

Kuskokwim River Salmon Management Working Group

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

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

June 14th, 2023

On Wednesday, June 14th, 2023, the KRSMWG meeting was called to order at 10:05 a.m. and adjourned at 12:11 p.m. Meeting time was approximately 2 hours and 6 minutes. A quorum was established with 7 full voting members in attendance and two additional members joined the meeting late. Fritz Charles chaired the meeting. The wet weather and high water were a recurring theme for people up and down the river.

AGENDA ITEMS AND SUMMARY INFORMATION:

A. USFWS/KRITFC UPDATE: *Audio for this update begins at 17:37 – Meeting Audio – 6/14/23*

- Boyd Blihovde, USFWS, summarized the June 12th set and driftnet opener. He said that the weather was bad for fishing with rain and high water. Some people were successful, others were not.
- Mr. Blihovde reported that only one flight count was done in the morning during this opener because of poor visibility in the afternoon. The concentration of boats was observed between Kwethluk and Napakiak with about 20 boats.
- Mr. Blihovde said that USFWS and KRITFC had plans to meet to look at the assessment and harvest to determine further openings. There are concerns about the Chinook run but they hope to provide openings to target sockeye. They will also discuss possible changes to the Aniak box and the Kalskag line.
- Kevin Whitworth, KRITFC, reminded everyone about the KRITFC teleconference that occurs every Tuesday 10:00 a.m. to Noon.

B. ADF&G MANAGEMENT ACTIONS UNDER CONSIDERATION: *Audio for this update begins at 25:30 – Meeting Audio – 6/14/23*

- Nick Smith, ADFG, did not have any current recommendations. Mr. Smith comments that upriver of Aniak is open to drift and set gillnet fishing with 6 inch mesh or less up to 25 fathoms and 45 meshes deep.
 - Kevin Whitworth made a comment about confusion over the closure and opening. Mr. Whitworth said that people in McGrath do not know the river is open. *Audio for this update begins at 26:30 – Meeting Audio – 6/14/23*

C. PEOPLE TO BE HEARD:

- Teresa Simeon-Hunter, Native Village of Chuathbaluk, made a comment that currently high water is her biggest concern. Another concern was the possibility of river closures like they were last year when the state closed the river for silver salmon. *Audio for this update begins at 28:20 – Meeting Audio – 6/14/23*
- Dan Gillikin, NVN, added that there were now clear markers between the state and federal jurisdiction at the Aniak line. This comment was met with questions about non-spawning tributaries and their markers. Boyd Blihovde stated not all tributaries have markers. The bigger or more well-known rivers do. Fishermen need to ensure they are 100 yards up from the mainstem of the Kuskokwim on non-salmon spawning tributaries. *Audio for this update begins at 29:45 – Meeting Audio – 6/14/23*

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D. CONTINUING BUSINESS:

- Subsistence Reports: Lower River, Middle River, Upper River, ONC In-season Subsistence Report
 - Lower River
 - Christian Alexie Jr., USFWS, said that most of the people in the lowest part of the river are still going out for herring and not many are targeting salmon yet. In Eek people are traveling up the Pailleq. Last he heard, Quinhagak people are fishing for herring, and some for salmon. *Audio for this update begins at 35:05 – Meeting Audio – 6/14/23.*
 - Fritz Charles said that he did not go fishing during the last opener but one of his relatives caught 8 King salmon. His family did not go out because of the weather and high winds. *Audio for this update begins at 36:00 – Meeting Audio – 6/14/23.*
 - Adolph Lupie, Tuntutuliak, said not many went fishing because of the weather. Mr. Lupie said that he wanted to conserve fish are swimming towards the headwaters. He said he has not seen many jack salmon this year and most of the fish he has seen have been medium to large fish. People are catching a few chums, but not many. *Audio for this update begins at 37:15 – Meeting Audio – 6/14/23.*
 - A member of the public gives a subsistence report in Yupik. Fritz Charles summarized what was said in English. The man said that the tundra villages are mostly catching whitefish. He had fished close to the mouth of the Johnson but didn't catch anything. The last opener some salmon were caught, but people are hardly fishing yet. He hopes that the South winds will push the salmon upriver. *Audio for this update begins at 39:00 – Meeting Audio – 6/14/23.*
 - John Andrew gave his subsistence report in Yupik which Fritz Charles summarized for him. Mr. Andrew said that not many people were fishing although some younger people went out. Those who went out caught 2 to 4 which was given out in the village. They went out again in the afternoon and did the same. Most people are fixing their smokehouses and drying racks that were damaged by Merbok in the fall or flooding this spring. He said, usually the catch from the 1st opener is used for fresh or frozen fish. People are not in full swing drying mode yet. Mr. Andrew said he would try harder during the next opener if the weather is better. *Audio for this update begins at 40:50 – Meeting Audio – 6/14/23.*
 - Adolph Lupie added that John Andrew had said that when there is high water more salmon swim in the middle of the river and that there was too much debris for setnetting.
 - Albert Kawagley, Bethel, said his son caught 3 fish during the opener and gave 2 away. Other fishermen he spoke to caught between 4 and 6 salmon. Mr. Kawagley said that his sister's drying rack was destroyed by the Merbok storm in

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the fall so they are rebuilding, and the smokehouse will be further back away from the river. His family will try it's best to dry some fish after the repairs, so they have some for winter. He said many are hurting this year because of damage to fish camps. *Audio for this update begins at 1:05:15 – Meeting Audio – 6/14/23.*

- Mike Williams, Akiak, reported that he did fair on the 3 setnet opportunities and said that it is the earliest that they have seen salmon in his area. He reported that some people have already done very well and that a lot of sheefish and whitefish have been caught as well. The opener on June 12th saw little effort in his part of the river in the morning; more went out in the afternoon, but it was still low effort. Mr. Williams said that during the Unit 4 meeting in Akiachak he heard reports from Tuluksak that they were having trouble with snags in the area so setnets worked better for them. Those who could get out of the wind or find a good eddy did very well there Mr. Williams believes the surge was just above Akiak during the June 12th opener. Fishermen that Mike spoke to reported catches between 10 and 20 Chinook. Mr. Williams caught 12 Chinook in 6 hours of drifting. Now he is hoping for good drying weather. *Audio for this update begins at 56:30 – Meeting Audio – 6/14/23.*
- ONC In-season Report
 - *Audio for this update begins at 45:30 – Meeting Audio – 6/14/23.*
 - Nia Long gave a report of ONC fisheries projects. ONC has hired multiple people this year for their natural resources department, including a Partners biologist.
 - Surveys were conducted at the boat harbor and at fish camps. According to survey results the average fish camp harvest goal for Chinook salmon is 43, chum is 24, sockeye is 53, coho is 35. Some of the comments included that people have not yet met their traditional subsistence harvest goals since the closures began and some were not happy with current management. Some said they no longer targeted Kings, while others said they need more Kings to meet their goals. Ms. Long continued reviewing survey comments to the group about harvest goals, how many families some fish camps supply fish to, and concerns for high water and chum salmon.
 - Ms. Long went over the data collected from the surveys regarding harvest and net mesh size.
 - Ms. Long speaks about their fish distribution programs. They have distributed to elders who have become widows this year and elders over 95 years old, as well as the YKHC long term facility. She mentions there is also senior services program that is currently passing out fish to elders, but it is not the same as the distribution program that is run by ONC fisheries, and it has separate guidelines.
 - The ONC Fisheries staff is working on training to learn ways they can update data in real-time using Microsoft and Google software.

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- Middle River
 - Walter Morgan, Lower Kalskag, reported that he did not go out during the opener because there was not yet enough fish in his part of the river to be worth the gas. Mr. Morgan said that the high number of fish caught near Kalskag was 8 and most of the fish were around 30 inches. Mr. Morgan said that he needed to catch a flight so he would be leaving the meeting but that he would like to see the river open from the Kalskag Bluffs and upriver. *Audio for this update begins at 1:03:30 – Meeting Audio – 6/14/23.*
 - LaMont Albertson, Aniak, said that the pike are aggressive as always and he has heard of some sheefish being caught. Mr. Albertson defers to Dan Gillikin for anything further since he has not been in Aniak. *Audio for this update begins at 1:07:45 – Meeting Audio – 6/14/23.*
- NVN Report
 - Dan Gillikin reported that some people went out fishing during the federal opener. A dozen or less fishermen went out but only caught a few. The high number of catch that Mr. Gillikin heard was 5 fish. He believes the run is starting to pick up, but so far those who have put out setnets are only getting a few. Upriver of Aniak is now open 24/7. *Audio for this update begins at 1:08:30 – Meeting Audio – 6/14/23.*
 - Audrey Leary reported that on June 12th she drifted from about 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. and did 6 drifts. She caught 8 kings. She also has a setnet out but has caught nothing in it. The fishwheel was put out last night but has not caught anything yet. *Audio for this update begins at 1:09:40 – Meeting Audio – 6/14/23.*
- Upriver
 - Teresa Simeon-Hunter, Chuathbaluk, said that she had put a setnet out when the river opened on 12th, but she has only caught whitefish and has not gone drifting yet. Ms. Simeon-Hunter says that she needs to get fish camp ready before catching salmon. Hopefully, she will get out soon with the weather getting better. *Audio for this update begins at 1:10:25 – Meeting Audio – 6/14/23.*
- Headwaters
 - Kevin Whitworth, McGrath, said that one person had put out a setnet, but only caught only whitefish and sheefish. Mr. Whitworth stated that the harvest estimate from the last opener and presented by KRITFC is incomplete this week. KRITFC has produced preliminary estimates based on surveys from their community-based harvest monitors. Those numbers do not include boat harbor or fish camp surveys since they had not received the data from ONC. KRITFC estimates that 1141 Chinook, 1130 chum, and 292 sockeye were caught. Mr. Whitworth explains what sensitivity analysis is and how that is affected by the missing information. He said that the numbers are likely to change as they receive information that will be included in the figure, but the preliminary estimate shows the lowest harvest so far during a driftnet opening. *Audio for this update begins at 1:11:15 – Meeting Audio – 6/14/23.*

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- Dan Esai, Nikolai, signed into the meeting at 11:20 and gave his subsistence report. He said wasn't any fish nets in his area. His nephew had gone to Black Water but did not catch any fish. He said that his family only got one salmon last year in Black Water. A few whitefish had been donated to Nikolai from McGrath and Alissa Rogers, ONC, is working with people in Nikolai to get fish to the people. The village just bought a freezer for the fish that will be delivered by the barge. Overall, the weather has been cool. Mr. Esai believes the berries will be plentiful this year. *Audio for this update begins at 1:15:15 – Meeting Audio – 6/14/23.*
- KRITFC In-season Report
 - Kevin Whitworth stated he had already shared the preliminary report when he gave his subsistence report. *Audio for this update begins at 1:18:45 – Meeting Audio – 6/14/23.*
 - Terese Schomogyi, KRITFC, added that KRITFC did have estimates for the June 9th setnet opportunity. She said between Tuntutuliak to Tuluksak just over 1,000 Chinook, 122 sockeye, and 15 chum. *Audio for this update begins at 1:19:10 – Meeting Audio – 6/14/23.*
 - Fritz Charles requested a comparison of harvest numbers between this year and recent years.
- Overview of the Kuskokwim River salmon run assessment
 - *Audio for this update begins at 1:23:15 – Meeting Audio – 6/14/23.*
 - Sean Larson, ADFG, gave a report on run assessment projects that are led by the department. That is about half the number of Chinook they saw last year up to this date. Chum salmon have a cumulative CPUE of 5 and sockeye has a cumulative CPUE of 3.
 - Bethel Test Fish had a cumulative CPUE of 13 which is the lowest since 2013 for this date. It is estimated that it is the ¼ point of the Chinook run.
 - Sonar began monitoring on June 9th, which is a little later than expected. But since sonar began over 6,000 King and a few chum and sockeye have been estimated. Between June 9th through the 12th last year sonar had estimated 12,000 Kings.
 - Mr. Larson said the Chinook salmon run does not appear to be as good as last year. It is either poor run or a slow start.
 - Mr. Larson said that it is too early to tell what is happening with the chum and sockeye runs yet.
 - Kevin Whitworth asked if the late start at sonar affected the estimate. Mr. Larson said he did not think that they missed counting many fish based on what was seen at Bethel Test fish and the fact that the first couple days that sonar was monitoring only accounted for less than 300 fish. *Audio for this update begins at 1:26:40 – Meeting Audio – 6/14/23.*

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- Dan Gillikin, NVN, asked if the high water would affect the Bethel Test Fish numbers. Mr. Larson answered that he didn't think so and he has not heard about any issues from the crew. *Audio for this update begins at 1:27:50 – Meeting Audio – 6/14/23.*
- Boyd Blihovde, USFWS, said that the Tuluksak weir will not be operating this year, but he gave an update on the Kwethluk weir. Mr. Blihovde said that the weir lead had arrived the previous night and is headed upriver to get the weir operational within the next few days. He said he thinks they will be ready on June 15th, but it could be later. The panels have been installed, but the weir still needed to be made fish tight. *Audio for this update begins at 1:29:05 – Meeting Audio – 6/14/23.*
 - Teresa Simeon-Hunter asked if there were weirs operating upriver. Sean Larson said that there were no weirs upriver that are fish tight yet, but the George River weir is being installed and the Kogruklu River weir up the Holitna would be next. There will also be the Takotna River weir, Salmon River weirs at Pitka Fork and Aniak, and the sockeye assessment weir at the Talequena River operating upriver. *Audio for this update begins at 1:30:35 – Meeting Audio – 6/14/23.*
- Dan Gillikin reports that the first Chinook was caught on June 10th at Aniak Test Fishery, but there has not been any caught since. Mr. Gillikin says that he is not too concerned at this point since they usually start catching fish around June 14th or 15th. Mr. Gillikin added that the last of the materials needed would be headed up to the Salmon River weir today and that it would be fish tight by July 1st. *Audio for this update begins at 1:32:25 – Meeting Audio – 6/14/23.*
- Working Group KRITFC Representative Report:
 - Lamont Albertson said that KRITFC relies on subsistence reports during this time of year. Mr. Albertson spoke about the water levels and said that it is also discussed in the KRITFC meetings. He said KRITFC was concerned about the confusion upriver and concerned for people in the middle river. KRITFC and USFWS will be discussing the Kalskag Bluff line at their meeting. *Audio for this update begins at 1:33:45 – Meeting Audio – 6/14/23.*
- Sport Fish:
 - Lamont Albertson said that he did not have much to report since sportfishing is closed. There is some guided fishing for other species, including char, but char follow the chum salmon. *Audio for this update begins at 1:36:30 – Meeting Audio – 6/14/23.*
- Intercept Fishery Report
 - *Audio for this update begins at 1:37:30 – Meeting Audio – 6/14/23.*
 - Nick Smith, ADFG, brought attention to the data provided in the packet regarding Alaska Peninsula Inseason Commercial Harvest Estimates on page 14

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of the Informational Packet. He said that he will continue to include this information in the weekly information packets now that their fishing season has begun.

- Therese Schomogyi, KRITFC, added that there had been another fishing period since the data that is included in the packet. On Sunday, 3,000 chum salmon had been caught. Two days later the number of chum that had been caught jumped to 12,000. Ms. Schomogyi said that the Bering Sea bycatch numbers are also updated weekly and as of Thursday, June 8th, the trawl fishery had caught 12,820 King salmon and 1,134 chum salmon. *Audio for this update begins at 1:38:35 – Meeting Audio – 6/14/23.*
 - Mike Williams said the issue had been addressed by AFN and he brought the issue to the National Commerce of American Indians, but people did not want to discuss the issue because people felt it was too divisive. He feels that Area M and the trawl fishery needs to make sacrifices as the people of the Yukon and Kuskokwim have. Mr. Williams said the truth of the impact of the fishery must be discussed. *Audio for this update begins at 1:40:25 – Meeting Audio – 6/14/23.*
 - A conversation about the impacts of the Bering Sea and Area M commercial fisheries has on the Yukon and the Kuskokwim and that some people have started talking about protest fishing. The conversation was wrapped up by Mike Williams who said that he did not feel comfortable discussing the topic of protest fishing and did not want to elevate the idea in people's minds. He recalls protest fishing in 2012 and how hard and emotional it was. Mr. Williams said that he did not want to see that happen again. He feels that the people of the Kuskokwim are smarter than that and reminds the group that that is what we have the Working Group and KRITFC for. He said he understands the hardships people are facing but we all need to work together and that we have enough capacity to do what is right up and down the river for the sustainability of our salmon. *Audio for this update begins at 1:45:30 – Meeting Audio – 6/14/23.*

E. OLD BUSINESS:

- No old business was addressed at this meeting.

F. NEW BUSINESS:

- No new business was addressed at this meeting.

G. COMMENTS FROM WORKING GROUP MEMBERS:

- Dan Esai suggested a modifying the agenda to move subsistence reports before people to be heard for the next meeting. *Audio for this update begins at 1:22:15 – Meeting Audio – 6/14/23.*
- Dan Esai said in the past he would go fishing on June 8th and the 13th at Black Water, but this year there was barely any fish at his setnet site, not even pike. He said he has not seen salmon

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the last few years, but he is hoping this year will be different. *Audio for this update begins at 1:59:25 – Meeting Audio – 6/14/23.*

- John Andrew said the first few openers during the season usually have high water and a lot of debris. He said he wants those fish to reach headwaters. For those reasons he said he hardly fishes the first few openers. *Audio for this update begins at 2:03:45 – Meeting Audio – 6/14/23.*

The meeting was adjourned at 12:11 p.m.

WORKING GROUP MOTIONS:

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

- *Audio for this update begins at 15:10 – Meeting Audio – 6/14/23.*
- LaMont Albertson makes a motion to make the Intercept Fishery topic in the agenda not optional. Albert Kawagley seconded the motion.

Motion 2: To extend meeting for 5 minutes *Passed (9 yes, 1 no)*

- *Audio for this update begins at 1:58:45 – Meeting Audio – 6/14/23.*
- Motion made by Lamont Albertson, 2nd by Mike Williams.

Motion 3: Adjourn at 12:11 p.m. *Passed (Unanimous)*

- *Audio for this update begins at 2:07:35 – Meeting Audio – 6/14/23.*
- Motion made by Lamont Albertson, 2nd by Mike Williams.

WORKING GROUP ATTENDANCE:

MEMBER SEAT:	NAME:
DOWNRIVER ELDER	John Andrew
UPRIVER ELDER	<i>Absent</i>
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	<i>Absent</i>
WESTERN INTERIOR RAC	Kevin Whitworth
YK DELTA RAC	Alissa Rogers
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, Chuck Brazil, Keegan Birchfield, Iris Fletcher	
<u>Sport Fish Division:</u>	
<u>Subsistence Division:</u>	
<u>Commissioner's Office:</u>	

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<u>USFWS</u> : Boyd Blihovde, Aaron Moses, Jaden Andrew, Chris Tulik, Laurie Boeck, Christian Alexie Jr.	
<u>OSM</u> : Kevin Foley	
<u>NVN</u> : Dan Gillikin, Audrey Leary	
<u>ONC</u> : Alissa Rogers, Orrie Rich, Nia Long, Dellen Hooper, Elenor Whitney, Briana Henry, Cannar Charlie	
<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	
Albert Kawagley (1 st Member at Large)	<u>Media</u> : Evan Erickson

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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