

Kuskokwim River Salmon Management Working Group

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

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

August 14th, 2024

On Wednesday, August 14th, 2024, the KRSMWG meeting was called to order at 10:03 a.m. and adjourned at 12:00 p.m. Meeting time was approximately 2 hours. A quorum was established with 7 full voting members in attendance. One member joined the meeting late for a total of 8 full voting members. Lamont Albertson chaired the meeting. Primary themes for this meeting were trawling and bycatch, the Bering Sea pollock fishery and the rescission of the federal special action that had been in place on the Kuskokwim River.

AGENDA ITEMS AND SUMMARY INFORMATION:

A. USFWS/KRITFC UPDATE: *Audio for this update begins at 8:25 – Meeting Audio – 8/14/24.*

- There was no USFWS/KRITFC Update at this meeting.

B. ADF&G MANAGEMENT ACTIONS UNDER CONSIDERATION: *Audio for this update begins at 8:40 – Meeting Audio – 8/14/24.*

- Sam Decker, ADFG, said that the Federal Special Action that had been in place regarding fishing in the Kuskokwim will be lifted on August 17th. Ms. Decker proposed releasing an announcement to open 5 commercial fishing periods to those with catcher/seller permits. The commercial periods would be 8-hours each from Bogus Creek down.
 - Avery Hoffman, Bethel, asked about subsistence fishing, which Ms. Decker said that subsistence fishing would be left open. Terese Vincente, KRITFC, read the announcement that had recently been released by USFWS and gave the reasons that USFWS and KRITFC had decided to provide the subsistence opener and then rescind the federal special action, giving management authority back to the state. *Audio for this update begins at 11:15 – Meeting Audio – 8/14/24.*

C. POLLOCK FLEET & SALMON BYCATCH PRESENTATION: *Audio for this update begins at 17:50 – Meeting Audio – 8/14/24.*

- Kate Haapala, PhD., NPFMC, introduced herself and summarized some of the management responsibilities of NPFMC. She said that NPFMC is responsible for making conservation and marine resource management recommendations to National Marine Fisheries Service and the Secretary of Commerce in federal waters from 3-200 feet offshore of Alaska. She spoke about the different commercial fishing fleets and management agencies that operate in the Bering Sea. NPFMC manages the pollock fleet which accounts for 80% of the Chinook salmon caught as bycatch and 98% of the chum caught as bycatch in the Bering Sea. Ms. Haapala described the different types of vessels that participate and gear types that are used in the pollock fishery as well as the fishing schedules and seasons. Bycatch is comprised of fish that originate from Central Western Alaska (from Kotzebue to Bristol Bay), the Alaska Peninsula, the gulf of Alaska Russia, British Columbia and the Pacific Northwest, however about 40-50% of the Chinook bycatch originates from Coastal Western Alaska, but only about 8% of the chum bycatch originates from Coastal Western Alaska. When speaking about measures to reduce or avoid bycatch, she said that Chinook salmon are designated a hard cap of 60,000, however the cap drops to 45,000 if Central Western Alaska stocks are in a time of low abundance and added that there is no set cap for chum bycatch, but it is being considered. Ms. Haapala explained that the

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.salmon>

Kuskokwim River Salmon Management Working Group

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

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

pollock fishery is not able to perform in-season rolling openings and closures like the Kuskokwim fisheries or other river systems in Alaska because every change needs to be recorded in the Federal Register which can take several weeks. Instead, the pollock fleet operates with “rolling hotspots” to avoid bycatch. In-season managers monitor bycatch and identify areas with high salmon bycatch and move vessels to new locations to avoid bycatch.

- After Ms. Haapala finished her presentation, she opened the floor to questions. Some topics that were discussed were salmon bycatch composition, how to engage with NPFMC, participate in public meetings and their next meeting dedicated to chum bycatch, genetic sampling and the how the observer program works, and “prohibited species” and how bycatch is handled. Before the Working Group moved on Mr. Albertson requested for Ms. Haapala to join into the next KRSMWG meeting so that members who were not able to be present would have a chance to hear her presentation and ask questions as well. *Audio for this update begins at 29:00 – Meeting Audio – 8/14/24.*

D. PEOPLE TO BE HEARD:

- Terese Vincente, KRITFC, said that she would like to give the rationale behind USFWS decision to rescind the Federal Special Action. She said that coho salmon returns appear better than in 2022, but not as good as last year and are lower in abundance than historically. She wanted to put it on record that they still have concerns for coho abundance, but they felt there would be little pressure. *Audio for this update begins at 51:10 – Meeting Audio – 8/14/24.*

D. CONTINUING BUSINESS:

- Subsistence Reports: Lower River, Middle River, Upper River, ONC In-season Subsistence Report
 - Lower River
 - Albert Kawagley, Bethel, said that he believed most people are done fishing. He said his family does not fish much for coho salmon. *Audio for this update begins at 56:15 – Meeting Audio – 8/14/24.*
 - Avery Hoffman, Bethel, said that he had fished using a 6-inch mesh net, but he said people that used 5 ¼ inch mesh did better than he did. He said a lot of people were fishing by Joe Pete’s and Schwalbe Island. Mr. Hoffman said he saw about 20 boats fishing along the river. *Audio for this update begins at 57:35 – Meeting Audio – 8/14/24.*
 - Tad Lindley, Bethel, said that he did fish the previous weekend and did similar to others that he spoke to. Mr. Lindley said that he was happy people can fish. He said people did well, especially those with smaller gears. *Audio for this update begins at 1:20:30 – Meeting Audio – 8/14/24.*
 - John Andrew, Kwethluk, said that he only went out fishing on August 5th by the Kwethluk “Y” and used a 25-fathom gillnet with 5 ½-inch mesh. During his first drift he only caught 4. Mr. Andrew said he moved closer to Akiachak and caught 37 coho salmon on his 2nd drift. He said after the tide came, he caught another 24 fish. Mr. Andrew said that this year had been an “eye opener” for him

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.salmon>

Kuskokwim River Salmon Management Working Group

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

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

because he had had boat troubles early in the year. When he finally got his boat fixed the weather had turned wet and windy. People do not want to go out at that time because they can't cut and dry fish in the traditional way and have to save for jarring or fillet and freeze them. Many people no longer go to fish camp because after commercial fishing had effectively closed in the area because they had to sell their gear and permits and have not been able to replace them. Mr. Andrew said he knew 17 people who also had boat motor problems and were not able to go out, so they were not able to meet their needs. He finished by commenting about the size of the salmon that had been returning. *Audio for this update begins at 1:06:15 – Meeting Audio – 8/14/24.*

- James Nicori, Kwethluk, said that he had similar results to everyone else. He said many people were headed out to rod and reel. Mr. Nicori said that some people that are rod and reeling are catching the same as those driftnetting because the coho are small enough to swim through the nets. He said most people are jarring. Other reports that Mr. Nicori had heard were that people were catching chums and very few sockeye salmon. *Audio for this update begins at 1:12:45 – Meeting Audio – 8/14/24.*
- **ONC In-season Report**
 - Delen Hooper, ONC, briefly read some comments from fishers who had been surveyed. People surveyed at fish camps had no comments. Ms. Hooper reported that ONC had conducted 36 boat harbor surveys during the most recent subsistence fishing opener. *Audio for this update begins at 59:40 – Meeting Audio – 8/14/24.*
- **KRITFC In-season Report**
 - Justin Leon, KRITFC, spoke about the most recent subsistence openers and reported that there had been a similar amount of drift- and setnets during both of the most recent subsistence fishing openers. KRITFC estimates that there were 1,500 fish harvested on August 10th, with most fish caught being coho salmon. He added that there was almost no Chinook salmon caught, some chum and just a little over 100 sockeye salmon. The estimated season total catch was given but Mr. Leon stated that the numbers were not yet final. Mr. Leon finished by saying that overall, there is less effort and that has affected fisheries management decisions as others had mentioned. *Audio for this update begins at 1:02:25 – Meeting Audio – 8/14/24.*
- **Middle River**
 - Walter Morgan, Lower Kalskag, reported that the water in his area was high and dirty and overall fishing is slow. He said that those catching fish with a rod and reel are reporting small salmon.
 - Allen Simeon, Aniak, said that he had gone to his fish camp 13 miles downriver of Aniak and saw one setnet. He said he had spoken to participants of the salmon derby held in Aniak and the biggest coho salmon that had been caught

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.salmon>

Kuskokwim River Salmon Management Working Group

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

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

was 7.5 pounds. Mr. Simeon commented about the snow earlier this year, causing everything to be late. He suggested using fish finders to count and locate fish and explained his reasoning and how he thought it would be better than the sonar site. He finished his report by telling the group that many fish were being caught in the Aniak and Owhat Rivers, but he said most were under 6 inches in length. *Audio for this update begins at 1:14:45 – Meeting Audio – 8/14/24.*

- Overview of the Kuskokwim River salmon run assessment
 - *Audio for this update begins at 1:22:20 – Meeting Audio – 8/14/24.*
 - Information about this update can be found beginning on page 5 of the Informational Packet.
 - Sean Larson, ADFG, gave a brief report of Kuskokwim fisheries assessment projects. Some highlights include that Bethel Test Fish CPUE for coho salmon is below average but does not align with sonar but are still in line with years that the escapement goals were met or exceeded. One potential reason for the discrepancy is on one tide days the BTF crew only goes out once, but sonar still performs test fishing on a regular schedule, instead of according to the tides. He told the group the last day of BTF will be August 15th as they will be headed to the Goodnews River weir site to do work there. Mr. Larson continued with information about the weirs. He said that the George and Kogrukluks weirs were both flooded and not currently counting fish, but escapement was looking good. The Talequena weir had average escapement numbers.
 - Tad Lindley, Bethel, asked about how single tide days are handled as far as data. There was a brief discussion about the subject.
- Subsistence Division Project Update
 - Tim Bimbenic, ADFG, said that the post-season salmon survey project was coming up. He said that ONC had been a long-standing partner, but because of the recent turnover the Subsistence Division is not sure about this year. *Audio for this update begins at 1:30:40 – Meeting Audio – 8/14/24.*
- Sport Fish:
 - Lamont Albertson, Aniak, said that fish were only being caught in clear water but that he was still concerned with the pike population. Sam Decker, ADFG, reminded Mr. Albertson and the Working Group that the Sport Fish Division was planning a stomach analysis of pike in the area. *Audio for this update begins at 1:27:25 – Meeting Audio – 8/14/24.*
- Intercept Fishery Report
 - Sean Larson, ADFG, gave a quick summary of information that can be found on page 22 of the Informational Packet. Dave Runfola, ADFG, offered a clarification about the information presented. *Audio for this update begins at 1:32:20 – Meeting Audio – 8/14/24.*

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.salmon>

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

E. OLD BUSINESS:

- Sam Decker, ADFG, explained that beginning on page 23 of the Informational packet was a letter that supporters of Amendment 80 had presented to Doug Vincent-Lang, ADFG Commissioner, to request a meeting in response to the letter written by the Working Group to address trawling fishing in the Kuskokwim Bay area. Supporters of Amendment 80 and Doug Vincent-Lang met on July 29th. *Audio for this update begins at 1:46:25 – Meeting Audio – 8/14/24.*

F. NEW BUSINESS:

- No new business was addressed at this meeting.

G. COMMENTS FROM WORKING GROUP MEMBERS:

- Lamont Albertson, Aniak, thanked Kate Haapala, NPFMC, for joining into the meeting and speaking to the Working Group. He also thanked staff that works with the Working Group all summer. Sam Decker, ADFG, thanked the Working Group and everyone who participates in the meetings. *Audio for this update begins at 1:49:30 – Meeting Audio – 8/14/24.*

The meeting was adjourned at 12:00 p.m.

WORKING GROUP MOTIONS:

Motion 1: Approve the agenda. Passed (Unanimous)

- *Audio for this update begins at 7:55 – Meeting Audio – 8/14/24.*
- No objections were made.

Motion 2: To support ADFG recommendations to provide 5 8-hour commercial periods in subdistrict 1-A with net restrictions for those with a catcher/seller permit. Passed (unanimous)

- *Audio for this update begins at 1:37:35 – Meeting Audio – 8/14/24.*
- Motion made by Tad Lindley, 2nd by Lamont Albertson
- There was a brief conversation about the process of becoming a catcher/seller if there is someone who would be interested in participating.

Motion 3: For the next scheduled Working Group meeting to occur on Wednesday August 28th, 2024, at 10:00 A.M. Passed (Unanimous)

- *Audio for this update begins at 1:52:00 – Meeting Audio – 8/14/24.*
- Motion made by Lamont Albertson, 2nd by Avery Hoffman.

Motion 4: Adjourn at 12:00 p.m. Passed (Unanimous)

- *Audio for this update begins at 1:53:40 – Meeting Audio – 8/14/24.*

WORKING GROUP ATTENDANCE:

MEMBER SEAT:	NAME:
DOWNRIVER ELDER	John Andrew
UPRIVER ELDER	Allen Simeon
LOWER RIVER SUBSISTENCE	<i>Absent</i>
MIDDLE RIVER SUBSISTENCE	Walter Morgan

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.salmon>

Kuskokwim River Salmon Management Working Group

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

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

UPRIVER SUBSISTENCE	<i>Absent</i>
HEADWATERS SUBSISTENCE	<i>Absent</i>
MEMBER AT LARGE SEAT 1	Albert Kawagley
MEMBER AT LARGE SEAT 2	Avery Hoffman
WESTERN INTERIOR RAC	<i>Absent</i>
YK DELTA RAC	<i>Absent</i>
COMMERCIAL FISHING	Tad Lindley
SPORT FISHING	Lamont Albertson
KRITFC	James Nicori
ADF&G	Sam Decker
CHAIR	Lamont Albertson
<u>ADF&G Comm. Fish:</u> Sam Decker, Sean Larson, Dave Runfola, Bobette Dickerson, Keegan Birchfield <u>Sport Fish Division:</u> John Chythlook <u>Subsistence Division:</u> Tim Bembenic <u>Commissioner's Office:</u>	
<u>USFWS:</u> <u>OSM:</u> <u>NVN:</u> <u>ONC:</u> Kara Domnick, Delen Hooper, Briana Henry <u>AVCP:</u> <u>KRITFC:</u> Justin Leon, Terese Vincente, Daniel O'Connor <u>UAF:</u> <u>WIRAC:</u> <u>YK Delta RAC:</u>	
<u>WG Alternates:</u> (not already listed above)	<u>Media:</u> <u>Other:</u> Maridon Bario, Sen. Hoffman's office; Kate Haapala, PhD, NPFMC; Lucinda Alexie

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=commercialbyvareakuskokwim.salmon>