

Yukon River Inseason Management Teleconference
Call #5 – June 29, 2010

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: Alakanuk, Emmonak, Kotlik, St. Mary's, Pilot Station, Marshall, Holy Cross, Anvik, Nulato, Koyukuk, Huslia, Galena, Tanana, The Rapids, Rampart, Stevens Village, Fort Yukon, Venetie, Circle, Eagle, Old Crow

Subsistence Reports: Chinook salmon are starting to show up around Rampart. Some communities in the lower river are reporting 50-75% completion with their subsistence needs. There are lots of chum in St. Mary's that are of good quality. Fishing is still slow in Nulato and Koyukuk, but people there expect it to pick up in the next few days. From Galena to Rampart there is a lot of fishing activity and they're just starting to catch fish. Galena reports that residents are about 10% done with subsistence. Stevens Village caught their first Chinook salmon on June 25; further upriver people are still awaiting the fish.

Management Updates:

ADF&G Assessment: Through June 28, the Dall Point test fishery has caught 21 Chinook salmon and 506 summer chum. The LYTF is reporting below average CPUEs for both the set and drift net projects. At the summer chum drift test fishery, cumulative CPUE through June 28 is 3,144, which is above the expected 2,224 for this date. The Mountain Village test fishery as of June 28 has caught 295 Chinook salmon with a CPUE of 462. As of June 28, Pilot Station has counted 69,400 Chinook salmon, which is below the average of 94,500. Approximately 690,000 summer chum have passed the sonar, which is about equal to the average of 762,000 for this date. Pilot Station is no longer comparing catches of 25 fathom and 50 fathom nets and has returned to its typical protocol. Age composition analysis of Chinook salmon shows 59% age-5 salmon and 33.8% age-6. Age-5 fish were more than twice the average for this date and age-6 fish were half of the average. For summer chum, age composition analysis shows 58% age-4 fish and 38.8% age-5 fish.

Run and Harvest Outlook: The Chinook salmon run is later than average. The lower river test projects have seen a steady flow of fish, indicating a late and compressed Chinook salmon run. A second pulse of fish was detected beginning June 27. The strength of the pulse will be better understood once it passes Pilot Station. In the lower Yukon, about $\frac{3}{4}$ of the run has passed, while Pilot Station is at about the mid-point.

A surplus of summer chum is anticipated above escapement and subsistence needs. Current projections are for 1.4 million chums past the Pilot Station sonar, which would support a commercial harvest of up to 400,000 fish. Summer chum commercial fishing was delayed until approximately 75% of the Chinook salmon run passed the lower river test fishery. A commercial period was opened on June 28 in Y-1. During that opening, 30,400 chum were harvested and 2,100 incidental Chinook salmon were also taken. Chinook salmon incidentally caught during this period could be kept for subsistence or sold. Additional commercial periods should be available later in the week.

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.

USFWS Input: The Andraefsky and Gisasa weirs have counted 750 chum and 14 chum, respectively, as of June 28. Four Chinook salmon have been counted at Andraefsky but none at Gisasa.

Local Input & Closing Comments:

Questions this week were about a concern over low numbers counted so far at Pilot Station, the accuracy of the sonar, fishing regulations, the summer chum commercial fishing periods and the high seas pollock fishery. There was some confusion over how far the Chinook salmon run has progressed and how the overall run is looking in terms of numbers. While the lower river test projects are estimated to be at the three-quarter point of the run, there is about a three-day travel time period between the lower river and Pilot Station. So the number of fish counted at Pilot Station currently represents approximately the mid-point of the run, not the $\frac{3}{4}$ point. The second pulse of fish, which appeared to be pretty big in the lower river projects, has not passed Pilot Station yet. A better assessment of its size will be available next week. In response to concerns about fishers potentially not being able to meet their needs, ADF&G expressed their confidence that sufficient opportunity exists. The first pulse is just beginning to reach the upper river and the 2nd pulse will be coming through, as well as the fish that are currently going through the lower river.

A couple of fishers voiced concerns over the accuracy of Pilot Station sonar. Individual experiences of fishing didn't seem to match up with the numbers reported at the sonar. For example, a caller from Galena reported an excellent day of fishing when the sonar showed there weren't many fish, or people were catching fish upriver from Pilot Station but the sonar wasn't reporting any Chinook salmon yet. ADF&G reiterated that conditions are good for the sonar this year and they feel confident of the estimates. The sonar saw fish beginning June 1, but ADF&G was not able to apportion the species of fish until they started catching them, which didn't happen until June 12. People would have therefore been able to catch Chinook salmon at an earlier date than fish were reported at the sonar. ADF&G also reminded everyone that the numbers from Pilot Station are only an estimate; standard error is typically about 10-25%, so there is the potential for the reported numbers to be low.

With one commercial period in Y-1 over, a lower river caller wanted to know if there would be additional periods and in other districts. ADF&G replied there may be. At the $\frac{3}{4}$ point of the run, it is expected that the Chinook salmon numbers will taper off and incidental catch will drop. A caller from the middle river expressed concern about the summer chum commercial periods and the allowance of selling incidentally caught Chinook salmon as residents in that area were just beginning to catch fish and in past years so many people were unable to meet their needs.

A caller from Y-4 wanted to know if the drifting period would be extended because of the late run. ADF&G replied that there was still time to make that decision. With the steady flow of fish passing through the lower river test projects, there may not be a need to extend the drift period. Another caller expressed his opinion that the change to 7.5" mesh nets was a poor decision that would result in many more fish being caught than currently is in the 8.5" nets and if it was possible to not go to 7.5". ADF&G explained that they did not have the power to change the regulations; one would have to go through the Board of Fisheries process to have it changed again. A final question was a request for a bycatch update in the pollock fishery. YRDFA responded that to date there have been 7,800 Chinook salmon caught. Of that amount, it is not clear what percentage is Yukon River origin, but 25% is an estimate.