

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

**August 28th, 2024**

On Wednesday, August 28<sup>th</sup>, 2024, the KRSMWG meeting was called to order at 10:03 a.m. and adjourned at 11:30 a.m. Meeting time was approximately 1 ½ 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. This meeting was primarily held to facilitate an informational session with NPFMC representative Dr. Kate Haapala and to host a conversation about Bethel Test Fish.

**AGENDA ITEMS AND SUMMARY INFORMATION:**

**A. USFWS/KRITFC UPDATE:** *Audio for this update begins at 8:35 – Meeting Audio – 8/28/24.*

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

**B. ADF&G MANAGEMENT ACTIONS UNDER CONSIDERATION:**

- There were no ADF&G management actions to consider at this meeting. Sean Larson, ADFG, gave a brief update on assessment projects still in operation. That update can be seen below under “Continuing Business” or can be heard on the meeting audio beginning at 9:05.

**C. POLLOCK FLEET & SALMON BYCATCH PRESENTATION:** *Audio for this update begins at 10:05 – 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 NOAA fisheries which span from three to two-hundred miles off the shore of Alaska. She described the fleets that operate in that space and said that the pollock fleet is responsible for 80% of the Chinook caught as bycatch in the Bering Sea. Dr. Haapala summarized what type of vessels and gear types and the schedules and seasons the pollock fleet uses. She said that Chinook and chum salmon are the most often caught bycatch species and discusses the range of bycatch per year. Chinook bycatch over the last few years has ranged from 6,337 to 32,294. 47% of bycatch caught in the pollock fleet come from Central Western Alaska Stocks which include waters from Bristol Bay to Kotzebue. The rest of the bycatch comes from the Gulf of Alaska, Russia, and Asia. She said the fishery operates under a Chinook bycatch cap and lowers the cap when the abundance of Central Western Alaska stocks are expected to be in low abundance. Since the fleet cannot operate with rolling closures and openings like some river systems do, instead they close high salmon areas for a week or more to avoid salmon bycatch. Dr. Haapala said that observers are stationed on each vessel and are managed by a 3<sup>rd</sup> party to provide oversight.
  - There was a conversation after Dr. Haapala finished speaking about the fishing seasons, what happens to bycatch and the non-profit company SeaShare, and how bycatch monitoring and the observer program works. *Audio for this update begins at 20:45 – Meeting Audio – 8/28/24.*

**D. PEOPLE TO BE HEARD:**

- There were no people to be heard at this meeting.

**E. CONTINUING BUSINESS:**

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- Subsistence Reports: Lowest River, ONC Inseason Subsistence Report, KRITFC Inseason Harvest Report, Lower River, Middle River, Upper River, Headwaters
  - Lower River
    - Avery Hoffman, Bethel, said he fished for approximately 3 hours and caught 15 fish. He believes many fish swam through the net because he was using a larger net. He said that as of the previous Sunday the fish are still coming into the river. *Audio for this update begins at 43:05 – Meeting Audio – 8/28/24.*
    - Tad Lindley, Bethel, said that he spoke to one person who did well the previous weekend. Mr. Lindley added that many in Bethel will be getting their needs met with coho salmon. He said the weather has not been the best for fishing. *Audio for this update begins at 43:55 – Meeting Audio – 8/28/24.*
    - John Andrew, Kwethluk, said that fishing had not been good near Kwethluk in the Spring because of the high water and now in the Fall the water is high again. Mr. Andrew said that talking to people he only heard from one family that they did well, but they have 2 boats. Some families did well in the early season but lost fish due to spoilage due to the rainy weather. He said inside the Kwethluk and Kasigluk Rivers, and probably the Kasigluk River, fishers are doing well but not many are going out. *Audio for this update begins at 45:00 – Meeting Audio – 8/28/24.*
    - James Nicori, Kwethluk, said that he had gone out fishing the previous day and only caught 5 fish in the first drift and 2 on the second drift. Mr. Nicori continues that before that he had fished in the rainy and windy weather before the water levels got really high and was able to catch 10 one day and 15 another day. Mr. Nicori said that he is fishing to jar fish and has gotten quite a bit, but he did not see anyone else go out fishing. He said that some of the coho salmon were small and went right through his net, but during the storm he caught bigger fish. *Audio for this update begins at 48:35 – Meeting Audio – 8/28/24.*
  - KRITFC In-season Report
    - There was no KRITFC In-season Report at this meeting.
  - Middle River
    - Dan Gillikin, NVN, said that coho salmon numbers had been low until the previous Thursday and Friday when they started coming into the Aniak River. Mr. Gillikin said that there were a lot of females, and they were coming in smaller than usual. He said that according to reports he had heard from upriver the salmon were very abundant. *Audio for this update begins at 52:05 – Meeting Audio – 8/28/24.*
  - Upper River
    - Barbara Carlson, Sleetmute, said that some people were going out with rod and reel but the water in the area was high and murky but still had luck. She had spoken to one person who set a small 60-foot net overnight and caught 10-15 fish of mixed stock. Ms. Carlson said that sockeye salmon were still being caught

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and were in good condition. *Audio for this update begins at 53:30 – Meeting Audio – 8/28/24.*

- Overview of the Kuskokwim River salmon run assessment
  - *Audio for this update begins at 9:05 – Meeting Audio – 8/28/24.*
    - The update was revisited later in the meeting, but ADFG staff had nothing more to add. (55:25)
  - There was no new data from Kuskokwim River salmon run assessment projects to be presented so the information will not be found in the Informational Packet. However, Sean Larson did give a brief update to the Working Group.
  - Sean Larson, ADFG, spoke about assessment projects still in operation this season. He said Bethel Test Fish stopped operations a few days prior to the meeting. George River and Kogruklu River weirs had been flooded out for the 16 days prior to the meeting and have not been operable. He added that Kogruklu River weir was able to get the weir back in the prior.
- Commercial Catch Report Update
  - Sam Decker, ADFG, said that there had been 5 commercial fishing periods announced for those with catcher/seller permits but since there are less than 3 commercial fishers registered as catcher/sellers the data is confidential. *Audio for this update begins at 55:35 – Meeting Audio – 8/28/24.*
- Sport Fish:
  - John Chythlook, ADFG, said that the Sport Fish division is backing out of the pike diet study that had been discussed in previous KRSMWG meetings and would be more likely to do a population study. He encouraged a graduate student or other agency to conduct the study. *Audio for this update begins at 56:55 – Meeting Audio – 8/28/24.*
    - Alissa Rogers, Bethel, asked if people could go out with an 8- or 4 ½- inch nets to fish for pike and if there were any predator control programs elsewhere in the state for pike. Mr. Chythlook said that there are not any predator control programs for pike where they are native, but there are in areas where they are not native. He added that there are no limits for pike in the area and encouraged people to catch as many pike as they want. Avery Hoffman, Bethel, asked if Mr. Chythlook had any suggestions to get the word out to people who could do the project. Mr. Chythlook said that the concern for pike is mostly bound to areas within the Yukon Delta Refuge and suggested speaking to USFWS. *Audio for this update begins at 58:15 – Meeting Audio – 8/28/24.*
- Intercept Fishery Report
  - The South Peninsula Commercial Harvest Report and Bering Sea bycatch totals can be found on page 4 of the Informational Packet. There was no additional information to add to the conversation. *Audio for this update begins at 1:02:35 – Meeting Audio – 8/28/24.*

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## F. OLD BUSINESS:

- Discussion regarding Bethel Test Fish.
  - *Audio for this update begins at 1:04:00 – Meeting Audio – 8/28/24.*
  - The discussion about Bethel Test Fish began with funding questions and why the BTF project ended early this year and how that would affect the data. Sean Larson, ADFG, said that ending the season early should not affect the data there just would not be numbers for the late season. Avery Hoffman, Bethel, asked how we plan to prevent an early ending of assessment projects next year. Mr. Larson explained that this year some projects ended early due to OSM funding not coming through and Bethel Test Fish ended early because the staff was needed to address concerns over the Goodnews weir, and no other staff were available. Dave Runfola, ADFG, added that Bethel Test Fish had been in operation for 30 years so changes should not be made from one year alone. Mr. Runfola said that if changes are to be made, they need to be incremental and with a lot of scrutiny. Tad Lindley, Bethel, suggested adding a 3<sup>rd</sup> drift set, possibly in Straight Slough. Albert Kawagley, Bethel, shared that Straight slough used to be very shallow but has deepened over the years and so the salmon runs have changed. Sam Decker, ADFG, reminded the group that this was an off year due to funding issues and high water, but KRITFC was exploring better placement for the Kwethluk River weir and Bethel Test Fish was able to operate through 75% of the coho salmon run. The group then discussed which weirs were and were not in operation this year and Dan Gillikin, NVN, expressed concern for a basin-wide estimate. Mr. Larson said that they have some data that can be used in the model, just not as much as they would usually like. John Andrew, Kwethluk, spoke about the Kwethluk River and the waters near Kwethluk and how the fish run in that area and at what time of the season.

## G. NEW BUSINESS:

- No new business was addressed at this meeting however Savannah Hollingworth, ADFG, did remind the group that fisheries proposals for the Arctic, Yukon, and Kuskokwim and the Alaska Peninsula areas will be due on April 11<sup>th</sup> of 2025. *Audio for this update begins at 1:23:45 – Meeting Audio – 8/28/24.*

## H. COMMENTS FROM WORKING GROUP MEMBERS:

- Sam Decker, ADFG, proposed that the next Working Group meeting be held sometime in November “at the call of the chair” and asked if March would be too early for the Spring Pre-season meeting. Savannah Hollingworth, ADFG, reminded the group that Board of Fisheries proposals for the Kuskokwim and Alaska Peninsula would be due on April 11<sup>th</sup>. The reason to hold the Spring meeting in March would be to give the Working Group an opportunity to work on and finalize proposals before the deadline. Sean Larson, ADFG, suggested waiting until April for the Spring meeting so that the Run Reconstruction can be ready. Savannah Hollingworth, ADFG, will work with the co-chairs and members and the department to find suitable dates for both the Fall and Spring meetings. *Audio for this update begins at 1:49:30 – Meeting Audio – 8/14/24.*

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The meeting was adjourned at 11:30 a.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: Adjourn at 12:00 p.m.** *Passed (Unanimous)*

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

**There were no additional motions made at this meeting.**

**WORKING GROUP ATTENDANCE:**

<b>MEMBER SEAT:</b>	<b>NAME:</b>
DOWNRIVER ELDER	John Andrew
UPRIVER ELDER	<i>Absent</i>
LOWER RIVER SUBSISTENCE	<i>Absent</i>
MIDDLE RIVER SUBSISTENCE	<i>Absent</i>
UPRIVER SUBSISTENCE	Barbara Carlson
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	Alissa Rogers
COMMERCIAL FISHING	Tad Lindley
SPORT FISHING	Lamont Albertson
KRITFC	James Nicori
ADF&G	Sam Decker
CHAIR	Lamont Albertson
<u>ADF&amp;G Comm. Fish:</u> Sam Decker, Sean Larson, Dave Runfola <u>Sport Fish Division:</u> John Chythlook <u>Subsistence Division:</u> <u>Commissioner's Office:</u>	
<u>USFWS:</u> <u>OSM:</u> Nissa Pilcher, Kevin Foley <u>NVN:</u> Dan Gillikin <u>ONC:</u> Delen Hooper, Briana Henry <u>AVCP:</u> <u>KRITFC:</u> Justin Leon <u>UAF:</u> <u>WIRAC:</u> <u>YK Delta RAC:</u> Alissa Rogers	
<u>WG Alternates:</u> (not already listed above)	<u>Media:</u> <u>Other:</u> Maridon Bario, Sen. Hoffman's office; Kate Haapala, PhD, NPFMC

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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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