - Spawning Tributaries?

Like our Facebook page to stay up to date on Kuskokwim Area fisheries:

<https://www.facebook.com/KuskoRiverFishingADFG/>



Questions?