

Kuskokwim River Salmon Management Working Group

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Meeting Summary

July 30, 2013

Meeting called to order at 10:10 am and adjourned at 11:30 pm at ADF&G in Bethel. Four full voting members were present and since quorum was not established the meeting was a Work Session.

AGENDA ITEMS:

Continuing Business: Run assessment and management actions.

Old Business Discussion Topics: none

New Business Discussion Topics: Tabled until a future meeting.

WORKING GROUP ACTION ITEMS: none

WORKING GROUP MOTIONS: none

PEOPLE TO BE HEARD: none

CONTINUING BUSINESS:

Subsistence Reports

- Lower River Reports:

Greg Roczicka (Lower River Subsistence) reported that people told him that they were catching Coho for their freezer "without any trouble" and were satisfied with their subsistence opportunity.

Casie Stockdale (Chair) reported that she had caught 7 silvers and 2 chum in 2 drifts, and then caught 20 silvers when she went out again.

- Middle River Reports:

Dave Cannon (Middle River Subsistence) said that a fair amount of people were rod and reeling for silvers. He commented that Nathan Underwood was the only person he knew that was still using a driftnet, and Nathan reported catching several chum and a couple of silvers.

Wayne Morgan (Middle River Subsistence alternate) said that families who were planning to fish for silvers said that they were hoping for a good run.

- Upper River Subsistence Reports:

Barbara Carlson (Upriver Subsistence) reported that the silver salmon had just arrived in the upper river. She said that there were a couple of set nets out, but most people were catching silvers with rod and reel.

Overview of Kuskokwim River salmon run assessment projects:

- **Bethel Test Fishery:**

Colton Lipka (ADF&G) reported near average water temperatures, poor water clarity, much debris, and slightly above average water level. Currently BTF was fishing a 5 3/8-inch net.

Chinook Salmon

Colton Lipka (ADF&G) said that BTF had not seen a Chinook salmon since July 16.

Chum

Colton Lipka commented that the chum salmon run had slowed down and that the crew was seeing more spawned-out looking fish.

Sockeye

Colton reported that the sockeye run had also slowed down and the cumulative CPUE was similar to 2012.

Coho

Travis Elison commented that the Coho run was steadily building. The July 26 commercial opener harvested about 6,000 Coho which resulted in a reduced BTF CPUE the following day, which had been predicted. Travis reassured the group that by July 28, BTF catches "were back up to the highest CPUE that we've seen this season, so it's definitely still building and fish appear to be getting through the commercial district."

Discussion:

Casie Stockdale commented that she was surprised that the Coho CPUE was not higher for this time of year. Travis replied that the run, "isn't looking huge, but is still bigger than the last three years," according to catch statistics and BTF CPUE's. He added that in 2012 there had been a maximum of 24 hours of commercial fishing per week in Subdistrict 1-B. So far in 2013, commercial fishing has been more limited: 8 hours per week in the upper section and 12 hours per week in the lower section of Subdistrict 1-B. Also, unlike 2012, processor capacity has not been available in Subdistrict 1-A and no commercial fishing has occurred there.

Greg Roczicka asked if anyone had an idea of where the high water and debris on the mainstem was coming from because it seemed unusual for this time of year. Dave Cannon suggested that glacial melt could be contributing to increased water level and turbidity. He suggested that tributaries were not the cause, because the ones in his area had extremely low water. Barbara Carlson also noted that the mainstem had been high and full of debris the previous week, and agreed this water did not seem to be coming from tributaries. She suggested that recent large storms in the Alaska Range could be the culprit, to which some members agreed.

- **Weirs:**

Brittany Blain (ADF&G) gave updates on all salmon escapement projects. *Please see July 30 Information Packet for tables and figures.*

Chinook: Relative to past years, Chinook salmon escapement was low. Passage percentages for Chinook are based on late run timing, and at most projects 85% to 95% of the run had passed.

- Kwethluk River weir escapement was the lowest on record (below 2010);
- Tuluksak River weir escapement was tracking just below 2010;
- Salmon River weir (Aniak) escapement was tracking below 2008;
- George River weir escapement was tracking below 2010 and was not projected to meet the escapement goal;
- Kogrukluk River weir escapement was tracking below 2010 and was not projected to meet the escapement goal;
- Tatlawiksuk River weir escapement was tracking just below 2010;
- Takotna River weir was tracking below 2011 and previous years.

Chum: An estimated 75% of chum passage had occurred at all weir projects to date.

- Kwethluk River weir escapement was tracking similar to 2008, 2010, and 2011;
- Tuluksak River weir escapement was tracking similar to 2007 and 2012;
- Salmon River weir passage was similar to 2008;
- George River weir escapement was just below 2006, and was the third highest escapement on record by this date;
- Kogrukluk River weir escapement had exceeded the upper bound of the escapement goal and is projected to be similar to the 2010 escapement;
- Tatlawiksuk River weir was tracking below 2006;
- Takotna River weir escapement was tracking similar to 2005 and 2012.

Sockeye:

- Kwethluk River weir escapement was tracking low;
- Salmon River weir escapement was similar to 2007 and 2008;
- Kogrukluk River weir had exceeded the lower end of the escapement goal and was tracking similar to 2011;
- Talaquana River weir escapement was 27,688 sockeye salmon to date.

Coho:

- Brittany noted Coho passage to date was 236 at Kwethluk; 44 at Tuluksak; 20 at George River; and 80 at Tatlawiksuk. She said other weir projects had not seen Coho yet, which was normal for this time of year.

Discussion

Barbara Carlson asked where Chinook salmon arrive at first. Kevin Schaberg replied, "They start showing up at about the same time at the spawning escapements... It's tough to define one being earlier than another..." Travis Elison commented that

Kwethluk, Tuluksak, George, and Tatlawiksuk Rivers start seeing kings slightly earlier than Kogrukluk and Takotna Rivers. Kevin clarified that fish headed for Takotna and other upriver tributaries swim faster than lower river fish.

Casie Stockdale asked for comments from USFWS regarding Kwethluk River weir operation and Chinook escapement.

- Ken Harper replied, "Every day the crew goes out and they check the weir for holes, and that's duly noted in our weir logs. Looking back over all the data for this year, they have checked every day. There have been a couple holes but the notes have been that they were either not big enough for fish to pass or something of that nature. One of the pickets was broken, but the notes said that they didn't think that the hole was big enough for fish to pass." He continued, "I don't think that there is any big discrepancy between what we are seeing at the weir and what we have...Those are some of the final numbers of what we are seeing."
- Casie replied, "So you basically think that the weir's operation has been normal and not interrupted throughout the season." Ken replied, "That's correct. We have not had any high water events like we did last year, where quite a bit of the weir was sunk." He continued, "It has been a very easy operation this year as far as getting out and checking the weir and making sure there's no holes, and if there are some, getting sandbags in there to plug those up or keep them from developing bigger."
- Casie then asked if the Kwethluk and Tuluksak had both video and people counting. Ken replied, "It's live video and we are watching the fish go through there. Also it's recorded using motion detection." He explained, "The entire season is videoed and we can go back and look at that and even get sex ratios on our king salmon."
- Dave Cannon asked what the Chinook sex ration was at the Kwethluk, and Ken replied that the data was still being collected, but generally there had been 25% to 35% females. Dave Cannon noted that, unlike Chinook, Kwethluk chum salmon did not seem to have an escapement that was the lowest on record

- **Aerial Surveys:**

Travis Elison reported that aerial surveys were still in process and results would be included in the next Working Group information packet.

- **General discussion regarding run assessment projects:**

There was discussion of the relationship between BTF CPUE and escapement for Chinook salmon and how that might be expressed in tables and figures within future Information Packets:

- Casie Stockdale suggested having two figures included in the information packet for Chinook, one that indicated achievement of tributary goals and one that indicated achievement of the drainage-wide goal. Kevin Schaberg replied that he didn't see how a second figure would help, because each weir project graph already had information on whether or not the escapement goal had been achieved in a given year (for systems where escapement goals exist).

- Casie replied, "Earlier in the season we don't see those weir figures....If someone who didn't take part in the Working Group all the time just looked at the BTF figure with the Bethel Test Fish Cumulative CPUE figure, they would think we achieved escapement goals; but everyone sitting at the table here knows that we haven't generally achieved tributary goals in the last few years." Travis Elison replied, "We discussed this thoroughly at the beginning of the season, because we went through such a change at Board of Fish with new escapement goals. This whole figure had to change and those pluses and minuses mean a whole different thing now." Travis explained that the box under the Chinook Cumulative CPUE figure explains escapement in relation to the new drainage wide SEG and indicates if there were restrictions that year. He said, "That's as descriptive as we can get." Kevin reiterated that the tributary goals are usually achieved when the SEG has been met. Therefore, "The pluses and minuses on the BTF figure [are] accurate to achieving or not achieving the new tributary goals in their current state."
- Dave Cannon asked how the BTF models stands in regard to the drainage-wide escapement goal, since nearly every weir project had the lowest escapement on record for Chinook salmon. Kevin Schaberg replied that, "We won't know that until the end of the season and we get all the information put into the run reconstruction model, but I think you can see that from the BTF number, that [Chinook escapement] is the lowest that we've seen in the last few years, as well. So it does agree with what we see at the escapement projects."
- Casie Stockdale requested that the BTF Cumulative Chinook CPUE figure be clarified to show that it represents both the whole-river and tributary escapement goals. She also requested that the figure show the date that the SEG was established (2013). She reiterated her concern that the figure could be "very misleading about the history of what has happened on the river."

Greg Roczicka asked that Chinook escapements be included in the same packet as aerial survey results for purposes of comparison. Travis Elison agreed to do so.

Ken Harper commented that Kwethluk, Tuluksak, and Salmon River Chinook escapements were tracking in a similar way, and he noted that all three rivers' headwaters were in the same area. Casie Stockdale suggested the inclusion of her map spatially showing the different projects in the next Information Packet.

Commercial Catch Report:

Travis Elison reported that there had been four commercial fishing periods in Kuskokwim River Subdistrict 1-B since July 16. *Please see the July 30 Information Packet for commercial catch statistics.* Travis commented that the first period had very good chum and Coho catches, and normal Chinook and sockeye catches. He said that Chinook and sockeye catches dropped off on July 19 because those runs were basically over. He noted that chum harvests continued to decrease, and Coho catches continued to increase. Travis reported that the total harvest for Coho was slightly ahead of past years and participation in the Subdistrict 1-B fishery had increased in 2013 because Subdistrict 1-A was closed. Finally, he clarified that all data was preliminary, and that all Chinook caught had not been sold, and were retained for subsistence use.

Discussion

Casie Stockdale commented that Chinook passage “was below average and not going to meet goals” in Kuskokwim Bay tributaries.

- As far as escapement, Travis Elison replied that the Middle Fork of the Goodnews River (Goodnews Bay) had a weir-based escapement goal, which was most likely not going to be achieved in 2013. However, he noted that over 1,000 Chinook had passed through the weir to date which was a much better escapement than 2012. As for Quinhagak (Kuskokwim Bay), Travis reported that 2013 escapement at Kanektok had surpassed 3,000 Chinook, compared to an escapement of 1,700 in 2012.
- Travis also clarified that commercial harvest of Chinook salmon in Kuskokwim Bay was “way down” compared to previous years. So far in 2013, he said that 2,029 Chinook had been harvested in District 4 (Quinhagak) and 475 Chinook had been harvested in District 5 (Goodnews Bay). Travis explained that previously these two numbers equaled the average annual harvest for District 5 alone. The 2013 Chinook harvest in Quinhagak was less than the previous low of 6,700 fish in 2012, which was already much lower than the compared to the historical average of 15,000 fish.
- Travis said that Chinook and sockeye aerial-based survey goals on the Kanektok River and the mainstem of the Goodnews River were currently being assessed.

Travis Elison commented that harvest for all species was down in Kuskokwim Bay because the Chinook, sockeye, and chum runs were over and the Coho run was just beginning. He said that ADF&G planned to skip the next few commercial periods to give fishermen the break they had been asking for and to allow the Coho run to build.

Greg Roczicka asked if comparative data was available for previous years of Coho catches on the Kuskokwim River. Travis replied that Coho run timing was earlier for the Kuskokwim River than Kuskokwim Bay. As in previous years, the Department had transitioned to Coho management on July 26, because more Coho were being harvested than other salmon species. As far as historical catches, Travis said that it is hard to compare harvest averages this early in the run, but noted that 2013 had higher CPUE's to date than previous years. He summed up by saying, “I don't think it's a huge Coho run right now, but it's looking fine.”

Casie commented that she was concerned about subsistence fishermen who planned to harvest Coho. Kevin Schaberg reminded her that subsistence reports earlier in the meeting indicated that people currently had subsistence fishing opportunity and were harvesting Coho with rod and reel. Dave Cannon commented, “Although people are out rod and reel fishing and there is opportunity, hopefully there won't be excessive commercial harvest downriver that cuts into the time that people actually are catching up here.”

Processor Report: none

Sport Fish Report: none

Intercept Fishery Report:

Casie Stockdale reported that 8,754 Chinook salmon were harvested in 2013 in all salmon and Pollock fisheries in the Bering Sea Aleutian Islands. She said that the non-Chinook harvest was 38,528 fish (mostly chum salmon), and that there had been a number of “rolling hotspot” closures to protect chum.

Weather Forecast:

The forecast for the Kuskokwim was cloudy to partly cloudy, 50 to 70 degrees, and predominantly southeast winds.

ADF&G Recommendation: none

Travis Elison commented that he would look at the July 30 harvest numbers from Kuskokwim River Subdistrict 1-B before deciding on the next commercial period. He stated, "As long as we are seeing adequate numbers of Coho salmon in the catches, at Bethel Test Fish, and at the escapement projects we will likely continue fishing Tuesday/Friday 4-hour periods with 2-hour extensions..."

Discussion:

Greg Roczicka's asked whether there had been any savings in Coho harvest in 2013, Travis Elison explained that Coho harvest in 1-B has had lower catch rates than 1-A historically because the river is wider. Since harvest in 1-A usually influences the relationship between BTF and escapement project, he explained that there should be higher escapement than past years with similar BTF indices. Greg Roczicka requested to see previous years' harvest in 1-A for similar dates.

OLD BUSINESS: none

NEW BUSINESS: *Both items tabled until a meeting with a quorum.*

Chris Sheldon commented that members could decide if a meeting to plan a fall meeting was necessary, or if planning via email would be sufficient. Barbara Carlson suggested mailing a survey form to members without email access. Alice Bailey clarified that she had working emails for all members and was comfortable communicating with them. Casie Stockdale asked that Alice email members asking for input about discussion points for a post-season meeting, and Alice agreed to compile responses before August 15th.

GENERAL COMMENTS FROM WORKING GROUP MEMBERS:

Wayne Morgan asked if other individuals or organizations could call into the Chinook Summit in Unalakleet because he was interested in participating. Casie Stockdale replied that she would look into it. Alice Bailey (ADF&G) reminded Wayne that Bev Hoffman, who will be representing the Working Group at the Summit, offered to take people's comments to the meeting as long as they emailed her beforehand.

There were many comments regarding the July 30 meeting date:

- Wayne Morgan commented that in the future he would appreciate not having Working Group meetings the same day as commercial fishing openers.
- Casie Stockdale commented that she requested a meeting on Monday, which was then moved to Tuesday because Monday meetings were logistically difficult for Department staff. She said that even though the Working Group asked the Department not to have an opener until after the meeting, but ADF&G decided to have the scheduled opener anyway.
- Travis Elison responded that the Department discussed at length the decision to have the opener on July 30 regardless of the meeting. He stated, "I considered moving the meeting to Monday, even though it had already been scheduled for Tuesday, and make everyone work on Sunday. However, these meetings tend to go long....typically they are over 2 hours, which pushes us past noon, which pushes us

well past the 24 hour notice for announcing a commercial period. The other part of that is that one of the big pieces of data we need for the next period is the previous opener, so in order to give as much notice as possible to fishermen, the Department likes to announce openers as soon as the data is available: "So that's why we announced it on Saturday, instead of waiting until Monday afternoon for a Tuesday opener." As far as moving it to Wednesday, August 1, Travis said that he wanted enough space between periods to allow fish passage through the district. He also commented that maintaining the Tuesday-Friday schedule that we have been on for two weeks now helps fishermen, the processor, and run assessment of data.

- Chris Sheldon said that he felt responsible for the Tuesday meeting because he made the request to avoid Monday meetings whenever possible. He clarified that he will continue to make requests not to have meeting on Mondays or weekends, but "If the needs of the Working Group and the needs of managers are in conflict with that, regardless of what I request, of course we will accommodate that."
- Wayne Morgan explained that his point was that even though it is easier for commercial fishermen and staff, it is frustrating for members voting on items because their time seems unappreciated. He wanted to give members a chance to approve or disapprove of recommendations. Casie Stockdale agreed.

Dave Cannon reiterated his concern for Chinook escapement and said, "I think we need to take a close look at the models we use to base decisions off of and know that these numbers are the lowest we've ever seen. We just need to work together....and see if we can turn this situation around." Wayne Morgan said that he agreed.

Barbara Carlson agreed with Dave Cannon. She added that she hopes that members come prepared at the late August meeting, "To put forth some valid ideas, and work, and do more than just talk." She said that the Working Group "is such a big, diverse group, and I'm just amazed that people have the patience to keep hashing this through and through. I hope that we can come up with something that we can do to help those Chinook salmon, and get it in place before next spring."

WORKING GROUP ATTENDANCE:

MEMBER SEAT:	NAME:
DOWNRIVER ELDER	<i>Absent</i>
UPRIVER ELDER	<i>Vacant</i>
LOWER RIVER SUBSISTENCE	Greg Roczicka
MIDDLE RIVER SUBSISTENCE	Dave Cannon
UPRIVER SUBSISTENCE	Barbara Carlson
HEADWATERS SUBSISTENCE	<i>Absent</i>
MEMBER AT LARGE	<i>Absent</i>
WESTERN INTERIOR RAC	<i>Absent</i>
YK DELTA RAC	<i>Absent</i>
COMMERCIAL FISHING	Greg Hoffman, Jr.
SPORT FISHING	<i>Absent</i>
PROCESSOR	<i>Absent</i>
ADF&G	Travis Elison
CHAIR	Casie Stockdale

Other Participants:
<p><u>ADF&G Comm. Fish:</u> Travis Elison, Chris Shelden, Alice Bailey, Zach Liller, Kevin Schaberg, Jan Conitz, Brittany Blain, Colton Lipka</p> <p><u>Sport Fish:</u></p> <p><u>Subsistence Division:</u> Hiroko Ikuta</p>
<p><u>USFWS:</u> Ken Harper, Steve Miller, Tom Doolittle</p> <p><u>OSM:</u> Don Rivard</p>
<p>Kate Schaberg (Georgetown)</p> <p>John Active (KYUK)</p> <p>Roberta Chavez (ONC)</p> <p>Wayne Morgan</p>

GLOSSARY OF ACRONYMS:

Alaska Department of Fish and Game (**ADF&G**), Orutsararmiut Native Council (**ONC**), Kuskokwim Native Association (**KNA**), Association of Village Council Presidents (**AVCP**), 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**), 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**)