

Kuskokwim River Salmon Management Working Group

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

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

July 5th, 2023

On Wednesday, July 5th, 2023, the KRSMWG meeting was called to order at 10:03 a.m. and adjourned at 12:15 p.m. Meeting time was approximately 2 hours and 10 minutes. A quorum was not established with 5 full voting members in attendance. Fritz Charles chaired the meeting. The size of returning Chinook salmon and allowable gillnet mesh size were recurrent themes at this meeting.

AGENDA ITEMS AND SUMMARY INFORMATION:

A. USFWS/KRITFC UPDATE: *Audio for this update begins at 9:25 – Meeting Audio – 7/5/23.*

- Aaron Moses gave a brief update.
- Mr. Moses said there is currently an opening which began 9:00 a.m. July 4th, 2023, and will continue until Thursday, July 6th at 9:00 a.m. Not many people fished yesterday, July 4th because of the rain, but those that went out and Mr. Moses spoke to said they caught an average of 40 fish in 20 minutes. The opener is for set or driftnet fishing up to 75 feet, 6-inch mesh, 45 meshes deep.
- Alissa Rogers asked what the management plan for Chinook was going forward. Mr. Moses answered that KRITFC and USFWS were currently meeting to discuss the management plan, so he did not know yet. *Audio for this update begins at 10:45 – Meeting Audio – 7/5/23.*

B. ADF&G MANAGEMENT ACTIONS UNDER CONSIDERATION: *Audio for this update begins at 11:25 – Meeting Audio – 7/5/23.*

- Nick Smith said that he did not have any new management recommendations and that sections 4 and 5 of the river were currently open for subsistence fishing.

C. PEOPLE TO BE HEARD:

- Robert Nicori, Nunapitchuk, introduced himself to the Working Group. He said that this was his first working group meeting, but he had spent his whole life in fisheries. During the last setnet opener Mr. Nicori had someone take him to the mainstem Kuskokwim River before noon. He said he observed 5 boats driftnetting on the Johnson River. Just below Napaskiak and Oscarville he saw 12 setnets. He saw many sockeye skimming the river. Mr. Nicori said that he fished the first opener, but his family told him that they had enough fish when the second opener occurred. He continued by sharing some traditional and local knowledge. *Audio for this update begins at 12:15 – Meeting Audio – 7/5/23.*
 - Jessica Reynolds, ONC, asked Mr. Nicori if he and his family had met their subsistence goals. Mr. Nicori answered that his family told him that they are done and have reached their goals after the 2nd driftnet opener and gave some further observations about how different species of fish behave and how his family uses them. *Audio for this update begins at 24:05 – Meeting Audio – 7/5/23.*
 - Robert Hoffman expressed his frustration over the question about meeting subsistence goals and the size of some of the King salmon. He feels that limiting Kuskokwim River fishermen to 6-inch mesh nets is unfair and that he is catching fish that are too young. Other members of the Working Group and managers explain to Mr. Hoffman why the nets are limited to 6-inch and why ONC asks questions about subsistence goals. A conversation follows between members about Area M regulations compared to

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Kuskokwim regulations regarding mesh size. *Audio for this update begins at 27:30 – Meeting Audio – 7/5/23.*

D. CONTINUING BUSINESS:

- Subsistence Reports: Lower River, Middle River, Upper River, ONC In-season Subsistence Report
 - Lower River
 - Fritz Charles, Tuntutuliak, said that his family and 4 other families are done fishing until silver salmon season. Mr. Charles said that it was a good summer despite the wet weather and losing a couple fish. He did notice an unusual number of tapeworms in his Chinook. *Audio for this update begins at 42:00 – Meeting Audio – 7/5/23.*
 - Albert Kawagley, Bethel, said that his family had started fishing late but were able to fill up his sister's drying rack during the last opener. Mr. Kawagley said they were catching too many sockeye. He noticed tapeworms in 2 or 3 of the fish. He believes his family will fish one more opener and then be finished and ready to pick berries, then they will hunt moose in the fall. *Audio for this update begins at 45:45 – Meeting Audio – 7/5/23.*
 - Robert Hoffman, Bethel, said that his family has met their fish goals, but not their Chinook goals. He said that he is happy for the abundance of the sockeye. Mr. Hoffman pondered if using 6-inch mesh was more harmful to the fish. He said he didn't think they would be able to meet their King goals until they are allowed to use 8-inch mesh nets. *Audio for this update begins at 48:40 – Meeting Audio – 7/5/23.*
 - Alissa Rogers, Bethel, said that her family had gone fishing during the June 23rd opener for the 1st time of the season and she is happy with they got. They plan to go out again today, July 5th. On June 23rd, they pulled their nets because they were trying to avoid catching chums. Today, they will target sockeye. Other families she spoke to said that they had met their King goals for the year based on pounds of meat, not necessarily how many. These families said that they still needed more sockeye and chum but will probably get those during the next opener. Some families only fished for a couple hours and are now done for the season, until the coho come into the river. Others are giving away fish because they caught too many. *Audio for this update begins at 50:55 – Meeting Audio – 7/5/23.*
 - ONC In-season Report
 - *Audio for this update begins at 53:55 – Meeting Audio – 7/5/23.*
 - Jessica Reynolds gave an update on ONC Fisheries projects. ONC performed harvest surveys alongside KRITFC during the most recent setnet opportunity. Ms. Reynolds said that some people had gone to set their net in the morning, but the afternoon was busier with people going to pull their nets or head out fishing. ONC is more consistently asking fishermen if they have met their

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subsistence needs. On July 1st, 33% of those surveyed said they had met their goals and 38% said they had not and 29% did not answer. Ms. Reynolds discusses harvest goals related to species. She reminded managers and the working group to consider that fishermen who had met their subsistence goals were less likely to go back out to fish, unless they are fishing for others. ONC is considering changing the question about harvest goals to be more open-ended. Some concerns of those who were interviewed are the intercept fisheries and people from outside the local area involved with assessment projects. ONC found that dipnets were gaining in popularity as fishing gear type on the Kuskokwim.

- ONC Fisheries distribution program distributed 22 Kings, 22chum, and 21 sockeye salmon between June 28-30th. Moving forward, ONC will only distribute Chinook and all other fish caught by Bethel Test Fish will be placed in the community fish bin. Additionally, 10 fish were given to the victims of a house fire and some fish were brought to Kwethluk. Some complaints were heard over the decision to bring fish to Kwethluk.
 - Albert Kawagley, Bethel, said that he agrees with ONC Fisheries staff and that we should be sharing with all the elders and people who cannot fish, not just elders who live in Bethel. *Audio for this update begins at 1:04:45 – Meeting Audio – 7/5/23.*
- ONC Natural Resources Department will begin to shift their focus on the annual Culture Camp beginning July 10th but will continue to collect ASL data and conduct boat harbor surveys for any other announced openers.
- Middle River
 - Allen Simeon, Aniak, said that he had pulled his nets before the sockeye started hitting hard. Mr. Simeon said that he had caught enough Kings. He had spoken to other fishermen in the area both up and down river and many were still fishing. Upriver people are doing well with King salmon and starting to catch sockeye. Downriver there are only a few families left that are still fishing and most people are all done. Mr. Simeon voices his thoughts on salmon spawning and large Kings and feels that the 6-inch mesh is working to allow big fish to get upriver and spawn. He feels that we need to continue using 6-inch mesh or less. *Audio for this update begins at 1:05:50 – Meeting Audio – 7/5/23.*
 - Walter Morgan, Lower Kalskag, said that most people are done fishing in his area. Most people caught reds and chums. Mr. Morgan commented that he has seen more chums than he has in years. He said most people throw the chums back, but he keeps them. Mr. Morgan said he caught a total of 40 Kings, but he gave some away. He put up 35 Kings and 30 reds. Some people are jarring fish, but fishing has slowed down. He noticed that the Kings were bigger this year. Mr. Morgan said he agreed with using 6-inch mesh and spoke a little about the

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intercept fishery. *Audio for this update begins at 1:12:15 – Meeting Audio – 7/5/23.*

- Robert Nicori thanked Mr. Simeon and Mr. Morgan and echoed their support for 6-inch mesh. *Audio for this update begins at 1:18:45 – Meeting Audio – 7/5/23.*
- Barbara Carlson, Sleetmute, said that her and her husband have been fishing exclusively with the fish wheel since the beginning of June. Sockeye are starting to hit hard. Most people that she has spoken to started seriously fishing the last 7-10 days. The weather has been very wet making drying fish difficult. Most people are opting for half-dried, canning, or freezing their fish.
- KRITFC In-season Report
 - *Audio for this update begins at 1:32:25 – Meeting Audio – 7/5/23.*
 - Avery Hoffman gave a brief report about KRITFC assessment projects. In season harvest estimates can be found on page 8 of the Informational Packet and survey results can be found starting on page 9.
 - Between boat harbor surveys, KRITFC Community Based Harvest Monitor surveys, ONC's fish camp surveys and boat harbor surveys conducted by both agencies 116 surveys were conducted. One flight was completed between 5:00-7:00 during the setnet opener and counted 90 setnets. Harvest estimates are just under 600 Chinook, 1,300 chum, and 6,500 sockeye caught during the June 30-July 1 opener.
- Overview of the Kuskokwim River salmon run assessment
 - *Audio for this update begins at 1:23:50 – Meeting Audio – 7/5/23.*
 - Sean Larson gives a brief update on ADFG assessment projects. This report begins on page 15 of the Informational packet.
 - Some highlights include that Chinook had a poor run this year when assessed by BTF and Sonar. Poor Chinook runs are occurring around the state. The chum run this year is an improvement over the last few years but are still low when compared to historical averages. The sockeye run is approximately 77% complete and is doing well. The sockeye had slowed down over the last few days but are beginning another push.
 - Alissa Rogers asks for a comparison of the Chinook run to last year. There is some discussion between Ms. Rogers and Sean Larson, ADFG. Mr. Larson answers that the Chinook run is half of what was seen in 2022 at this same time. *Audio for this discussion begins at 1:29:40 – Meeting Audio – 7/5/23.*
 - Barbara Carlson asks for an estimate of Chinook harvest so far in 2023 in hopes of discerning if there are just low returns or if people on the Kuskokwim have harvested more and so it appears that we have had low returns. Sean Larson deferred to USFWS, KRITFC, or ONC. Jim Simon, KRITFC, said that the Chinook harvest as of June 30th- July 1st was estimated at 20,622, which was a lower

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harvest when compared to 2022 and 2021 harvest numbers at the same date.

Audio for this update begins at 1:31:55 – Meeting Audio – 7/5/23.

- Subsistence Division Project Update
 - Katie Haydn gave a brief report of Subsistence Division ongoing projects on the Kuskokwim. One more trip is planned for the lower Kuskokwim non-spawning tributaries project. Ms. Haydn thanked the involved villages for their hospitality. The final report will be sent to each of the participating villages and will be wrapped up in February. Ms. Haydn reminds everyone to fill out and send back the subsistence calendars and participants will be entered into a drawing with the ability to win up to \$500. Post-season Subsistence surveys will begin in mid-September. Lastly, Ms. Haydn reported that workers will be sent to McGrath and Nikolai in August to finish up on the natural indicators project. *Audio for this update begins at 1:35:25 – Meeting Audio – 7/5/23.*
- NVN Report
 - *Audio for this update begins at 1:38:30 – Meeting Audio – 7/5/23.*
 - Dan Gillikin gave updates on Aniak Test Fish and the Salmon River weir. Numbers are provided on page 21 of the Informational Packet. Mr. Gillikin said that the Chinook numbers were very low, chum were low but an improvement over 2022, and sockeye were similar in numbers to last year. The Salmon River weir is ready to be installed with a crew onsite. There was high water, but it is starting to come down and the crew hopes to have it installed today before the water levels rise again.
 - Allen Simeon asked if the weir would be operating into September, but Mr. Gillikin said that the Salmon River is notorious for getting blown out by high water and it becomes dangerous into September. Sean Larson, ADFG, added that some of the weirs are operational through September. Mr. Larson added that sonar will operate through August *Audio for this update begins at 1:40:30 – Meeting Audio – 7/5/23.*
 - Alissa Rogers asked about the numbers for the sockeye salmon and if the run was near it's end or if we would see another push. Mr. Larson answered that based on historical run timing about 69% of the sockeye should be past sonar, but he suspects that less than that have made it past since they have been trending later this year. *Audio for this update begins at 1:42:55 – Meeting Audio – 7/5/23.*
 - Working Group KRITFC Representative Report
 - The WG KRITFC Representative Report was absent at this meeting so there was no report.

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- Sport Fish:
 - The Sport Fish WG representative was absent at this meeting so there was no report.
- Intercept Fishery Report
 - *Audio for this update begins at 1:45:10 – Meeting Audio – 7/5/23.*
 - A table of the estimated salmon catch in the Alaska Peninsula Management Area is included on page 24 of the Informational Packet and is current up to July 2nd, 2023.
 - Alissa Rogers requested a map of the locations that are named in the table provided. Jim Simon, KRITFC, commented that the Shumigan and South Unimak fisheries are what is considered the “intercept fishery.” Barbara Carlson asked about the genetics project to determine where the fish passing through the intercept fishery are headed and what proportion of chums were returning to coastal Western Alaska. Nick Smith and Sean Larson, ADFG, offered to include some of that data in the next Working Group packet. Jim Simon, KRITFC, said that 2022 DNA collection suggested that 18% of the bycatch were Western Coastal Alaskan chum. He mentions that the data is preliminary, but the percentage was much lower than previous studies and he discusses some intricacies and reasons why he thinks that may be. *Audio for this update begins at 1:45:35 – Meeting Audio – 7/5/23.*

E. OLD BUSINESS:

- Savannah Hollingworth, ADFG, discusses vacant positions, recruitment for those positions and the process that needs to happen to elect new members. Ms. Hollingworth said that she would be collecting nominations until an election date is decided. Fritz Charles requested that we put an ad on Facebook. Barbara Carlson said that could be added to the agenda and that the WG needs to schedule a time to vote on new members. *Audio for this update begins at 1:57:50 – Meeting Audio – 7/5/23.*
- No motions were made, due to the lack of quorum.

F. NEW BUSINESS:

- Alissa Rogers asked if the Working Group could revisit how BTF catch is handled and ONC’s distribution program. *Audio for this update begins at 2:07:20 – Meeting Audio – 7/5/23.*

G. COMMENTS FROM WORKING GROUP MEMBERS:

- Walter Morgan, Lower Kalskag, made a comment about the cold weather and wonders how the weather effects the salmon run. *Audio for this update begins at 2:09:20 – Meeting Audio – 7/5/23.*

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

WORKING GROUP MOTIONS:

No motions were made during this meeting since quorum had not been met.

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WORKING GROUP ATTENDANCE:

MEMBER SEAT:	NAME:
DOWNRIVER ELDER	<i>Absent</i>
UPRIVER ELDER	Allen Simeon
LOWER RIVER SUBSISTENCE	Mike Williams
MIDDLE RIVER SUBSISTENCE	Walter Morgan
UPRIVER SUBSISTENCE	Barbara Carlson
HEADWATERS SUBSISTENCE	<i>Absent</i>
MEMBER AT LARGE SEAT 1	Fritz Charles
MEMBER AT LARGE SEAT 2	<i>Vacant</i>
WESTERN INTERIOR RAC	<i>Absent</i>
YK DELTA RAC	Alissa Rogers
COMMERCIAL FISHING	<i>Absent</i>
SPORT FISHING	<i>Absent</i>
ADF&G	Nick Smith
CHAIR	Fritz Charles
<u>ADF&G Comm. Fish:</u> Nick Smith, Sean Larson, Keegan Birchfield, Iris Fletcher, Bobette Dickerson <u>Sport Fish Division:</u> John Chythlook <u>Subsistence Division:</u> Katie Haydn <u>Commissioner's Office:</u>	
<u>USFWS:</u> Aaron Moses <u>OSM:</u> Nissa Pilcher, Kevin Foley <u>NVN:</u> Dan Gillikin <u>ONC:</u> Delen Hooper, Briana Henry, Christian Rivers, Jay Evan, Nia Long, Alissa Rogers, Elenor Whitney, Cannar Charlie <u>AVCP:</u> Jennifer Hooper <u>KRITFC:</u> Jim Simon, Avery Hoffman <u>UAF:</u> <u>WIRAC:</u> <u>YK Delta RAC:</u> Alissa Rogers, Robert Hoffman	
<u>WG Alternates:</u> (not already listed above) Albert Kawagley (1 st Member at Large)	<u>Media:</u> Evan Erickson

GLOSSARY OF ABBREVIATIONS:

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