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Yukon River Panel 100 – 419 Range Road Whitehorse, Yukon Y1A 3V1

PRESS RELEASE, December 15, 2011

Management efforts by the Alaska Department of Fish and Game and reduction in the subsistence fishing effort by Alaska fishermen resulted in the border escapement being met for Chinook salmon. This success was praised by the Yukon First Nations. A greater than forecast run of fall chum salmon allowed for both subsistence and commercial harvests of fall chum salmon throughout the Mainstem Yukon River.

The Yukon River Panel, established by the US/Canada Yukon River Salmon Agreement, met in Whitehorse from December 6 through 8 to review the status of the 2011 salmon runs and the management actions utilized in 2011. The Panel also considered Restoration and Enhancement proposals for 2012.

The preseason outlook for the 2011 run of Chinook salmon predicted a poor to below average run. As a result, conservative US management actions were implemented to protect the fish throughout the season. These efforts resulted in an estimated spawning escapement into Canada of 46,227 Chinook salmon, which met the escapement goal of between 42,500 to 55,000 Chinook salmon. As a result, the treaty obligation to Canada was met in 2011.

Going in to the season, conservation measures in place on the US side included no directed commercial fishing for Chinook salmon and a delay of the first commercial fishery for chum salmon. Inseason, subsistence fishing periods were reduced to protect the first pulse and a portion of the second pulse of Chinook salmon. Commercial fishing periods for summer chum salmon were delayed to protect the first pulses of Chinook salmon. Chum salmon commercial fishing periods were also surgically placed in locations where Canadian bound Chinook salmon abundance was low. This was in addition to restricting mesh sizes to six-inch or smaller later in the run.

In Canada, First Nations fishers harvested approximately 4,000 Chinook salmon for their subsistence use. The commercial and domestic fisheries remained closed, although a limited recreational fishery was allowed once border passage estimates indicated objectives would be achieved. 44 Chinook salmon were harvested in the recreational fishery.

The fall chum salmon run exceeded the preseason forecast of 605,000 to 870,000 fish, with a preliminary run size estimate of 1,000,000 fish. This provided for subsistence and commercial fisheries on the U.S. portion of the Yukon River drainage. The Canadian portion of the run came in considerably later than expected and stronger than expected for the Mainstem Yukon River. The spawning escapement of 203,263 fall chum in the Mainstem Yukon River exceeded the escapement goal of 70,000-104,000 fish. This provided for the First Nations Fishery and commercial openings in the Canadian Mainstem of the Yukon River. However, the escapement of fall chum in the Fishing Branch of the Porcupine River fell below the goal of 22,000 to 49,000 fall chum, with only 13,085 fall chum salmon counted at the Fishing Branch River weir. The First Nations harvest at Old Crow was 1,771 fall chum salmon.

The Panel, which operates under the umbrella of the Pacific Salmon Treaty, consists of 12 Alaska and Yukon Territory residents from throughout the Yukon River system, and is supported by regional advisors and scientists and managers from Canadian and United States agencies.

Since 2002, the Panel has allocated over 9 million dollars to community-based projects, including stewardship projects, directly supporting the management of Yukon River salmon stocks originating in Canada. In 2011, these projects included test fisheries and population monitoring projects in Mountain Village and Rampart-Rapids in Alaska; and in communities within the Yukon drainage in Yukon Territory, both along the Yukon River Mainstem and tributaries, such as the Porcupine River. These communities include Dawson, Mayo, Minto, Old Crow, Teslin and Whitehorse.

Other Restoration and Enhancement projects involve the application of technologies to support fishery management. These projects include advanced genetic stock identification technology and salmon run counting techniques using sonar stations at the US-Canada border and within the Canadian portion of the system. All have assisted with monitoring the escapement objectives set by the Panel. Important discussions on formulating a long range plan for guiding the R&E fund were also held.

The Panel will reconvene in March in Alaska, to allocate another 1.2 million dollars for Restoration and Enhancement Fund projects in both Alaska and Yukon, and to review specific escapement guidelines for the management of the Chinook and fall chum salmon stocks in 2012.

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