

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

June 21st, 2023

On Wednesday, June 21st, 2023, the KRSMWG meeting was called to order at 10:00 a.m. and adjourned at 1:10 p.m. Meeting time was approximately 3 hours and 10 minutes. A quorum was not established with 6 full voting members in attendance. However, 2 members joined in later, establishing quorum. Quorum was lost again during the meeting. LaMont Albertson chaired the meeting. Concern for chum, bycatch and the intercept fishery were a recurring topic of discussion.

AGENDA ITEMS AND SUMMARY INFORMATION:

A. USFWS/KRITFC UPDATE: *Audio for this update begins at 13:40 – Meeting Audio – 6/21/23.*

- Boyd Blihovde, USFWS, said that a good summary of the numbers can be found on page 14 of the informational packet. Roughly 1,000 Chinook were harvested on June 12th during the set and driftnet opener. June 17th saw a productive Chinook harvest as well. Harvest numbers were similar to last year's harvest numbers. There is concern with sonar and BTF's low numbers. Mr. Blihovde says he hopes things will pick up.
- Aaron Moses, USFWS, summarized the meeting last week with KRITFC. He said the only positive indicator that has come from the 3 assessment projects they use for management was the harvest numbers and that they would like to see more fish pass by. There was a lot of discussion and in the end, they compromised on an opening for Friday, June 23rd. Mr. Moses said that they still wanted to continue subsistence and the Chinook run is at it's peak so even one day can make a huge difference. In addition, the upriver of the Kalskag bluff line and below the Aniak box is now open 24/7, but there is not many fishing up there yet. *Audio for this update begins at 16:15 – Meeting Audio – 6/21/23.*
- Boyd Blihovde added that USFWS and KRITFC plan to meet again on June 26th in the afternoon to decide what to do next. He is hopeful that they can provide some kind of fishing opportunity that targets sockeye salmon, while protecting the chum and Chinook. *Audio for this update begins at 19:10 – Meeting Audio – 6/21/23.*
- Boyd Blihovde added that there were many opposing views among people at the meeting and the openings going forward were compromises and that Chinook are at a cumulative CPUE of roughly 13,000 which is close to the cumulative CPUE at this time in 2022. 484 boats were counted on the June 17th opener. There is still concern about the numbers from BTF and sonar. *Audio for this update begins at 22:40 – Meeting Audio – 6/21/23.*
 - Charles Brazil, ADFG, asks Mr. Blihovde about the biological justification for the timing of the upcoming opener. Mr. Blihovde answered there was biological justification for the closure. KRITFC and USFWS have a goal of 110,000 Chinook escapement so there isn't a biological justification for an opener. For USFWS and KRITFC the justification for the opener is ANILCA. *Audio for this update begins at 29:00 – Meeting Audio – 6/21/23.*
 - Mr. Brazil said that their escapement goal has not been met for the last 3 years and asks if he thought they would reach their escapement goal this year. Mr. Blihovde said that he disagreed since it was only an estimate and there was an error bar around escapement. He added that he did not think they could allow another driftnet opener

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this year and still reach escapement. *Audio for this update begins at 31:00 – Meeting Audio – 6/21/23.*

- Alissa Rogers asks if the fish caught so far were headwaters bound fish. Mr. Blihovde said he thought the early season frontend of the Chinook run headed for Salmon River Pitka Fork were passed. He said he thought by June 20th the headwater bound fish are usually past however he asked for Mr. Smith to provide more information. Mr. Smith said that based on tagging studies from previous years the midpoint past Bethel is usually about June 16th, but the bulk of headwaters fish coming through occurs between June 12th to the 22nd. *Audio for this update begins at 33:35 – Meeting Audio – 6/21/23.*
 - Alissa Rogers said that she believes we have and are harvesting headwaters and midriver fish. This leads to a discussion about management decisions being made. Aaron Moses, USFWS, stated that half of the 10,000 fish were caught in the lowest river and part of what was taken into consideration. Using inseason harvest estimates about 3,000 fish were harvested in the Bethel area and a majority of the harvest occurred near the mouth of the river.
- Kevin Whitworth, KRITFC, spoke on management decisions made so far, escapement, and harvest estimates compared over years. Mr. Whitworth added that he has caught about 20 salmon in 36 hours, which is the most he has caught by this time of year in the last 5-10 years. He feels this is a good indication for headwaters fish. Mr. Whitworth thinks that the majority of the headwaters fish have passed the lower river area. *Audio for this update begins at 38:25 – Meeting Audio – 6/21/23.*

B. ADF&G MANAGEMENT ACTIONS UNDER CONSIDERATION: *Audio for this update begins at 52:50 – Meeting Audio – 6/21/23.*

- Nick Smith, ADFG, did not have any current recommendations. Mr. Smith summarizes the current management actions in effect in sections 4 and 5 of the Kuskokwim.

C. PEOPLE TO BE HEARD:

- Boyd Blihovde, USFWS, reminds the group that the people on the Yukon have not been able to fish and adds that some people are coming down to the Kuskokwim to fish and it is something that should be considered. *Audio for this update begins at 33:35 – Meeting Audio – 6/21/23.*
- Adolph Lupie, Tuntutuliak, said that it is probable that fish will be traveling upriver this week and headed for the headwaters. Mr. Lupie expressed his appreciation for being able to listen to USFWS, commissioners and scientist discuss the data. He added that he believes the CPUE will be high during the opener on June 23rd. If the numbers are high, he would like to request an opener near the mouth of the river sometime after the 26th. *Audio for this update begins at 54:50 – Meeting Audio – 6/21/23.*
- Briana Henry, Bethel, asked Aaron Moses about run-timing and resting time for the fish bound for the headwaters. Mr. Moses said that it takes 7 days for salmon to travel from the mouth of the Kuskokwim to Bethel and another 2 days to make it to Kwethluk. He was not sure about further upriver or the headwaters. *Audio for this update begins at 59:00 – Meeting Audio – 6/21/23.*

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- David Epchook, Kwethluk, stated that he was sitting in for John Andrew and asked when the intercept fishery will be addressed in the agenda. *Audio for this update begins at 1:03:25 – Meeting Audio – 6/21/23.*
- Adolph Lupie said he forgot to mention that many subsistence fishermen from upriver let the big salmon go so they can continue to the headwaters and spawn. *Audio for this update begins at 1:05:00 – Meeting Audio – 6/21/23.*
- Charlie Brown, Eek, said that a local fishermen’s son went to the Pailleq where it is open and set a net. But one of the officers told him that he was not supposed to set a net close to the bend. Before he set his net out, he tied a rope about 50-100 feet away from the bank. Mr. Brown said that he had never heard of this. *Audio for this update begins at 1:06:00 – Meeting Audio – 6/21/23.*
 - Boyd Blihovde said that it is legal to fish 100 yards up the Pailleq and will talk to law enforcement. He promised to get back to Charlie that day.
- Alissa Rogers, ONC, added that 100-yard markers at the Johnson have been taken down and possibly the Gweek and that those rivers should have markers. *Audio for this update begins at 1:10:10 – Meeting Audio – 6/21/23.*
 - Wilson, Kasigluk, said that he had fished the mouth of the Johnson the day before and the diamond plates were where they were supposed to be.

D. CONTINUING BUSINESS:

- Subsistence Reports: Lower River, Middle River, Upper River, ONC In-season Subsistence Report
 - Lower River
 - Charlie Brown reported that reds and Kings were picking up, but most fishermen in Eek did not go out because of the choppy waters. *Audio for this update begins at 1:12:05 – Meeting Audio – 6/21/23.*
 - Fritz Charles, Tuntutuliak, reported that his nephew went out during the last opener and caught about 11 Kings, 6 chums, and 13-15 reds. He had fished up the Tuntutuliak River because the mainstem Kuskokwim was too rough.
 - Adolph Lupie reported that the reds are coming in and he has seen more reds and chums lately. People are hanging chums and must keep the fire when it starts to rain. He is happy to see hanging fish and is grateful for the fish and the opportunity to harvest them. *Audio for this update begins at 1:15:50 – Meeting Audio – 6/21/23.*
 - ONC In-season Subsistence Report
 - *Audio for this update begins at 1:18:20 – Meeting Audio – 6/21/23.*
 - Alissa Rogers begins by mentioning the difficulty caused by the internet issues. Ms. Rogers welcomes Jessica Reynolds, the new USFWS Partner biologist who will be starting on June 22nd. Orrie Reich has completed her timing assisting ONC with harvest surveys but will be helping with the science and culture camp later this summer.
 - 34 fish camps were visited on Saturday, June 17th.

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- Delen Hooper reported survey results regarding average harvest goals. Briana Henry reported how families are meeting their harvest goals. Nia Long went over the data collected regarding species composition and numbers of harvest. 183 total harvest surveys were completed. According to surveys, 2,335 Chinook, 1,158, sockeye, 547 chum, and 55 other species were harvested. Some comments that were made by participants include frustration over trawlers and other commercial fisheries and difficulty setting goals due to current restrictions. Some felt that the concerns and knowledge of subsistence fisherman was not heard by managers, and frustration with management in general. *Audio for this update begins at 1:22:05 – Meeting Audio – 6/21/23.*
- Alissa Rogers reported on ONC's distribution program and said that they had delivered fish to 55 Bethel elders' homes and 12 fish were delivered to Tuluksak. Ms. Roger's outlines a plan to get frozen fish up to headwaters villages. *Audio for this update begins at 1:28:00 – Meeting Audio – 6/21/23.*
 - Boyd Blihovde asked if all the fish that ONC distributes comes from Bethel Test Fish or if there were also fishermen who donate fish. Ms. Rogers answered that the fish distribution program run by ONC's Natural Resources department only distributes fish that are received from BTF. ONC has a separate seniors' program that sources fish from local subsistence fishermen, but it is run by their social services department.
- Henry Hunter said that many people reported that their fish camp structures had been damaged or destroyed by the flooding this spring and storms last fall. Fishing during the opener on June 12th was rough for our area and many fishermen gave up after catching only 1 or 2 fish but the opener on June 17th was much better and people did well. Although Mr. Hunter pointed out that the harvest numbers for Chinook were not as good as last years. People told Mr. Hunter that they would like to have more openers when the weather is favorable for drying and that is part of the reason why many wanted an opener on June 21st. Some people also wanted to have the weekend to work on their fish. He suggested that openers be decided based on data from sonar and BTF. Mr. Hunter said that a lot of fishermen are catching more chums. Some people do not want to catch chums, but chum can be good for eating. He said people up and down the river wants to fish and put-up fish to dry and meet their needs for the winter. He feels the only way to decide openers is based on escapement and data. *Audio for this update begins at 1:31:50 – Meeting Audio – 6/21/23.*
- Albert Kawagley, Bethel, said that he had not been fishing yet. The fish rack needs to be rebuilt and his family will put up a temporary rack for this season

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and put one further back to be ready for next spring. Mr. Kawagley said that his family does not need much, and they hope to put up just a few dry fish before berry picking season. He hopes that upriver people can get their share too.

Audio for this update begins at 1:39:45 – Meeting Audio – 6/21/23.

- Alissa Rogers, Bethel, said that her family does not target King salmon, so they are waiting to fish. Ms. Rogers said other families she spoke to since the 17th went downriver of the Johnson River. Three of these families said that they caught between 75-150 King salmon. She said other families she spoke to asked about closing a box in the Oscarville-Napaskiak choke point to allow fish passage. 10-12 families she spoke to said they would be headed upriver to fish. *Audio for this update begins at 1:43:45 – Meeting Audio – 6/21/23.*
- Mike Williams said that the 3 setnet openers had been ok but high water presented some challenges. Mr. Williams said that many did not fish for very long during the June 12th opener because of the weather, but that may be a blessing in disguise since it allowed more fish to pass. June 17th was a good day to fish. People in Akiak fished for an average of 6 hours. Mr. Williams stated there is still a concern for chums. He discussed concerns about Area M and trawler bycatch and the the Board of Fisheries and NPFMC were asked to take action over the winter. Mr. Williams encouraged people to voice their concerns to policy makers. *Audio for this update begins at 1:47:50 – Meeting Audio – 6/21/23.*
 - Henry Hunter echoed Mr. Williams concerns about Area M and trawlers. Mr. Hunter added that the City of Bethel had joined a lawsuit against NPFMC. Senator Olsen also introduced senate bill 138 to temporarily close Area M on a temporary basis. *Audio for this update begins at 1:56:05 – Meeting Audio – 6/21/23.*
- Middle River
 - Walter Morgan, Lower Kalskag, reported that he had observed 4 boats on the river yesterday. During the openers on June 12th and the 17th he saw a total of 9 boats. He expressed his frustration about others from down river coming to the middle river to fish since they are now open 24/7 upriver of the Kalskag Bluff line. Mr. Morgan is worried that the extra effort in the area will affect how the river near Kalskag will be treated in future closures. He finished by reporting that there is a lot of snags in the area and that he caught 12 Kings, 5 reds, and 1 or 2 chum salmon. *Audio for this update begins at 1:59:05 – Meeting Audio – 6/21/23.*
 - Dan Esai, Nikolai, asked why people target King salmon instead of other more abundant species. He also asked that people only take what they need for their families and not share with people from other areas. *Audio for this update begins at 2::50 – Meeting Audio – 6/21/23.*

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- Mike Williams said that he supported opening fishing upriver of the Kalskag Bluffs because of the low impact. Mr. Williams stated that people from Tuluksak were not able to meet their needs during the openers because of snags or other problems. He agrees that it is low impact upriver and feels that it does not affect escapement. Mr. Williams made a comment that people along the Kuskokwim used to catch 84,000 fish, but now only catch 30,000. He said that we need to all work together to support the whole river. *Audio for this update begins at 2:04:35 – Meeting Audio – 6/21/23.*
- Lamont Albertson, Aniak said that the pike have been more prevalent, and they eat a lot of salmon. Believes there should be studies on the impact of pike on the salmon run. Mr. Albertson added that some sheefish have been caught, but the water has not been clear, and it is hard to find good places to fish. *Audio for this update begins at 2:09:00 – Meeting Audio – 6/21/23.*
- Kevin Whitworth reported that McGrath has seen between ½ to an inch of rain recently and water is coming from upriver off the Alaska range causing the tributary water levels to rise. Mr. Whitworth said that one person in McGrath had put out a setnet over the weekend and had caught 10 King salmon that were in good shape. The fisherman gave the fish to elders. Mr. Whitworth said that he had fished with a 4 ¾ inch mesh net and caught 20 King salmon in 36 hours. He said only about 5 people fish with nets in McGrath and those that fish share what they catch. *Audio for this update begins at 2:10:25 – Meeting Audio – 6/21/23.*
 - Dan Esai asked questions about how the fish look and said it reminds him of fish in the past. Mr. Esai sounded hopeful about the prospect of fish and berries this summer. *Audio for this update begins at 2:14:40 – Meeting Audio – 6/21/23.*
 - Adolph Lupie said that Mr. Whitworth’s report reminds him of past years too.
- KRITFC In-season Report
 - KRITFC representatives had nothing to add to the previous USFWS report.
- Overview of the Kuskokwim River salmon run assessment
 - *Audio for this update begins at 2:18:45 – Meeting Audio – 6/21/23.*
 - Sean Larson gave a report on ADFG assessment projects on the Kuskokwim. Details are in the Informational Packet beginning on page 5.
 - Mr. Larson reported that the Chinook run is having a slow start and so far, tracking numbers and timing similar to 2013. Sonar has seen just under 20,000 Chinook and the run is about 1/3 complete.

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- It is early for chum and sockeye, however the chum appears to have a better run than last year, even though the numbers are still low and sockeye numbers are over average for this time of year.
- Mr. Larson reported that the George weir is now fish tight and operating.
- Subsistence Division Project Update
 - *Audio for this update begins at 2:24:15 – Meeting Audio – 6/21/23.*
 - Tim Bembenic reported on the Subsistence Chinook Salmon harvest in lower Kuskokwim River project which is in its final phase of field work. The subsistence division are about to begin the writing phase of their report. Mr. Bembenic thanked the lower Kuskokwim villages for the data.
 - Kelsy Sisk reported on the Traditional Ecological Knowledge project, designed to learn about traditional and local ecological knowledge of salmon in the past and present, how the knowledge is passed on to future generations and how it has changed with adaptations to the regulations. The subsistence division is in the process of analyzing the collected data and will be conducting community reviews soon. They plan to complete the project by June of 2024.
- NVN Report
 - *Audio for this update begins at 2:27:50 – Meeting Audio – 6/21/23.*
 - Information can be found on page 11 of the Informational Packet.
 - Some highlights from the report were that ATF had a CPUE of 14 Chinook and that the Aniak River weir had a crew headed upriver this week.
- Working Group KRITFC Representative Report
 - *Audio for this update begins at 2:29:25 – Meeting Audio – 6/21/23.*
 - Lamont Albertson reported that KRITFC and USFWS had met for 3 hours and discussed headwaters and lower river needs and the conservation of King and chum salmon. Both species are important on the river to people for multiple uses. Mr. Albertson touched on topics like “chum-chucking” and the intercept fishery, and declining quality of people’s diets along the river. He states that the people of the Kuskokwim cannot assume the responsibility of the Yukon and other fisheries. He encourages people to listen to local scientists and elders and biologists to reach conclusions.
 - Alissa Rogers questions the KRITFC decision to provide an opening beginning on June 3rd. She reasons that ANILCA does give subsistence opportunity, but BTF and ATF numbers for Chinook are the lowest they have been since 2013. Mr. Albertson stated that others were very concerned as well, but they feel as if they are victims because of rules made by managers involved with the trawling fleet and other commercial fisheries. James Nicori reasoned that fishing was poor on June 3rd due to high water, so not many were harvested. He also voices his skepticism of the numbers presented and feels that there are more

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fish in the river this year than accounted for. *Audio for this update begins at 2:34:30 – Meeting Audio – 6/21/23*

- Sport Fish:
 - Lamont Albertson said that he had nothing to report.
- Intercept Fishery Report
 - Walter Morgan requested the False Pass fishing schedule to be included in the meeting packet. *Audio for this update begins at 2:44:10 – Meeting Audio – 6/21/23.*
 - Nick Smith brings attention to page 38 of the Informational Packet. Savannah Hollingworth added that the fishing schedule in Area M is decided by the Board of Fish, and she would bring the Record Copy from this year's Board meeting that contained their fishing schedule. Therese Schomogyi said that Area M seiners are in the middle of a 44-hour opening and the drift setnetters are in the middle of an 88-hour opener. Kevin Whitworth finds the catch and schedule information on the ADFG website and goes over it for the group. Mr. Whitworth goes on to discuss the problem of chum-chucking and how the practice could skew data that managers depend on. Henry Hunter stated that people gave testimony to the Board of Fish over the winter. He feels that Western Alaska stakeholders were not successful because the state supports commercial fishing. *Audio for this update begins at 2:46:30 – Meeting Audio – 6/21/23.*

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:

- Alissa Rogers reiterates her concern for Chinook salmon and asks the group what the next steps should be to help conserve them. She urges USFWS managers to look at data and the run before announcing openings in the pre-season and to utilize the tools that have been provided to managers by the Working Group to responsibly manage our fishery. *Audio for this update begins at 2:56:00 – Meeting Audio – 6/21/23.*
- Fritz Charles said that James Charles will resign and that the Working Group will have to recruit for new membership. Mr. Charles added that he did not want to see further restrictions. *Audio for this update begins at 3:03:30 – Meeting Audio – 6/21/23.*

The meeting was adjourned at 1:10 p.m.

WORKING GROUP MOTIONS:

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

- *Audio for this update begins at 52:05 – Meeting Audio – 6/21/23.*
- Motion made by Alissa Rogers, 2nd by Mike Williams.

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- A Working Group member joined into the meeting at approximately 10:45 a.m. establishing a quorum.

Motion 2: To extend meeting until 1:00. Passed (Unanimous)

- Audio for this update begins at 1:58:25 – Meeting Audio – 6/21/23.
- Motion made by Fritz Charles, 2nd by Alissa Rogers

Motion 3: To extend the meeting by 20 minutes Quorum was lost.

- Audio for this update begins at 3:00:50 – Meeting Audio – 6/21/23.
- Motion made by Fritz Charles, 2nd by Albert Kawagley
- It is determined during the roll call vote that quorum had been lost.

No motion to adjourn was made since quorum had been lost.

WORKING GROUP ATTENDANCE:

MEMBER SEAT:	NAME:
DOWNRIVER ELDER	<i>Absent</i>
UPRIVER ELDER	<i>Absent</i>
LOWER RIVER SUBSISTENCE	Mike Williams
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	<i>Absent</i>
WESTERN INTERIOR RAC	Kevin Whitworth
YK DELTA RAC	John W. Andrew
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, Dave Runfolo, Charles Brazil, Iris Fletcher <u>Sport Fish Division:</u> John Chythlook, <u>Subsistence Division:</u> Tim Bembenic, Kelsey Sisk <u>Commissioner's Office:</u>	
<u>USFWS:</u> Boyd Blihovde, Aaron Moses, Christian Alexie Jr., Chris Tulik, Laurie Boeck, <u>OSM:</u> Brooke McDavid, Nissa Pilcher <u>NVN:</u> Cameron ? <u>ONC:</u> Alissa Rogers, Orrie Reich, Canaar Charlie, Nia Long, Delen Hooper, Briana Henry, Elenor Whitney <u>AVCP:</u> Jennifer Hooper <u>KRITFC:</u> Terese Schomogyi, Avery Hoffman, Henry Hunter Sr., Avery Hoffman <u>UAF:</u> <u>WIRAC:</u> Kevin Whitworth <u>YK Delta RAC:</u> Alissa Rogers	
<u>WG Alternates: (not already listed above)</u> Alissa Rogers (YK Delta RAC), Albert Kawagley (1 st Member at Large)	<u>Media:</u>

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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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