

# Kuskokwim River Salmon Management Working Group

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

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

**May 28, 2024**

On Tuesday, May 28<sup>th</sup>, 2024, the KRSMWG meeting was called to order at 9:00 a.m. and adjourned at 02:30 p.m. Meeting time was approximately 5 hours and 30 minutes. A quorum was established until after the lunch recess with 7 voting members. Alissa Rogers and Fritz Charles chaired the meeting. This meeting was the first Working Group meeting of the season. Primary themes were centered around the front-end closures and schedule of subsistence openings and Working Group business including elections.

## **PEOPLE TO BE HEARD:**

- Fritz Charles asked if the Working Group could write a letter to support CJ McCormick's actions to introduce a bill to include tribal representation on the State's Boards and Committees. This item was added to the agenda. *Audio for this update begins at 14:40 – Meeting Audio – 5/28/24.*
- Avery Hoffman made a comment about the fish bin being abused and asked if the Working Group had the ability to move it. The group decided to address the issue at the end of the agenda. *Audio for this update begins at 17:10 – Meeting Audio – 5/28/24.*
- Nels Alexie states that he has attended the meeting so that he knows when and how he can fish this season. He talks about how the closures are affecting him, especially as he has gotten older. Mr. Alexie talks about why people used to pull their nets and not fish on Sundays and shares a couple of stories. Mr. Alexie said that he would like people to work together and said that he would be happy to answer questions and he may have questions as well. He invited those in attendance out to his fish camp and said he would be happy to share information. *Audio for this update begins at 18:25 – Meeting Audio – 5/28/24.*

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

### **A. 2023 Season Recap (Sean Larson, ADF&G)**

- *Audio for this update begins at 32:35 – Meeting Audio – 5/28/24.*
- Sean Larson, ADFG, reviewed the results of last year's assessment. Project results from 2023 can be found on pages 4-13 of the Informational packet.
- Chinook salmon total run size was estimated at 134,007 with an estimated drainage wide escapement of 96,630. *Audio for this update begins at 44:35 – Meeting Audio – 5/28/24.*
- Chinook salmon are forecasted to have a run size between 108,000-160,000 in 2024. *Audio for this update begins at 17:10 – Meeting Audio – 5/28/24.*
- A summary of 2023's assessment can be found on page 15 of the informational packet and the Chinook Salmon Forecast can be found on page 14.
  - There is a discussion about the size of the returning Kings that occurs immediately after Mr. Larson's presentation. *Audio for this discussion begins at 45:25 – Meeting Audio – 5/28/24.*

### **B. 2024 Assessment projects: *Audio for this update begins at 1:16:15 – Meeting Audio – 5/28/24.***

- Sean Larson, ADFG, lists projects that the Alaska Department of Fish and Game will be operating during the 2024 summer season. *Audio for this update begins at 1:16:25 – Meeting Audio – 5/28/24.*
  - Projects include Bethel Test Fish, Sonar, the George and Kogrukluks weirs, and performing aerial surveys.

*Meeting summaries are prepared and distributed by the Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ADF&G) in cooperative agreement with the United States Fish and Wildlife Service Office of Subsistence Management (USF&WS OSM). The department is responsible for summary content. Summaries are not comprehensive or considered meeting minutes and are designed to provide context on meeting proceedings for the convenience of interested parties/participants. Audio recordings of meetings can be found at: <https://www.adfg.alaska.gov/index.cfm?adfg=commercialbyareakuskokwim.kswg>*

# Kuskokwim River Salmon Management Working Group

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

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

- Sonar will not be operating through August and the Salmon Pitka Fork weir will not be operating this season due to funding from the Office of Subsistence Management (OSM) that did not come through.
  - There were some questions about undercounting chum or overcounting sockeye salmon by sonar. Mr. Larson addressed those questions and added that there is a mark/recapture project that has been planned that would help verify those numbers and for now the numbers are being used as an index. An independent abundance estimate of sockeye is also planned but needs funding. *Audio for this update begins at 1:17:20 – Meeting Audio – 5/28/24.*
  - There was a question about timing for the projects that Mr. Larson had mentioned. This led to a conversation about other projects, timing and funding for the projects. *Audio for this update begins at 1:22:55 – Meeting Audio – 5/28/28.*
- NVN
  - *Audio for this update begins at 1:30:05 – Meeting Audio – 5/28/24.*
  - Dan Gilikin, NVN, speaks about Native Village of Napaiamute’s involvement with the fishery and discusses projects that NVN will be operating this summer.
    - Funding from OSM for the Salmon River weir did not come through this year so it will not be operating this year. Permission was received from Partners in Fisheries Monitoring Program to continue operating Aniak Test Fishery. A new project in partnership with Donlin Gold and Owl Ridge Environmental Services to monitor Chinook outmigration using a rotary screw trap at the George River weir will begin setting up this season.
    - There were a few questions regarding how fishery counts work and how accurate they may be. Mr. Gilikin also addressed questions about the screw trap project and Donlin Gold’s funding requirements. *Audio for this update begins at 1:33:35 – Meeting Audio – 5/28/24.*
- ONC
  - *Audio for this update begins at 1:48:15 – Meeting Audio – 5/28/24.*
  - Nikki Pollock, ONC, gave a summary of projects that ONC is involved in. ONC leads the Community Based Harvest Monitor Program in collaboration with KRITFC. ONC performs harvest surveys at the Bethel boat harbor and surrounding ONC fish camps and KRITFC performs surveys in the lower river villages. ONC and KRITFC also partner to do aerial views and count boats and nets during the subsistence fishing openers. Harvest estimates for the openers are based off those surveys and aerial views. ONC partners with ADFG to perform post-season subsistence surveys, ASL (Age, Sex, Length), otolith sampling and at the sonar site. ONC will start taking environmental assessment information along with their projects.
- USFWS
  - *Audio for this update begins at 1:51:35 – Meeting Audio – 5/28/24.*

*Meeting summaries are prepared and distributed by the Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ADF&G) in cooperative agreement with the United States Fish and Wildlife Service Office of Subsistence Management (USF&WS OSM). The department is responsible for summary content. Summaries are not comprehensive or considered meeting minutes and are designed to provide context on meeting proceedings for the convenience of interested parties/participants. Audio recordings of meetings can be found at: <https://www.adfg.alaska.gov/index.cfm?adfg=commercialbyareakuskokwim.kswg>*

# Kuskokwim River Salmon Management Working Group

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

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

- Frank Harris, USFWS, said that USFWS is partnering with the Village of Kwethluk, and KRITFC to operate the Kwethluk River weir. Mr. Harris reported how things have progressed this year with the weir. Spencer Rearden, USFWS addressed some questions about the smolt outmigration project at the Kwethluk weir, including questions regarding smolt mortality. Spencer agreed to send information to the Working Group Participants regarding reported mortality.
- KRITFC
  - *Audio for this update begins at 1:58:15 – Meeting Audio – 5/28/24.*
  - Justin Leon, KRITFC, reported on KRITFC projects planned for this summer. KRITFC hopes to have Takotna River weir operating by June 24<sup>th</sup>, and they have a full crew starting next week. Other projects that KRITFC is involved in include drone survey work, community-based harvest monitoring work and other partnering projects that had been mentioned previously. Mr. Leon said as part of an effort with Dan Gilikin and the Upper Middle Kuskokwim River Watershed council, KRITFC will begin water temperature monitoring in a couple locations, and they hope to monitor water temperatures throughout the river in the future.
    - Mr. Leon addressed some questions and comments about juvenile weight and length and drone surveys.

## C. 2024 Fishery Management:

- **ADF&G Management Discussion on Specific Management Actions for 2024, Subsistence:**
  - Charles Brazil, ADFG, states that ADFG will not make recommendations for the lower river within the Yukon Delta NWR waters. Mr. Brazil *introduces* Sam Decker the new Kuskokwim River manager for the Commercial Fisheries division. *Audio for this update begins at 1:33:35 – Meeting Audio – 5/28/24.*
  - *Audio for this update begins at 2:18:30 – Meeting Audio – 5/28/24.*
  - Sam Decker presents ADFG recommendations for fishery management actions in the Kuskokwim River upriver of the Yukon Delta National Wildlife refuge.
    - *Audio for this update begins at 2:23:05 – Meeting Audio – 5/28/24.*
    - **Date to begin early season closure:** June 7<sup>th</sup>, 2024, on the Kuskokwim beginning at Yukon Delta NWR boundary near Aniak upriver to the headwaters.
    - **Tributary management**
      - a. Aniak River early season closure: June 7<sup>th</sup>, 2024, at 12:01 AM from the Yukon Delta NWR boundary near the Buckstock river upriver to the headwaters.
    - **Use of live release gear**
      - a. Subsistence hook and line fishing for Chinook will be closed. Dip nets and beach seines will be allowed but all Chinook salmon must be immediately returned to the river alive. Fish wheels with a live

*Meeting summaries are prepared and distributed by the Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ADF&G) in cooperative agreement with the United States Fish and Wildlife Service Office of Subsistence Management (USF&WS OSM). The department is responsible for summary content. Summaries are not comprehensive or considered meeting minutes and are designed to provide context on meeting proceedings for the convenience of interested parties/participants. Audio recordings of meetings can be found at: <https://www.adfg.alaska.gov/index.cfm?adfg=commercialbyareakuskokwim.kswg>*

# Kuskokwim River Salmon Management Working Group

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

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

box and checked at least every 6 hours will be allowed but all Chinook caught must be returned to the river alive.

- There is a brief discussion about how information is communicated to upriver and headwaters villages after the recommendations were presented. The group also briefly discussed alternative means of subsistence fishing.
- **Sport Fishing:** John Chythlook, ADFG, said that Chinook salmon would be closed to rod and reel sportfishing for the season. *Audio for this update begins at 2:44:30 – Meeting Audio – 5/28/24.*
- **Subsistence:** There was no staff present from the Subsistence Division.
- **Yukon Delta National Wildlife Refuge:**
  - *Audio for this update begins at 2:46:35 – Meeting Audio – 5/28/24.*
  - Spencer Rearden, USFWS, said that a public hearing was held on May 15<sup>th</sup> to announce their intentions to close the lower river to gillnets and limit the catch of Chinook, chum and coho salmon beginning on June 1<sup>st</sup> and explained that the lower river within the Yukon Delta NWR is managed by USFWS in cooperation with KRITFC.
    - Spencer Rearden discusses what alternative gear will be allowed for federally qualified and non-federally qualified users and spoke about what people had asked for by the public and other agencies in meetings leading up to the closure. *Audio for this update begins at 2:48:05 – Meeting Audio – 5/28/24.*
    - Aaron Moses, USFWS, spoke about the subsistence fishing openings that had been announced so far. *Audio for this update begins at 2:50:45 – Meeting Audio – 5/28/24.*
    - Mr. Rearden and Mr. Moses address questions about the gillnet closure and scheduled openings and Nels Alexie speaks about why openings are difficult for some.
    - After returning from the lunch recess, Aaron Moses, USFWS, read the announcements to the group again and addressed clarifying questions. *Audio for this update begins at 3:04:30 – Meeting Audio – 5/28/24.*
    -

## D. WORKING GROUP BUSINESS:

- **New Member Elections**
  - *Audio for this update begins at 3:10:00 – Meeting Audio – 5/28/24.*
  - Savannah Hollingworth, ADFG, summarized what has happened so far regarding elections and discussed the nominations that had been received over the winter. Additional nominations were made. The Working Group discussed how elections should happen, what positions were available, and who would be eligible to be nominated.

*Meeting summaries are prepared and distributed by the Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ADF&G) in cooperative agreement with the United States Fish and Wildlife Service Office of Subsistence Management (USF&WS OSM). The department is responsible for summary content. Summaries are not comprehensive or considered meeting minutes and are designed to provide context on meeting proceedings for the convenience of interested parties/participants. Audio recordings of meetings can be found at: <https://www.adfg.alaska.gov/index.cfm?adfg=commercialbyareakuskokwim.kswg>*

# **Kuskokwim River Salmon Management Working Group**

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

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

- Nominations for the 2<sup>nd</sup> Member at Large position included Tad Lindley, Avery Hoffman, Kara Dominick, Mike Glore, and David Epchook. Avery Hoffman will be the 2<sup>nd</sup> Member at Large, with Tad Lindley and Kara Dominick as alternates.
- Two nominations were made for the Commercial Fishing Alternate; Fritz Charles, who would hold a dual seat if elected and Tad Lindley. Charlie Brown still holds the Commercial Fishing seat but is not expected to attend any more meetings. Fritz Charles will be the 1<sup>st</sup> Alternate and Tad Lindley will be the 2<sup>nd</sup> Alternate.
- John Andrew was nominated as the Down River Elder. He had already held the seat of the Down River Elder Alternate however the previous member who held the seat had resigned in 2023.
- **Election of Co-Chairs**
  - *Audio for this update begins at 3:41:55 – Meeting Audio – 5/28/24.*
  - Co-chairs will remain the same with Alissa Rogers, Fritz Charles, Lamont Albertson, and Barbara Carlson.
- **Working Group In-Season Meeting Schedule**
  - *Audio for this update begins at 3:45:05 – Meeting Audio – 5/28/24.*
  - Working Group meetings will be held on Wednesdays throughout the summer beginning at 10:00 AM.
- **Nominate WG representative to serve at KRITFC inseason meetings**
  - *Audio for this update begins at 3:46:40 – Meeting Audio – 5/28/24.*
  - Lamont Albertson states that he will not accept a nomination this year and nominates Mike Williams for the position instead. Alissa Rogers nominated herself. Ms. Rogers will serve as an alternate.
  - A motion is made to create an alternate for the WG representative to serve at KRITFC inseason meetings. *Audio begins at 3:56:50 – Meeting Audio – 5/28/24.*

## **G. COMMENTS FROM WORKING GROUP MEMBERS:**

- Allen Simeon, Aniak, speaks about how important it is to have a weir on the Salmon River. Mr. Simeon told the group that there have been a lot of pike and in the Aniak River. *Audio begins at 4:07:11 – Meeting Audio – 5/28/24.*
- Walter Morgan, Kalskag, said that he hopes everyone has a good fishing season and thanks everyone for their participation. *Audio begins at 4:16:10 – Meeting Audio – 5/28/24.*
- Mike Williams, Akiak, commented that the lower river villages support USFWS conservation measures. He said that he has caught many sheefish and whitefish and has heard of one Chinook being caught by another Working Group member. *Audio begins at 4:17:15 – Meeting Audio – 5/28/24.*
- Alissa Rogers, Bethel, thanked everyone for participating and the staff for facilitating. *Audio begins at 4:22:40 – Meeting Audio – 5/28/24.*

*Meeting summaries are prepared and distributed by the Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ADF&G) in cooperative agreement with the United States Fish and Wildlife Service Office of Subsistence Management (USF&WS OSM). The department is responsible for summary content. Summaries are not comprehensive or considered meeting minutes and are designed to provide context on meeting proceedings for the convenience of interested parties/participants. Audio recordings of meetings can be found at: <https://www.adfg.alaska.gov/index.cfm?adfg=commercialbyareakuskokwim.kswg>*

# Kuskokwim River Salmon Management Working Group

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

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

- Fritz Charles, Bethel, welcomes the new members and thanks everyone for attending the meeting. *Audio begins at 4:23:10 – Meeting Audio – 5/28/24.*
- Lamont Albertson, Aniak, spoke about the large number of pike near Aniak, and research done on the river and in the ocean. *Audio begins at 4:23:30 – Meeting Audio – 5/28/24.*
- 

**The meeting was adjourned at 2:30 p.m.**

## **WORKING GROUP MOTIONS:**

**Motion 1:** To change John W. Andrew's the Down River Elder alternate seat to the main Downriver Elder member holding the seat. *Passed (Unanimous)*

- *Audio begins at 3:25:10 – Meeting Audio – 5/28/24.*

**Motion 2:** Written, verbal and text message votes were submitted and tallied. A motion was then made to accept the vote tallies and name Avery Hoffman as Member at Large 2 seat with alternates Kara Domnick and Tad Lindley. *Passed (Unanimous)*

- *Audio begins at 3:36:55 – Meeting Audio – 5/28/24.*

**Motion 3:** To appoint Fritz Charles as the Commercial Fishing 1<sup>st</sup> alternate and allow him to hold a dual seat. *Passed (Unanimous)*

- *Audio begins at 3:38:15 – Meeting Audio – 5/28/24.*

**Motion 4:** To appoint Tad Lindley as the 2<sup>nd</sup> alternate for the Commercial Fishing seat. *Passed (Unanimous)*

- *Audio begins at 3:40:15 – Meeting Audio – 5/28/24.*

**Motion 5:** To keep Co-chairs to remain the same. *Passed (Unanimous)*

- *Audio begins at 3:41:55 – Meeting Audio – 5/28/24.*

**Motion 6:** To hold Working Group Meetings on Wednesdays starting at 10:00 AM weekly. *Passed (Unanimous)*

- *Audio begins at 3:45:05 – Meeting Audio – 5/28/24.*

**Motion 7:** The Working Group nominated WG representative to serve at KRITFC inseason meetings. Mike Williams won the most votes followed by Alissa Rogers. A motion was made to create an alternate for the position. *Passed (Unanimous)*

*Meeting summaries are prepared and distributed by the Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ADF&G) in cooperative agreement with the United States Fish and Wildlife Service Office of Subsistence Management (USF&WS OSM). The department is responsible for summary content. Summaries are not comprehensive or considered meeting minutes and are designed to provide context on meeting proceedings for the convenience of interested parties/participants. Audio recordings of meetings can be found at: <https://www.adfg.alaska.gov/index.cfm?adfg=commercialbyareakuskokwim.kswg>*

# Kuskokwim River Salmon Management Working Group

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

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

- *Audio begins at 3:52:45 – Meeting Audio – 5/28/24.*

**Motion 8:** To write a letter of support and recommendation from the Kuskokwim River Salmon Management Working Group for CJ McCormick for the appointed seats on the Alaska Boards to the Alaska Department of Fish and Game Commissioner, the Governor, the Senate, and the House of Representatives who will be voting on the Senate Bill.

- *Audio begins at 3:57:55 – Meeting Audio – 5/28/24.*

**Motion 9:** To move the fish bin to the boat harbor. *Passed (Unanimous)*

- *Audio for this discussion begins at 4:00:15 – Meeting Audio – 5/28/24; motion occurs at 4:05:45.*
- There is some discussion about why people have asked to have the fish bin moved as well as a reminder that fish placed in the bin are open for any member of the public to take, and potential placement options.

**Motion 10:** To move the next meeting date to Friday June 14<sup>th</sup>. *Passed (Unanimous)*

- *Audio begins at 4:25:10 – Meeting Audio – 5/28/24.*
- Sections 4 and 5 of the river begin their front-end closure on June 7<sup>th</sup> and a subsistence gillnet opener has been announced for Wednesday, June 12<sup>th</sup> so by delaying the meeting until Friday a full river harvest report would be more likely to review at the next meeting.

**Motion 11:** To adjourn the meeting at 2:30 PM. *Passed (Unanimous)*

## WORKING GROUP ATTENDANCE:

<b>MEMBER SEAT:</b>	<b>NAME:</b>
DOWNRIVER ELDER	<i>Absent</i>
UPRIVER ELDER	Allen Simeon
LOWER RIVER SUBSISTENCE	Mike Williams Sr.
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>Absent</i>
WESTERN INTERIOR RAC	Kevin Whitworth
YK DELTA RAC	Alissa Rogers
COMMERCIAL FISHING	<i>Absent</i>
SPORT FISHING	LaMont Albertson
ADF&G	Sam Decker
CHAIR	Fritz Charles

*Meeting summaries are prepared and distributed by the Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ADF&G) in cooperative agreement with the United States Fish and Wildlife Service Office of Subsistence Management (USF&WS OSM). The department is responsible for summary content. Summaries are not comprehensive or considered meeting minutes and are designed to provide context on meeting proceedings for the convenience of interested parties/participants. Audio recordings of meetings can be found at: <https://www.adfg.alaska.gov/index.cfm?adfg=commercialbyareakuskokwim.kswg>*

# Kuskokwim River Salmon Management Working Group

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

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

<u>ADF&amp;G Comm. Fish:</u> Sam Decker, Sean Larson, Dave Runfola, Charles Brazil, John Linderman, Bobette Dickerson, Zach Liller, Bobette Dickerson <u>Sport Fish Division:</u> John Chythlook <u>Subsistence Division:</u> <u>Commissioner's Office:</u>	
<u>USFWS:</u> Spencer Rearden, Aaron Moses, Frank Harris <u>OSM:</u> Kevin Foley, Nissa Pilcher <u>NVN:</u> Dan Gillikin <u>ONC:</u> Kara Dominick, Nikki Pollock, Delen Hooper <u>AVCP:</u> <u>KRITFC:</u> Terese Vincente, Avery Hoffman, Lamont Albertson, Joe Spader, Justin Leon, Bill Bechtol <u>UAF:</u> <u>WIRAC:</u> Kevin Whitworth <u>YK Delta RAC:</u> Alissa Rogers	
<u>WG Alternates:</u> (not already listed above) Robert Hoffman (YK Delta RAC)	<u>Media:</u>

## **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**),

*Meeting summaries are prepared and distributed by the Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ADF&G) in cooperative agreement with the United States Fish and Wildlife Service Office of Subsistence Management (USF&WS OSM). The department is responsible for summary content. Summaries are not comprehensive or considered meeting minutes and are designed to provide context on meeting proceedings for the convenience of interested parties/participants. Audio recordings of meetings can be found at: <https://www.adfg.alaska.gov/index.cfm?adfg=commercialbyareakuskokwim.kswg>*