

**Yukon River Inseason Management Teleconference
Call #6 – July 6, 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: Emmonak, St. Mary's, Pitka's Point, Pilot Station, Marshall, Holy Cross, Grayling, Nulato, Koyukuk, Huslia, Allakaket, Galena, Ruby, Tanana, The Rapids, Rampart, Nenana, Stevens Village, Fort Yukon, Circle, Eagle, Dawson, Old Crow

Subsistence Reports: Chinook salmon are starting to be caught around Fort Yukon and up the Tanana River. In the lower river up through the GASH region, families are about 75% done with their subsistence needs. In Holy Cross the salmon are reported to be of good quality. Further upriver, families are around 5-10% done; some communities are just beginning to fish, others have only seen a few fish. The Koyukuk River has gotten lots of chums, but few Chinook salmon. Circle, Eagle and the communities in Canada are still waiting for the fish.

Water levels are low or dropping in the lower river and rising from the GASH region to Dawson. Water is also high in the Koyukuk and Porcupine Rivers and rising in the Tanana River. Debris loads are generally high throughout the river, except in the lower reaches where communities are reporting little or no debris.

Management Updates:

ADF&G Assessment: All reported numbers are through July 5 unless otherwise indicated. The LYTF and Chinook salmon drift test fishery are both reporting below average cumulative Chinook salmon CPUEs. The summer chum drift test fishery cumulative CPUE is above average for this date. At Pilot Station sonar, 102,000 Chinook and 1,123,000 summer chum salmon have passed. This is below average for Chinook and about average for summer chum salmon. The Anvik River sonar has counted a below average number of summer chum salmon. Eagle sonar has counted 28 Chinook salmon to date. Age composition analysis of Chinook salmon shows 58.8% age-5 salmon and 34.2% age-6. Age-5 fish were more than twice the average for this date and age-6 fish were slightly more than half of the average. For summer chum, age composition analysis shows 61.1% age-4 fish and 34.5% age-5 fish.

Run and Harvest Outlook: The Chinook salmon run is later than average and below average in abundance. Based on LYTF and Pilot Station sonar assessments the run appears to be near the lower end of the preseason projection. One more small pulse of Chinook salmon is expected to enter the river this week. Age-5 fish appear to dominate the run.

A surplus of summer chum is anticipated above escapement and subsistence needs. Current projections are for 1.5 million chums past the Pilot Station sonar, which would support a commercial harvest of up to 500,000 fish. Summer chum commercial fishing was delayed until most of the Chinook salmon run passed the lower river test fishery. There have been 3 summer chum commercial periods to date; the combined commercial harvest in Y-1 and Y-2 is 5,856 Chinook and 77,091 summer chum salmon. A commercial period will open in Y-4 this 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 Andreadfsky and Gisasa weirs have counted 25,300 and 12,278 summer chum respectively, as of July 5. Both counts are above average. Chinook salmon counts are below average, with 212 salmon counted at Andreadfsky and 111 salmon at Gisasa. The Henshaw River weir, operated by Tanana Chiefs Conference, saw the first chum salmon pass yesterday, so it appears summer chum are moving well up the Koyukuk River now.

DFO Input: The first Chinook salmon have been seen at the Eagle sonar. US assessment indicates that the run is at the low end of the preseason projection, putting Canadian management at the top end of the Yellow Management Zone. This zone would entail closures in the domestic, commercial and recreational fisheries, with potential closures in the First Nation fisheries although none are currently anticipated. It is still early in the season, so as there is better assessment of the number of salmon crossing the border, management strategies may change.

Local Input & Closing Comments:

Questions this week concerned the commercial fishery in Y-4, opening additional periods for drifting in Y-4, hatcheries, salmon predation, the weak Chinook salmon run and dropout rates. A caller from Y-4A wanted to know if there were any buyers lined up for commercial harvests. ADF&G responded that there was a buyer in Kaltag who was ready and a buyer in Anvik whose status was currently unknown. To date there has not been much fishing effort in Kaltag. Another caller from Y-4 asked if it would be possible to have an additional drift opening of five days in July, rather than extending the drifting period for completion of subsistence harvests. ADF&G replied that they would talk with managers from USFWS about it and would let the affected communities know by fax if they go ahead with the additional opening.

There is general concern about the low Chinook salmon return and its negative effects on subsistence and commercial users. One caller suggested that next year there be a five-day closure at the beginning of the season. Bycatch in the high seas was brought up as an issue of concern, as were other potential factors such as hatcheries, pike predation, and beaver-induced changes to the salmon spawning grounds. ADF&G reminded everyone that Chinook salmon runs across the state have been weak this year. Because the changes are so widespread, it seems likely that there are oceanic or climatic factors impacting production. To the hatcheries concern, ADF&G did not know at the time of the call if the hatcheries had been successful in their request to increase their egg take, but would look into it and report back on the next teleconference. To address the question of predation on salmon, ADF&G shared that there are studies being done at the University of Alaska Fairbanks looking into that question. ADF&G will follow up on the studies to see where they are at and the findings will be shared when they are complete. A caller from Canada addressed the issue of beavers in the spawning grounds by explaining that they do some beaver management on tributaries because there is less traditional beaver hunting than there used to be.

As the Mountain Village test fishery is using 7.5-inch mesh, a caller wanted an update about the dropout rates of Chinook salmon that were being seen. A representative from the Yukon Delta Fisheries Development Association (YDFDA), who is running that test fishery with ADF&G, responded that have noticed very few dropouts – about 3 over the 400 fish that have been caught. While they've seen the net bobbing in the water, they are attributing that to chums passing through the net and not Chinook salmon dropout. It is also possible that there have been dropouts that they have not seen.