

**Yukon River Inseason Management Teleconference
Call #5– June 23, 2009**

Facilitated by: Yukon River Drainage Fisheries Association (YRDFA)

Funded by: USFWS – Office of Subsistence Management and the Yukon River Panel

Communities involved in the call: Hooper Bay, Emmonak, Kotlik, Mt. Village, St. Mary's, Pitka's Point, Pilot Station, Marshall, Russian Mission, Holy Cross, Anvik, Grayling, Kaltag, Nulato, Koyukuk, Huslia, Allakaket, Galena, Ruby, Tanana, the Rapids, Rampart, Fort Yukon, Circle, Eagle, Teslin, and Old Crow.

Subsistence Reports: In the Canadian portions of the river, there are few whitefish in the Porcupine River and the water level is low with little debris. Teslin has high water and there are whitefish. On the Alaskan side, water is dropping with little debris on the Yukon flats and whitefish are present. Kings are being caught as far up as Ruby, but most were small males. The kings have been in the Rapids for 4 days. Water on the Koyukuk is high in sediment, dropping, and there is a mix of whitefish, pike, and salmon, mostly chums. In the middle reaches of the river, the water is slightly above normal and is dropping. Some of the kings being caught in Kaltag were blushed. In the lower river, camps are still being repaired from the spring flooding. Sheefish are being caught along with the king and chums. Kotlik is catching mostly sheefish and the kings are ~35% are jacks, and a lot of the kings have holes and one was full of puss. Along the coast, in Hooper Bay ~50% of subsistence needs met, and they're seeing mostly chums now. This week has been raining throughout most of the Yukon, and subsistence fishermen are saying the weather is bad for drying.

Management Updates:

ADF&G Assessment: Subsistence salmon fishing effort increased over the past week in Districts 3 and 4a. Harvest reports ranged from fair to poor. The Dall Point Test Fishery, which is a new drift gillnet test fishery project, began operations on June 20. The Lower Yukon test fishery on June 20, using 8.5 inch gear, had a cumulative CPUE of 5.60 which is below the average of 12.01. Pilot Station Sonar recorded, through June 22, a total of 26,400 kings, which may be as high as 27,000, but is still below the 56,000 fish average. 148,000 chums were recorded which is below the expected number of 358,000 to this date. Numbers recorded at the Pilot Station Sonar are considered conservative due to high waters. A more accurate assessment is expected as water levels drop. The Anvik River sonar became operational on June 18 and the Rapids test fish wheel project came online on June 14. The first king salmon was recorded on June 21.

Run and Harvest Outlook: The 2009 king run appears to be similar or weaker than the 2008 run. Pulse strength usually increases in numbers for 3-4 days, but this year that has not happened. This unusual pattern appears to be symptomatic of a weak run. As the fish pass Pilot Station sonar, run strength will be more clearly understood. Due to limited amount of assessment information currently available it is still difficult to estimate run abundance and timing for summer chum salmon, however the run is anticipated to provide for escapement, subsistence, and commercial fishing. If run strength develops as anticipated the surplus could range from 500-900,000 chums. Commercial chum fishing will be affected by the poor king run.

A reduced schedule has been implemented in Y-1, Y-2, and Y-3 consisting of two 18 hours periods a week. Consistent with the with the preseason management plan, 2 fishing periods were closed in districts Y-1, Y-2, and Y-3 to protect the first pulse. After the two period closures, these districts will return to their reduced fishing schedule, with gear size restricted to 6 inch mesh. Subsistence fishing periods in Y-4a are currently being as the first pulse moves through the district. Similar actions will be implemented in upriver districts and sub districts chronologically with the run of the first pulse. Subsistence fishing is open 24/7 until a reduced schedule goes into effect. **Fisherman upriver should**

be on stand by for short notice news on the VHF and radio regarding implements on the subsistence schedule.

Current Subsistence Fishing Schedule and Assessment Projects – please visit the ADF&G website at <http://www.cf.adfg.state.ak.us/region3/yukhome.php> for this information, or contact Emmonak ADF&G at 1-866-479-7387 (available 24 hours).

USFWS Input: Federal restrictions of qualified subsistence users applies only to areas that are in Federal waters. Neither the federal inseason manager nor the Federal Subsistence Board can take special action to allow a proxy for fishers who normally receive fishing help from non-federally qualified users. In order for such an exception to be made, a proposal must be put before the Federal Subsistence Board during their meeting in December of 2010 or January of 2011.

Department of Fisheries and Oceans (DFO): DFO will not be operating the mark/recapture program this year due to flood damage at their camp. This was to be the last year of the mark/recapture program. DFO staff members are currently working at the Eagle sonar program which will be used to assess the Upper Yukon Chinook and fall chum salmon runs into Canada.

DFO discussed how the timing pattern of the 2009 Chinook run may influence total season return. It has been difficult to determine what timing pattern this year's Chinook salmon run is following. Within a few days the run may be 50% complete if the run is following average (1995-2008) run timing and approximately 30% complete if the timing is similar to 2008. When various timing information are applied to recent Pilot Station counts, the trend is for declining total season run projections. There have been some Chinook salmon run failures on the Pacific coast this year (i.e. Fraser and Stikine Rivers) and DFO is concerned that the Yukon run could be much lower than the preseason projections.

Local Input & Closing Comments: Many fishermen were not prepared for the 6 inch mesh gear restrictions, and there was some confusion about why it was being implemented. ADF&G stated that it was a part of the preseason management plan that could be used if the Chinook salmon run developed as poor as it has so far. The necessity of these restrictions will be reevaluated in the future. Gear restrictions allow fishers to still fish for summer chums, but as most people in the upper districts do not own 6 inch gear they requested more time restrictions instead. While the regulations may differ, the overall goal is to apply fair regulations in both the upper and lower river districts.

People were concerned and confused about enforcement regarding ADF&G patrols and the subsistence fishing schedule. ID cards are not necessary, but ADF&G stated that a main concern is for everyone to wear or have a PFD and troopers are citing people for not doing so. To keep current with the changing subsistence schedules, ADF&G faxes updates to all the villages and makes announcements on the VHF or radio, but people can also call the ADF&G office.

There were a number of questions about the daily numbers from the ADF&G test projects and comparisons of this year's run timing and strength to last year's. ADF&G clarified that the overall numbers are lower so far in 2009, even though there was less subsistence harvest this year. On the topic of bycatch in the pollock fishery, it was suggested that those kings be given to subsistence users on the river. USFWS replied that the fish taken as bycatch are young, small and of low quality.

A participant representing the Teslin Tlingit Council spoke about their voluntary community closure for the Chinook salmon season and wondered if anyone else on the river planned to do the same. A fisherman from the lower Yukon responded that even though there is no formal system to restrict subsistence catch, people on the Alaska side of the drainage have restrained or limited their subsistence harvest voluntarily.