

# Kuskokwim River Salmon Management Working Group

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

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

**July 19, 2023**

On Wednesday, July 19th, 2023, the KRSMWG meeting was called to order at 10:00 a.m. and adjourned at 11:30 a.m. Meeting time was approximately 1 hour and 30 minutes. A quorum was not initially established with 6 full voting members in attendance. However, 1 member joined into the meeting at 10:25 a.m. making quorum. Alissa Rogers chaired the meeting. The meeting was brief and came when near the tail end of the sockeye run with a dip in the chum and Chinook run and before the coho. Concern for the coming coho run was a primary theme of this meeting.

## **AGENDA ITEMS AND SUMMARY INFORMATION:**

### **A. USFWS/KRITFC UPDATE:** *Audio for this update begins at 9:00 – Meeting Audio – 7/19/23*

- Boyd Blihovde, USFWS, said that USFWS and KRITFC had met and that their main concern was the coming coho run. Ways to target the strong sockeye run and avoid other species was discussed. With the continuing concern for chum, USFWS decided to announce 3 12-hour setnet opportunities on July 17<sup>th</sup>, 19<sup>th</sup>, and 21<sup>st</sup> from 10:00 a.m. to 10:00 p.m. For the following week 2 setnet opportunities have been announced for July 24<sup>th</sup> and 26<sup>th</sup> but are limited to 6 hours from 10:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. because of the concern for coho. Mr. Blihovde went on to remind everyone that fishing with dipnets is allowed during the closure. He added that ONC is offering dipnet rentals.
- Aaron Moses, USFWS, gave a brief report regarding boat harbor surveys. He said that most of the people he spoke to were not going fishing, but instead just enjoying the good weather. Mr. Moses said that he only did 2 interviews over a 3.5-hour period.

### **B. ADF&G MANAGEMENT ACTIONS UNDER CONSIDERATION:** *Audio for this update begins at 15:20 – Meeting Audio – 7/19/23*

- Charles Brazil, ADFG, said that the department does not have any current management recommendations. Mr. Brazil added that there would not be a working group meeting the following week because staff would be unavailable. Nick Smith, ADFG, will be doing aerial surveys and the department will be able to give better information at the August 2<sup>nd</sup> meeting.

### **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 Kawagley, Bethel, said that he had not been out fishing because he has had many meetings to go to, but his sister wants fish to jar, some to freeze, and possibly for sulunaq. Mr. Kawagley said he would go fishing on Friday. *Audio for this update begins at 18:20 – Meeting Audio – 7/19/23.*  
Mr. Kawagley added that his family in Akiachak was done drying fish and put their first batch in the freezer and are smoking the second batch. Mr. Kawagley said that his family told him they have enough fish although he hopes they can get more since they have a big family. *Audio for this update begins at 23:10 – Meeting Audio – 7/19/23*

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- Henry Hunter, Bethel, said that he has been in Anchorage but when he returned, he spoke to some of his neighboring fish camp families. Mr. Hunter said that many people are not targeting King salmon and most got fish for strips in June. The same can be said for sockeye since there are so many this year. Many people caught a lot of sockeye in setnets and dipnets. Mr. Hunter mentioned ONCs dipnet rental program and how some families were grateful. Mr. Hunter said that people are catching a lot of chums this year. He added that many people consider chum salmon dog food, but he thinks they are good to eat when slabbed and smoked or frozen. He hangs about 20-30 chum. Many people that got what they needed brought their fish into the smokehouse because of the damp weather. Many families are waiting for coho salmon. Many like silvers for fresh fish or for freezing. *Audio for this update begins at 19:35 – Meeting Audio – 7/19/23*
- Alissa Rogers, Bethel, said that her family had not been out fishing since the last openers and have been busy smoking fish. The misty rain meant that the fish needed to be moved to the smokehouse. She thinks the fish will need one more day until they are finished drying. Ms. Rogers said that her family was considering trying dipnetting but for now she is trying to find ways to protect her garden from birds. *Audio for this update begins at 27:40 – Meeting Audio – 7/19/23*
- ONC In-season Report
  - *Audio for this update begins at 32:15 – Meeting Audio – 7/19/23*
  - Alissa Rogers, ONC, began by thanking the public for their participation in boat harbor and fish camp surveys. ONC has met 75% of their survey number goals and anticipate meeting 100% of their goal by the following week.
    - Ms. Rogers summarized the survey results for the group. She said that many respondents did not catch as many King salmon as they would have liked. Most had met 100% of their sockeye goals and that none of the respondents had met their chum goals with low numbers during the openers.
    - Harvest estimates calculated from survey results were 4,408 Chinook, 2,051 chum, 6,253 sockeye, and 338 other fish harvested. ONC had conducted 235 fish camp surveys and 641 boat harbor surveys for a total of 876 completed, with most surveys occurring on June 17<sup>th</sup> and 23<sup>rd</sup>.
  - Ms. Rogers said that ONC has concluded their fish distribution program for the year. ONC has distributed fish to 156 households in Bethel, 4 elder facilities, 1 prematernal and 6 surrounding villages and had hoped to extend their fish distribution program into one other village but time sensitivity and weather complications had prevented them from going out.

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- Henry Hunter commends ONC for the distribution program and the dipnet program. He feels it is a great contribution to the YK Delta area.  
*Audio for this update begins at 41:50 – Meeting Audio – 7/19/23*
- Ms. Rogers speaks a little about the dipnet rental program at ONC.
- Middle River
  - Walter Morgan, Lower Kalskag, said that there have been very few people fishing and people are getting ready for berry picking and waiting for silvers. Mr. Morgan said that the few that he has seen in the river have done a few short drifts and are mainly catching for fresh fish. He said that he has picked one gallon of berries so far and added that everyone's fish dried well. *Audio for this update begins at 29:45 – Meeting Audio – 7/19/23*
  - Allen Simeon, Aniak, said that very few people have been driftnetting. Mr. Simeon said that people upriver had told him that the chum run was really thick and asked if the lower river would be open to unlimited fishing. He asked how long sonar, and the weirs would be operating since that is the only accurate count of salmon in the Kuskokwim. He asked how sonar is able to assess between the different species in the river. He reported that the Aniak river has high water, the berries are 2-3 weeks behind and people are not yet catching whitefish and he theorized that the coho run would also be behind. *Audio for this update begins at 45:35 – Meeting Audio – 7/19/23*
    - Charles Brazil, ADFG, answered Mr. Simeon's questions. He said that chum are continuing to return in good numbers. He reminded the group that US Fish and Wildlife is managing the river below Aniak. Sonar apporportion fish through gillnets to get a ratio of what is in the river.  
*Audio for this update begins at 52:00 – Meeting Audio – 7/19/23*
  - Barbara Carlson, Sleetmute, said that she has had the fish wheel running up through the previous Sunday but had to pull the fish wheel up because of high water and debris in the river but the water is starting to come back down. She said she had caught 42 sockeye and 1 Chinook in a 12-hour period. Ms. Carlson said she is not seeing many chum salmon there but says that she is fishing the North side of the river and that could make a difference. She said there are many smokehouses in operation and that she has seen people driftnetting. She adds that people are getting ready for coho fishing. *Audio for this update begins at 53:30 – Meeting Audio – 7/19/23*
  - Dan Esai, Nikolai, said that his uncle has caught 75 Chinook at fish camp. Mr. Esai is concerned about the Salmon River/Pitka Fork numbers and hope that the Working Group can meet in person for the spring meeting. He said that the berries in his area are just getting ripe. He commented that they will concentrate on gathering and that they will have to adapt to the rainy season

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and concentrate on sockeye. *Audio for this update begins at 55:20 – Meeting Audio – 7/19/23*

- KRITFC In-season Report
  - Jim Simon, KRITFC, said that he was not prepared to give a report but that the KRITFC are concentrating on culture camp, but surveys usually begin to drop off about this time of year. Mr. Simon said he was not sure if there will be estimates produced for the July 17<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> openers, so the last harvest estimates he has are from the July 11<sup>th</sup> when 262 Chinook, 1,914 and 4,475 sockeye were estimated to be harvested. *Audio for this update begins at 1:00:30 – Meeting Audio – 7/19/23*
  - Aaron Moses, USFWS, added that a flight was completed on Monday, July 17<sup>th</sup> and they would go out again later in the afternoon on July 19<sup>th</sup>. Community Based Harvest Monitors are still working in the villages and boat harbor surveys are being done, although they were unable to get very many. There will be some kind of estimate and Mr. Moses promised to get the information to the Working Group as soon as possible. *Audio for this update begins at 1:03:20 – Meeting Audio – 7/19/23*
- Overview of the Kuskokwim River salmon run assessment.
  - *Audio for this update begins at 1:04:15 – Meeting Audio – 7/19/23*
  - Sean Larson gave an update on ADFG assessment projects. Some highlights include:
    - Chinook are at the end of their run with about 72,000 past sonar.
    - Chum are still coming in strong, but still lower numbers than average, but better than the last couple years. BTF CPUE is at about 2,500 which is about half of the historical average of 4,400 but double the number that we had at this point in 2022.
    - Sockeye are having an average run when looking at statewide numbers and close to the numbers the Kuskokwim had in 2022 with about 785,000 past sonar with a BTF CPUE of 1,600.
    - Coho are beginning to enter the river. A few coho have been reported by fishermen and sonar and BTF have both caught a couple, but it is too early to tell how that run will do.
    - Mr. Larson said that many of the weirs have been dealing with high water. George weir has counted 1,900 King salmon and 2,400 chum salmon which is below average but still within the escapement goal for that project. Kogrukluq weir has been blown out and had missed or partial passage for many days so they will try to reconcile those numbers to get an estimate at the end of the season. Takotna weir has had below average counts, and Pitka Fork weir has only passed about

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300 Chinook which is well below average and a few less than this time in 2022. Sockeye are just beginning to pick up at the Talequena weir.

- Alissa Rogers asked if there had been any issues at the weir that would have affected the counts which led to a brief conversation about how fish passage is estimated when a weir blows out and how long the weirs would stay in operation. *Audio for this update begins at 1:09:20 – Meeting Audio – 7/19/23*
- NVN Report
  - No report was given as there were no NVN members in attendance.
- Sport Fish:
  - No report was given.
- Intercept Fishery Report
  - Sean Larson, ADFG, said that the total chum harvested in the South Peninsula June fishery was approximately 366,700. Ms. Rogers asked if they were still fishing. Mr. Larson said that he believed so and Jim Simon, KRITFC, clarified that the fishery was still fishing but that after June the fishery operated under a different management plan since the idea is that intercept was much less likely into July. *Audio for this update begins at 1:13:25 – Meeting Audio – 7/19/23*
- KRITFC Representative Report
  - Henry Hunter gave a brief update. He said that he was not able to attend the last KRITFC meeting however there was a request for a set and driftnet opener. KRITFC and USFWS decided on a setnet opener for today, July 19<sup>th</sup> from 10 a.m. to 10 p.m. and another on Friday, July 21<sup>st</sup>. Jim Simon, KRITFC added that because of concern for chum and coho salmon and also because the sockeye run would be coming to an end they decided to only do 6 hour openers on July 24<sup>th</sup> and 26<sup>th</sup>. Mr. Simon said it took 4 hours for the group to come to a consensus. *Audio for this update begins at 1:15:45 – Meeting Audio – 7/19/23*

## 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:

- Allen Simeon, Aniak, asked if Aniak will be able to hold their annual Silver Salmon Derby on August 1<sup>st</sup>. Charles Brazil, ADFG, answered that he would have to discuss the derby with USFWS in season manager since the derby falls within the refuge boundary and there is a federal special action in place that includes coho salmon. Mr. Simeon asked about rod and reeling in the Aniak River. Mr. Brazil said that the portion of the river that is managed by the state will be discussed after aerial surveys are complete and we would bring that information up for discussion at the August 2<sup>nd</sup> meeting. Jim Simon, KRITFC, commented that the Aniak box was currently open to rod and reel fishing with the live release of chum and coho, as well as some bag and size limits for Chinook salmon. *Audio for this update begins at 1:21:55 – Meeting Audio – 7/19/23*

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The meeting was adjourned at 11:30 a.m.

**WORKING GROUP MOTIONS:**

- This meeting began as a work session after failing to make quorum. Quorum was achieved but no motions were made at this meeting.

**WORKING GROUP ATTENDANCE:**

<b>MEMBER SEAT:</b>	<b>NAME:</b>
DOWNRIVER ELDER	<i>Absent</i>
UPRIVER ELDER	Allen Simeon
LOWER RIVER SUBSISTENCE	Alissa Rogers
MIDDLE RIVER SUBSISTENCE	Walter Morgan
UPRIVER SUBSISTENCE	Barbara Carlson
HEADWATERS SUBSISTENCE	Daniel Esai
MEMBER AT LARGE SEAT 1	Albert Kawagley
MEMBER AT LARGE SEAT 2	<i>Vacant</i>
WESTERN INTERIOR RAC	<i>Absent</i>
YK DELTA RAC	<i>Absent</i>
COMMERCIAL FISHING	<i>Absent</i>
SPORT FISHING	<i>Absent</i>
KRITFC	Henry Hunter
ADF&G	Charles Brazil
CHAIR	Alissa Rogers
<u>ADF&amp;G Comm. Fish:</u> Sean Larson, Charles Brazil, Iris Fletcher	
<u>Sport Fish Division:</u>	
<u>Subsistence Division:</u> Isabelle Tiller	
<u>Commissioner's Office:</u>	
<u>USFWS:</u> Boyd Blihovde, Laurie Boeck, Aaron Moses	
<u>OSM:</u> Nissa Pilcher, Kevin Foley	
<u>NVN:</u>	
<u>ONC:</u> Alissa Rogers	
<u>AVCP:</u> Ashley Johnson	
<u>KRITFC:</u> Henry Hunter, Jim Simon	
<u>UAF:</u>	
<u>WIRAC:</u>	
<u>YK Delta RAC:</u> Alissa Rogers	
<u>WG Alternates:</u> (not already listed above)	<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

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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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