

When Will the Salmon Come?

ADVICE FROM ELDERS

Knowledge from lower and middle Yukon River Elders and fishers

Compiled by YUKON RIVER DRAINAGE FISHERIES ASSOCIATION

Illustrated by Beth Peluso

When Will the Salmon Come?

ADVICE FROM ELDERS

Knowledge from lower and middle Yukon River Elders and fishers



Compiled by
YUKON RIVER DRAINAGE FISHERIES ASSOCIATION

Illustrated by Beth Peluso



YUKON RIVER DRAINAGE FISHERIES ASSOCIATION

Copyright © 2010 Yukon River Drainage Fisheries Association
Illustrations copyright © 2010 Beth Peluso

YRDFA MISSION:

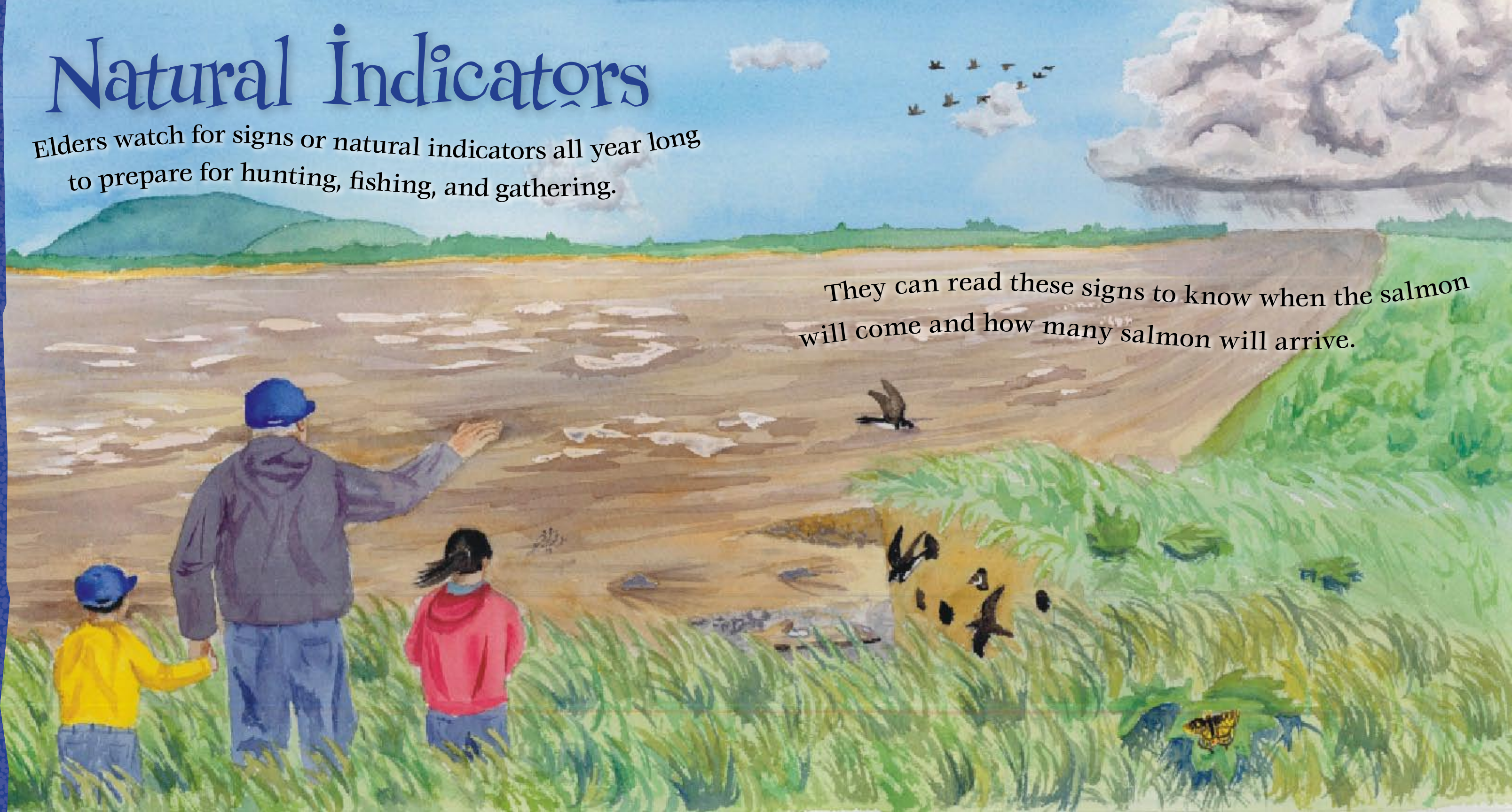
"To protect and promote all healthy wild fisheries and cultures along the Yukon River drainage."

Illustration: Beth Peluso, (907) 957-1050
Graphic Design: Tracy Schwartz, Southfork Graphic Services
Printing: Northern Printing • Anchorage, Alaska
Editing: Judy Griffin, Word Wrangling
Project Coordination: Catherine Moncrieff, Jason Hale,
Lauren Sill, Richard Bender

Natural Indicators

Elders watch for signs or natural indicators all year long to prepare for hunting, fishing, and gathering.

They can read these signs to know when the salmon will come and how many salmon will arrive.



Wind

"OLD PEOPLE USED TO SAY, WHEN IT'S NORTH AND WEST WIND
IN THE WINTERTIME THAT MEANS THERE'LL BE MORE FISH
ON THE SOUTH MOUTH AND BLACK RIVER. WHEN THEY SEE
SOUTH WIND BLOWING MOSTLY IN WINTER AND EAST WIND,
THE FISH WILL BE ON THE NORTH MOUTH."

—MICHAEL ANDREWS, EMMONAK

Wind tells us
what kind of salmon will come
and where and when the salmon
will enter the river.



North and west winds cause the salmon to enter the south mouth of the Yukon River. [Emmonak]

Lots of north wind causes salmon to head to the Black River and Hooper Bay. [Emmonak]

South wind causes salmon to enter the north and middle mouths of the Yukon River. [Emmonak]

East wind causes salmon to pass the Yukon River and head up to Norton Sound. [Emmonak]

North and northwest winds bring king salmon to Hooper Bay. [Hooper Bay]

North winter winds bring smaller king salmon and south winter winds bring longer king salmon. [St. Mary's]

North winds bring black-backed king salmon while south winds bring whitenoses. [Emmonak]

Birds

Birds show us
when the salmon will arrive and
how many salmon will come.

"THEY SAY IN OUR TRADITION WHENEVER THESE
MUD SWALLOWS COME FLYING, OUR ANCESTORS SAY
THAT WHENEVER THE SWALLOWS ARE HERE, THE KING
SALMON [ARE] HERE."

—GABE MOSES, HOOPER BAY



Salmon arrive after the mud
or cliff swallows. [Emmonak,
Hooper Bay, Mountain Village]

Bird returns reflect how the
salmon will return - timing,
numbers, and patterns.
[Emmonak, St. Mary's]



More eggs in a nest means more
salmon will return. [Emmonak]

The longer birds stay, the more
salmon will arrive. [St. Mary's]

The more birds there are, the
more salmon will come.
[St. Mary's, Koyukuk]

Certain birds (known as fish
birds) come to the river's edge
and sing a song when the salmon
are near. [Grayling, Koyukuk]



Insects



When there are many black flies and mosquitoes, many salmon will come. [Emmonak, St. Mary's]

King salmon arrive with yellow and black butterflies. [Kaltag]

Chum salmon arrive with white butterflies. [Kaltag]

Insects tell us
how many salmon will come
and when they will arrive.

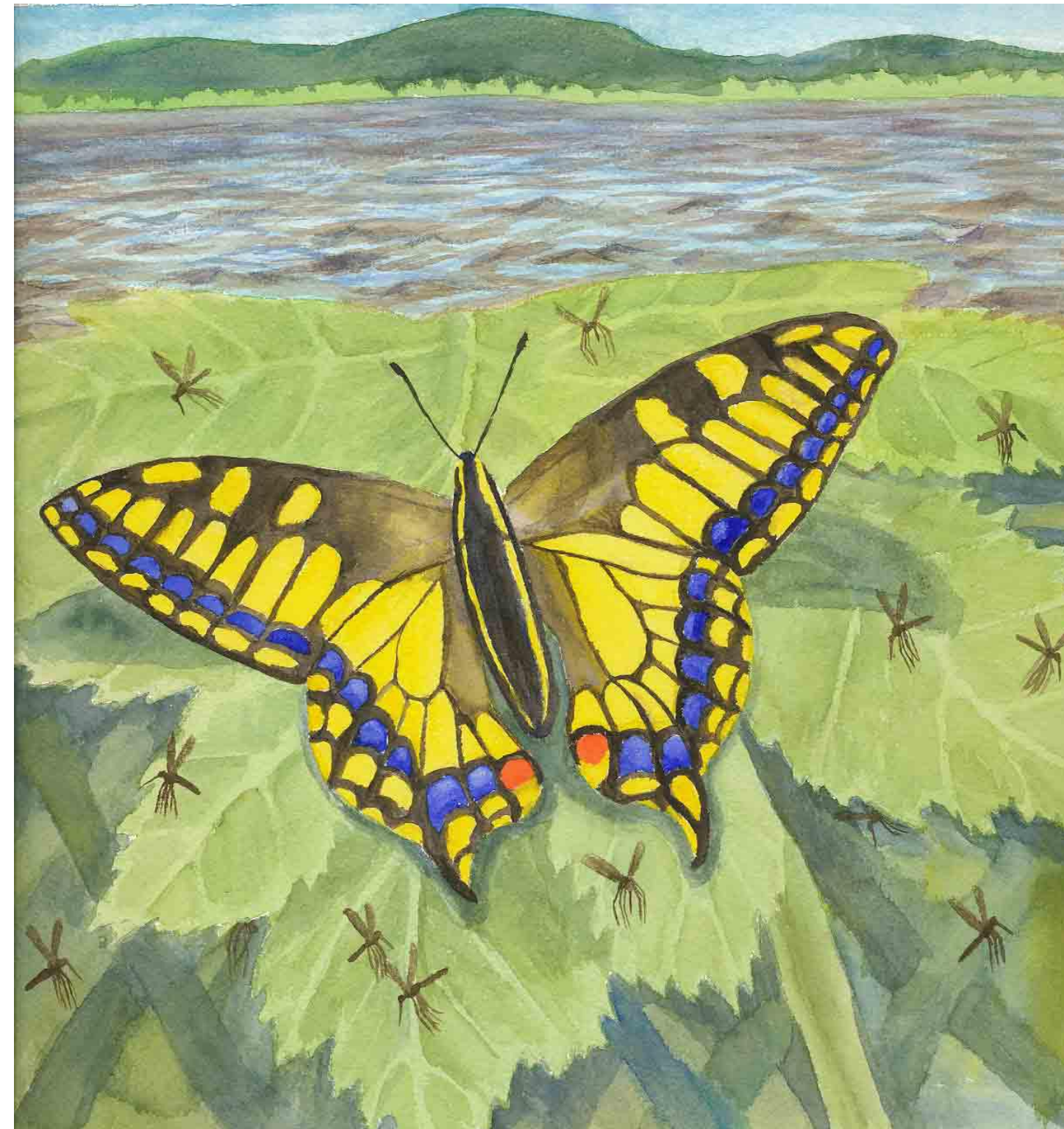


"THE MORE MOSQUITOES THERE ARE,
THE MORE ABUNDANCE OF BEARS
AND MORE ABUNDANCE OF FISH
COMING IN."

—PAUL JONES, EMMONAK

"WHEN THE BUTTERFLY COME, THERE'S A BIG YELLOW BUTTERFLY
THAT TELLS US THAT THE KING SALMON IS COMING CLOSE, AND
THE WHITE BUTTERFLY TELLS US THE DOG SALMON IS COMING."

—FRANKLIN MADROS, KALTAG



Fish

"BLACKNOSE HIT FIRST, AND THE WHITENOSE
LATER... BLACKNOSE, THEY'RE A LITTLE SMALLER
THAN THE WHITENOSE."

—DAVID SIMON SR., HOOPER BAY

The kinds of fish that arrive tell
us about other kinds of fish that
will come.



Richer, darker (blueback/
blacknose) king salmon arrive
first, followed by the larger
whitenose king salmon. [Hooper
Bay, Emmonak, Alakanuk, Nulato,
Kaltag]

Herring arrive first, followed by
chum salmon. [Hooper Bay]

Regular chum salmon arrive first,
followed by silver chum salmon
which are more desirable for
eating. [Hooper Bay]

Smelt arrive before king salmon.
[Emmonak, St. Mary's]

Sheefish arrive before or at end
of king salmon pulses. [St. Mary's]

Sheefish arrive before king salmon.
[Kaltag]

Fish

The numbers and size
of some fish tell us how many
king salmon will return.



King salmon are smaller when there are many. [Hooper Bay, St. Mary's]

When there are many sheefish in the river, king salmon will be fewer; when sheefish are few, many king salmon will come. [St. Mary's]

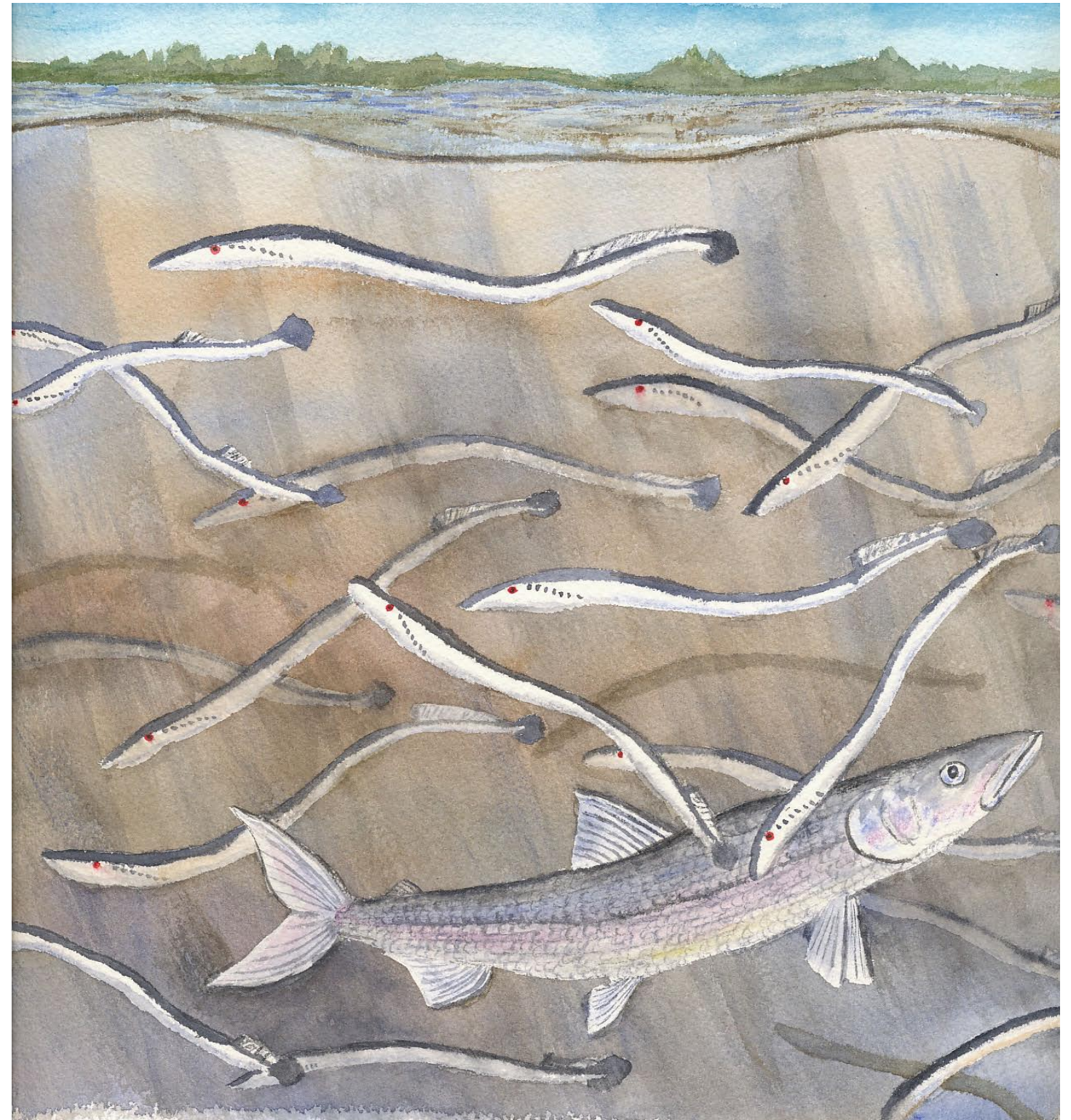
Many eels in the fall will be followed by many king salmon the next summer. [St. Mary's]

Big fat whitefish mean a good run of king salmon. [Galena]



THE ELDERS USED TO TELL US, IF THERE'S SMALLER KING SALMON THAT MEANS CROWDED, TOO MANY, CROWDED."

—JAMES GUMP, HOOPER BAY



Plants

"WHEN THE COTTON STARTS FLYING,
THE SALMON ARE HOME."
— FRED HUNTINGTON, GALENA

Plants tell us
when the salmon will come and
how many salmon will
arrive.



Good plant growth means many
salmon. [St. Mary's]

When grass reaches knee height
and the rhubarb starts to grow,
it is time to get ready for the
arrival of salmon. [St. Mary's]

Cotton flying from trees means
the king salmon run is ending.
[St. Mary's]

Cotton flying from trees means
the king salmon are arriving.
[Grayling, Kaltag]

When there is lots of cotton
from trees, salmon will be many.
[Grayling]



Water

"WHEN IT'S COLDER THERE'S MORE FISH, WHEN
ITS WARMER THERE'S LESS FISH... THE COLDER THE
WATER IS, THE MORE FISH THEY'LL GET."

—NICHOLAS SMITH, HOOPER BAY

Water temperature
and level tell us
when the salmon will come
and how many salmon will
arrive.



If the water is warm during
salmon season, salmon will be
fewer. [Hooper Bay]

Salmon will not enter the river
at the mouth if the water is too
warm. [Kotlik, Emmonak]

A high tide brings fish into
Hooper Bay. [Hooper Bay]

A lot of snow will be followed
by many salmon. [Hooper Bay,
Emmonak, Galena]

The river water level rises when
the salmon arrive. [Scammon
Bay, Mountain Village, Grayling,
Kaltag]

Weather



Weather tells us
when fishing will be good, and
the moon is one sign of weather.



"[MY GRANDPA] USED TO SAY WHEN WE GET THUNDER CLOUDS IN SPRINGTIME, DEPENDING ON HOW MUCH THUNDERCLOUDS OR LIGHTNING, THEY'D USE THAT AS A WAY TO TELL HOW MUCH AND WHETHER OR NOT THE FISH WERE COMING. HE USED TO SAY, DEPENDING ON HOW MUCH THUNDER, THEY'RE WAKING UP THE FISH AND GETTING THEM READY TO COME IN TO SPAWN."

—MARY PATSY, ST. MARY'S

More fish are caught when its windy, stormy, or cloudy. [Hooper Bay]

Thunderstorms tell us when the salmon will arrive and how many there will be. [St. Mary's]

A low moon in the sky is a sign of snow or rain. [St. Mary's, Koyukuk]

A moon shaped like a bowl is a sign of rain all summer. [St. Mary's, Koyukuk]

Search & Find

How many natural
indicators can you find and
what do they mean?



OTHER ACTIVITIES:

- ☐ Talk to Elders and learn about natural indicators in your village.
- ☐ Have a salmon celebration.
- ☐ Learn Native names for the indicators and fish.
- ☐ Learn traditional ways of fishing, making nets, and putting up fish.

Signs Along the River

People in parts of the river
and the look at different signs,
signs have meanings.

	Hooper Bay	Emmonak	St. Mary's	Grayling	Kaltag	Koyukuk
Wind	X	X	X			
Birds	X	X	X	X	X	X
Insects		X	X		X	
Fish	X	X	X		X	
Plants		X	X	X	X	X
Water	X	X		X	X	
Weather	X		X			X

Signs Today

Yukon River
Elders are
teaching these
signs to scientists
to help them
know when the
salmon will come
and how many
there will be.



IN THE CLASSROOM:

A teacher tool kit has been developed to accompany this book in the classroom. It offers suggested activities, ways to engage elders and youth within your community, and ways for teachers to meet the Alaska Performance Standards. Contact Yukon River Drainage Fisheries Association for more information 1-877-999-8566 or www.yukonsalmon.org.

BACKGROUND:

This book has been created because the Elders of the Yukon River want this information to be documented, shared with youth, and passed to future generations. In the past, the Elders were the teachers and the scientists. Their knowledge is place-based and has accumulated over thousands of years. Their knowledge is a resource that should not be lost, it should continue to be held by their descendants.

Acknowledgements

First and foremost, special thanks to the many knowledgeable Elders and active fishers of the lower and middle Yukon River who shared their knowledge, time, and insight to make this book a reality.

Emmonak

Mary Ann Andrews
Michael Andrews
John Bird
Mary Ann Immamak
Peter Moore
William Trader
Benedict Tucker

Maggie Paukan
Mary Paukan
Cecilia Sipary
Daniel Stevens, Sr.
Theresa Stevens
John Thompson, Sr.
Marcia Thompson

Hooper Bay

Nathan Fisher
James Gump
Gabe Moses
George Moses
Neva Rivers
Peter Seton, Sr.
Helen Smith
David Simon, Sr.
Carl Smith
Catherine Smith
James Smith
Nicolas Smith
Evan Tomaganuk
Silas Tomaganuk

Kaltag

Mary Rose Agnes
Barb Arquell
Dale Arquell
Richard Burnham
Robert Dentler
Austin Esmailka
Justin Esmailka
Franklin Madros, Sr.
Albert Nickolai
Lawrence Saunders
Goodwin Semaken

Grayling

Herman Deacon
Rose Golilie
Freddie Howard
Joe Maillelle
Rose Maillelle
Mary Mountain
Gabe Nicholi

St. Mary's

Hilda Alstrom
Pat Beans, Jr.
Sophie Beans
Evan Kozevnikoff
Mike Joe
Liz Joe
Clarence Johnson
Lillian Johnson
Mary Patsy
Charlie Paukan

Koyukuk

Benedict Jones

Mountain Village

Simon Harpak
Josephine Harpak

In addition, thank you to the team of reviewers who poured over draft versions to ensure the accuracy and usefulness of this book.

Malinda Chase, Veronica Kaganak, Carol Lee Gho, Lillian Johnson, Lester Wilde, Frank Alstrom, Aloysius Unok, Ephrim Thompson, Alexie Walters, Sr., Paul Beans, Bill Alstrom, Leroy Peters, Fred Huntington, Sr., Richard Burnham, Charlie Wright, Stan Zuray, Philip Titus, Victor Lord, William Derendoff, Jan Woodruff, Aloysius Aguchak, Felix Walker, Sr., Michael James, Ole Hunter, Anna Pratt, Mike Peters, Alfred Demientieff, Robert Walker, Mickey Stickman, Lester Erhart, Tim McManus, Ted Suckling, Pollock Simon, Sr., Andrew Firmin, Ron Chambers, Craig McKinnon, Laurel Devaney, Dani Evenson, Jill Klein, Teddy Willoya



This book would not have been possible without generous funding from Rasmuson Foundation, Lannan Foundation, Alaska Sustainable Salmon Fund, Arctic-Yukon-Kuskokwim Sustainable Salmon Initiative, and National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration. We appreciated their continued support.

Yukon River Elders watch for signs or natural indicators all year long to prepare for hunting, fishing, and gathering. They can read these signs to know when the salmon will come and how many salmon will arrive.

