

Kuskokwim River Salmon Management Working Group

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

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

June 3, 2015

Meeting called to order at 10:00am on Wednesday June 3, 2015 and adjourned at 12:00pm. Total meeting time was 2 hours. Six full voting members were present plus the ADF&G representative. The meeting was conducted as an executive session.

AGENDA ITEMS:

Continuing Business: Run assessment and management actions. (*KNA Inseason Report was discontinued from the Subsistence Reports*).

People to be Heard:

Old Business Discussion Topics:

New Business Discussion Topics:

- Update from USFWS on the lower river. (*This item was moved to Continuing Business under Subsistence Reports*).

WORKING GROUP ACTION ITEMS: *There were no action items during the June 3rd meeting.*

WORKING GROUP MOTIONS: *The meeting was conducted as an executive session, no motions were made.*

CONTINUING BUSINESS:

1. ADF&G Management Actions under consideration: Aaron Poetter (ADF&G) reported no new management actions or recommendations. ADF&G was drafting a News Release regarding restrictions for the Holitna and headwaters. Mr. Poetter, Chris Shelden, Brittany Blain, and Colton Lipka attended a meeting in Aniak on May 29th to discuss the ADF&G 2015 salmon management actions and projects. Mr. Poetter commented that the state did not have a cultural permit program for the Kuskokwim River and the department could not allocate resources among users. He commented that the department would look at all available data from the inseason projects to determine possible Chinook salmon harvest opportunities. The elder fishery would be an option but would only allow a small percentage of the population to harvest.

John Linderman (ADF&G) reported that the current state budget impasse was expected to be resolved by July 1st. In the event of a partial state government shutdown, he commented that the Division of Commercial Fisheries would try to remain focused on active salmon fisheries management after July 1st. The department would do its best to keep all programs and staff operating while there were active fisheries that needed to be managed.

Discussion: Lisa Feyereisen (Middle River Subsistence alternate) requested a biological reason why the elder fishery could not take place from Chuathbaluk on up. Aaron Poetter responded that the department was unable to determine the strength of the run this early in the season to provide opportunity.

2. Overview of Kuskokwim River Salmon Run Assessment Projects:

- **Bethel Test Fish:** Colton Lipka (ADF&G) reported that the Bethel Test Fishery (BTF) began on May 25th. The cumulative CPUE to date was 14. Mr. Lipka reported that the water temperature was above average, the water clarity was above average and the water level was well below average but within historical range.
- **Aniak Test Fish:** Colton Lipka reported that the Aniak Test Fishery (ATF) had been operational since June 1st with procedures similar to the BTF. The cumulative CPUE was 37; 4 Chinook salmon caught over 4 drift sessions. He noted that the ATF was fishing with a shorter net and for shorter drift times than the BTF. The ATF CPUEs were not comparable to BTF CPUEs.

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Dan Gillikin (Native Village of Napaimute) agreed with Mr. Lipka that BTF and ATF CPUE numbers were not comparable. He reported that the morning session catch was donated to the Aniak Tribal Council and distributed among community members on a “needs basis.” The evening catch was placed in a tote on the beach for the community at large. During the weekends fish from both sessions would be placed in the tote. Mr. Gillikin and his crew would attempt to distribute fish to surrounding villages as the numbers increased.

John Linderman thanked the Native Village of Napaimute, Mark Leary and Dan Gillikin for their work on the ATF.

- **Weirs:** Brittany Blain (ADF&G) reported that the new Salmon River, Pitka Fork weir was fish tight as of June 1st. The weir crew was made up of residents from Nikolai. Crews were in Aniak ready to head up river to install the George, Tatlawiksuk and Salmon River Aniak weirs. Ken Harper (USFWS) reported that the Kwethluk River weir was established in late April and fish tight ~ May 2nd. He commented that USFWS was operating a rotary screw trap at the weir site looking at smolt out-migration. Mr. Harper reported the weir was under water as of June 3 due to rain. The first fish passed through on May 22nd and a second on the 27th. The Tuluksak weir would be established during the week of June 15th.
 - **Radio Tagging Project:** Aaron Poetter reported that fish were being tagged in the lower river, to date eight Chinook salmon were tagged. He noted that Nick Smith (ADF&G) and Josh Clark (ADF&G) were going up river to install towers. Zac Liller (ADF&G) provided a brief overview of the tagging project. He reported that two crews were tagging only Chinook salmon, fishing twice a day on the incoming tide and using 7.5” mesh nets. The fish were then being tracked through the drainage. There were 19 towers located throughout the drainage. ADF&G would provide weekly updates to the Working Group on the data. He reminded the Working Group that people returning tags to ADF&G would be entered into a cash drawing. ADF&G was flying telemetry flights every 2 weeks starting on June 10th focusing on the waters from Aniak to the mouth. Lew Coggins (USFWS) reported that on June 2nd USFWS conducted a telemetry flight from the Johnson River to Akiachak including the Kwethluk River. Three tags were detected. USFWS planned to take three flights a week, primarily focusing on the Kwethluk River.
 - **Sonar Feasibility Project:** Zac Liller reported that the department was interested in establishing a sonar project in the lower Kuskokwim River to improve inseason management abilities. Three potential sites had been determined in 2014. Each site would be tested with sonar and drift gillnets to determine their viability. ADF&G had done outreach in selected communities in spring 2015 and received support from Bethel Native Corporation, Kwethluk Inc., and the Native Village of Akiak.
 - **Aerial Survey:** N/A
- 3. Subsistence Reports:**
- **Lowest River Reports:** Charlie Brown (Commercial Fishing) reported that he had not started fishing. He said there were not many other people fishing.
 - **ONC In-season Subsistence Report:** Alissa Joseph (ONC) reported on the ONC subsistence survey from May 25th-31st, 2015. A total of 26 families were surveyed, only 7 were fishing. (*See the June 3 Informational Packet for full survey results*).
 - **Lower River Subsistence:** Mike Williams Sr. said there were ~7 nets near Akiak that had been fishing through the spring in the sloughs. People had been setting nets for whitefish, and then taking them out. He reported that people were catching Sheefish and whitefish. He commented that there were a few reports of 3-4 jacks being caught.
 - **Middle River Subsistence:** Lamont Albertson (Sport Fishing) commented that people were catching pike, some whitefish and a few trout. Dave Cannon (Middle River Subsistence) reported that people had been catching Sheefish a week prior. He noted that the Aniak River was muddier than the Kuskokwim River. Lisa Feyereisen (Middle River Subsistence alternate) commented that the nets between Crow Village and Aniak had been pulled. A net in the slough caught some whitefish and one king salmon. She reported that ~6 kings had been caught in whitefish nets.

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- **Upriver Subsistence:** Mark Leary (Upriver Subsistence) reported that he set his net on June 1st. He noted the water level was low and clear. Barb Carlson (Upriver Subsistence alternate) commented that residents in her area had been fishing with larger mesh nets and the water was very clear. She reported that people were catching pike, a few Sheefish and very few whitefish.
- **Headwaters Subsistence:** Dan Esai (Nikolai) commented that the water was low.
- **USFWS Lower River Update:** Neil Lalonde (USFWS) reported that gillnets for non-salmon species would be limited to 72 hour setnet opportunities, 6am Thursday-6am Sunday beginning on June 4th. A Special Action and News Release were published on Monday, June 1st closing all gillnet use starting at 6:01am on Sunday June 7th on the Kwethluk, Kisaralik, Kasigluk, Tuluksak and Aniak Rivers and their tributaries.

A community harvest permit would be optional for federally qualified communities along the Kuskokwim drainage. An allotted 7,000 fish would be divided among the communities. The permit would be limited to fish wheels, beach seines, dipnets, and drift only gillnets of 6" mesh (or less), 300' (or less) and 45 meshes deep. The harvest would be open from June 10th-30th. Mr. Lalonde noted that there would be reporting requirements with the permits. If communities chose not to participate, their allocation would not be redistributed. Permit issuing would begin on Saturday June 6th. Mr. Lalonde added that additional law enforcement officers would be on the river. USFWS noted they had encountered positive attitudes from residents along the river. Lew Coggins (USFWS) reported that the USFWS conducted aerial surveys between the Johnson River and Tuluksak prior to the closures to count fishing efforts with nets. USFWS planned to fly surveys each Friday until the chum and sockeye openers started.

Greg Roczicka commented that ONC had been busy preparing for the community harvest permits. He noted they had over the number of designated fishers for the Bethel area. A fisherman's meeting would be held on Saturday June 6th at 10:00am at the ONC Multi-Purpose Hall. Mr. Roczicka commented that McGrath had requested a designated fisher from the Bethel area to serve as their proxy and catch their allocation.

Discussion: There was some concern from middle and upper river residents that the projected harvest of Chinook salmon was too many during a conservation period. Some Working Group members reflected on the 2013 season overharvest. USFWS, ADF&G and the Inter-Tribal Fish Commission had discussed the allotted amount for the community harvest permit program in previous meetings and concluded that their approach continued to be conservative, however inseason assessment would continue. It was noted by other Working Group members that the reduction to 72 hour harvest opportunities during the 2015 season would reduce the harvest amount compared to 2014. Lisa Feyereisen suggested that fishing efforts in the river be reported during each Working Group meeting. Mike Williams Sr. commented that some residents did not fully understand that the Federal community harvest permit program was an opportunity due to the 2015 fishing restrictions but not necessarily a permanent program for upcoming seasons.

4. **Discussion of ADF&G Management consideration and discussion of possible alternatives:** N/A
5. **Motion for Discussion and Action:** N/A

OLD BUSINESS: N/A

NEW BUSINESS: N/A

PEOPLE TO BE HEARD:

- Herman Morgan (Aniak) commented that he disagreed with how the fishery was being managed and thought it was unfair. He asked if the management would allow opportunity to fish for red and chum salmon. Bev Hoffman clarified that the restrictions were due to the poor king salmon abundance and the need to conserve. She noted that when sockeye and chum salmon numbers increased, there would potentially be more fishing opportunity.

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- Dave Runfola (ADF&G) reported that the ADF&G Subsistence Division was in consultation with lower river communities to get volunteer fishers to report their catch and effort inseason data. The Subsistence Division was considering inseason subsistence sampling work near Aniak and Kalskag. Mr. Runfola also noted that in 2014 some community members expressed dissatisfaction on how fish from the federal community harvest had been distributed within their own communities. USFWS responded that being fair and equitable was part of the permit program and communities needed to comply with this in order to participate.

WORKING GROUP MOTIONS: *There were no motions during the June 3rd meeting.*

COMMENTS FROM THE WORKING GROUP

- Lamont Albertson (Sport Fishing) appreciated the May 29th ADF&G meeting in Aniak but suggested that better communication could occur when traveling to villages for community meetings.
- Mark Leary (Middle River Subsistence) commented that the middle river residents appreciated ADF&G attending the Aniak meeting on May 29th. He pointed out the population along the river, noting that there were over 13,000 people living in the first 100 miles of the river and only 1,900 people between Kalskag and Nikolai.
- Mike Williams Sr. (Middle River Subsistence) reported that he heard some complaints regarding the 6am fishing start and end times for the 72 hour setnet periods.
- Bev Hoffman (Chair/ Sport Fishing) commented that she would contact Donalson's Fishing Supplies in Anchorage to discuss their verbiage regarding 4" net gear for the Kuskokwim River.

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WORKING GROUP ATTENDANCE:

MEMBER SEAT:	NAME:
DOWNRIVER ELDER	<i>Absent</i>
UPRIVER ELDER	<i>Absent</i>
LOWER RIVER SUBSISTENCE	Mike Williams
MIDDLE RIVER SUBSISTENCE	Dave Cannon
UPRIVER SUBSISTENCE	Mark Leary
HEADWATERS SUBSISTENCE	<i>Dan Esai (Joined at 11:10am)</i>
MEMBER AT LARGE	<i>Absent</i>
WESTERN INTERIOR RAC	<i>Absent</i>
YK DELTA RAC	Greg Roczicka
COMMERCIAL FISHING	Charlie Brown
SPORT FISHING	LaMont Albertson (<i>Left at 11:00am</i>)
PROCESSOR	<i>Absent</i>
ADF&G	Aaron Poetter
CHAIR	Bev Hoffman

Other Participants:

ADF&G Comm. Fish: Zac Liller, Brittany Blain, Aaron Tiernan, Chris Shelden, Aaron Poetter, Colton Lipka, John Linderman, Jen Peeks

Sport Fishing: John Chythlook

Subsistence Division: Lisa Olson, David Runfola

USFWS: Neil Lalonde, Lew Coggins, Ken Harper, Aaron Webber

OSM: Kay Larson-Blair

Ben Matheson (KYUK)	Lisa Feyereisen (Middle River Subsistence alternate)
Gerri Sumpter (Sen. Murkowski's Office)	Barbara Carlson (Upriver Subsistence alternate)
Alissa Joseph (ONC)	Greg Hoffman Jr. (Commercial Fishing alternate)
Garis Kinegak (ONC)	Dan Gillikin (Native Village of Napaimute)
Dustin Wagner (ONC)	Megan Leary (Native Village of Napaimute)
Mark Cloward (AK Wildlife Trooper)	Herman Morgan (Aniak)

GLOSSARY OF ABBREVIATIONS:

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

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