

2025 In-Season Harvest Survey Subsistence Salmon Survey

Prepared by Grace Kirkey, YRDFA

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Executive Summary

The Yukon River Drainage Fisheries Association (YRDFA) conducts in-season subsistence surveys to provide fisheries managers and partners with real-time information on the conditions and experiences of communities along the U.S. side of the Yukon River. In 2025, surveys were conducted in Alakanuk, Marshall, Mountain Village, Russian Mission, Huslia, Tanana, and Eagle. A total of 103 survey submissions were received, including 81 non-fishing forms and 22 fishing forms. Surveyors also shared weekly community reports during YRDFA's in-season teleconferences, ensuring that local perspectives were included in management discussions.

This year marked an important methodological shift for this program: for the first time, a non-fishing form was introduced. This addition responded to feedback from previous seasons, where low salmon runs and widespread closures reduced harvest opportunities and limited the usefulness of quantitative harvest reporting alone. The non-fishing form captured insights from households that were not fishing in a given week, including how they stayed connected to the river, what activities replaced fishing, and the impacts on diet and food security.

The 2025 survey season faced several challenges. Late receipt of funding delayed program start-up by several weeks, resulting in the loss of early-season data collection during the front end of the salmon run. This also limited opportunities for in-person training. Instead, YRDFA developed a training booklet and provided remote support. Nearly all surveyors had participated in previous years, which helped mitigate the impact of reduced training time.

Another challenge was declining participation, a trend surveyors attributed to increasingly restrictive regulations and diminished access to fish. While the transition to collecting more qualitative, narrative data was initially met with hesitation, surveyors reported that participation improved when they explained to households how the data would be used in YRDFA's advocacy and communications work.

Despite these challenges, the 2025 program successfully piloted the non-fishing form, collected over one hundred community responses, and provided managers with both quantitative and qualitative insights into the experiences of several Yukon River communities.

Introduction

The Yukon River Drainage Fisheries Association (YRDFA) In-Season Subsistence Survey program was established in 2002 to address a critical information gap in Yukon River fisheries management. Prior to its development, subsistence harvest information was collected only through postseason surveys conducted annually by the Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ADFG) since 1961. These postseason surveys have been invaluable for estimating harvest levels, evaluating fishing success, and documenting long-term trends in subsistence use. However, because postseason data are not available during the fishing season, they cannot be used to inform in-season management decisions.

The idea for an in-season program was first suggested by ADFG during the 2001 postseason management meeting in Fairbanks, and it was further developed in partnership with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) and Yukon River–focused Federal Regional Advisory Councils. The program was designed as a long-term effort to provide managers with timely information while building trust through locally hired surveyors who maintained rapport within their communities. The program’s intent was simple yet powerful: to bring the observations and experiences of Yukon River fishers directly into in-season management discussions.

Over time, the program has become an essential communication tool between Yukon River communities and fisheries managers. By hiring and training local surveyors, YRDFA has created a stable and knowledgeable network that both collects data and strengthens community capacity to participate in fisheries management. Each week during the fishing season, surveyors share household responses through standardized forms and also provide verbal community reports during YRDFA’s in-season teleconferences. These teleconferences bring together state, federal, and Tribal managers with community representatives to discuss run strength, harvest opportunities, and conservation needs.

The program has also provided an important avenue for incorporating Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK) alongside quantitative harvest data. Surveyors and fishers contribute observations on unusual environmental events, ecological conditions, and indicators of salmon health. These insights create a fuller picture of conditions along the river than quantitative data alone can provide, and they allow managers to hear directly from the people most affected by regulatory measures.

In recent years, declining salmon runs and increasing regulatory restrictions have reshaped the role of the program. Initially focused on Chinook salmon, the survey expanded to include information on non-salmon species beginning in 2024. That same year, the new seven-year U.S.–Canada Yukon River Salmon Agreement went into

effect, requiring additional restrictions on Chinook harvests unless escapement goals are met. These regulatory changes further reduced opportunities for harvest, prompting YRDFA to broaden the scope of the survey.

In 2025, YRDFA introduced a non-fishing form for the first time. This new tool was developed in response to community feedback and was designed to capture how households are impacted when they are unable to fish. The form documents activities that replace fishing time, how households remain connected to the river, and the effects of closures on diet and food security. Together, the fishing form and the new non-fishing form provide both quantitative and qualitative insights into the experiences of Yukon River communities during a salmon crisis.

Method

At the beginning of each season, YRDFA hires and trains local surveyors in Yukon River communities to collect in-season subsistence information. In 2025, surveyors were active in Alakanuk, Mountain Village, Russian Mission, Marshall, Huslia, Tanana, and Eagle.

At the start of each season, YRDFA staff first contact surveyors who participated in the prior year to determine their interest in returning. Many surveyors continue with the program year after year, providing consistency and familiarity within their communities. When a new surveyor is needed, YRDFA works with the Tribal office in that community to announce the open position and conduct outreach to identify a replacement.

Once hired, surveyors receive training on interviewing techniques and proper use of the survey forms. In 2025, a training manual was developed to support new surveyors, provide consistency in data collection, and serve as a reference tool throughout the season. Each surveyor also received a binder with program materials, including the training manual and a full season's worth of survey forms.

The survey forms were designed to capture both quantitative harvest information and qualitative household experiences. Forms included:

Participant Consent Form – Informed participants that their identity would remain anonymous, participation was voluntary, and they could withdraw at any time.

First Interview Form – Used only during a surveyor's first interaction with a household; collected background information including how the household stays informed, typical fishing practices, how fish are obtained, and gear use.

Weekly Fishing Form – Used if the household reported fishing that week; documented species harvested, gear used, effort, catch amounts, and satisfaction with harvests.

Weekly Non-Fishing Form – Used if the household reported not fishing that week; captured reasons for not fishing, alternative activities, ways of staying connected to the river, and reliance on substitute foods.

Final Interview Form – Used during the last week of surveys; asked households to reflect on the season, whether their subsistence needs were met, and their overall experience.

Data collection began in early June and continued through the last week of August. Each week, local surveyors conducted household interviews, typically between Thursday and Sunday. Surveyors began by asking whether the household had fished during the past week and then selected the appropriate survey form based on the response.

Surveyors submitted completed forms to YRDFA staff on Monday mornings. YRDFA staff compiled and summarized the weekly results, which were then shared with managers and partners at YRDFA’s in-season teleconferences. These summaries ensured that real-time community experiences informed fisheries management decisions throughout the season.

Results for Fishing Data

Overview

Of the 7 communities that participated in the 2025 season, only four reported fishing activity: Alakanuk, Mountain Village, Tanana, and Eagle. A total of 22 fishing forms were submitted. On average, fishing households reported spending 2.7 days per week fishing.

Harvest by species

Whitefish was the most abundantly harvested species, which accounted for nearly two-thirds of all fish reported. Chum salmon were the second most harvested species, followed by pike (Figure 1).

Species	Total number harvested	Percent of total
Burbot	5	1.1%

Chum	93	20.5%
Pike	24	5.3%
Sheefish	53	11.7%
Whitefish	277	61.1%
Other	1	>1

Figure 1. Total number of species harvest in the 2025 season

Gear use

The majority of respondents reported using gillnets as their primary gear type. Accounting for 75% of the responses. Rod and reel and dip net both accounted for 10% of and fyke net only mentioned once as used gear accounted for 5% of the gear used (Figure 2).

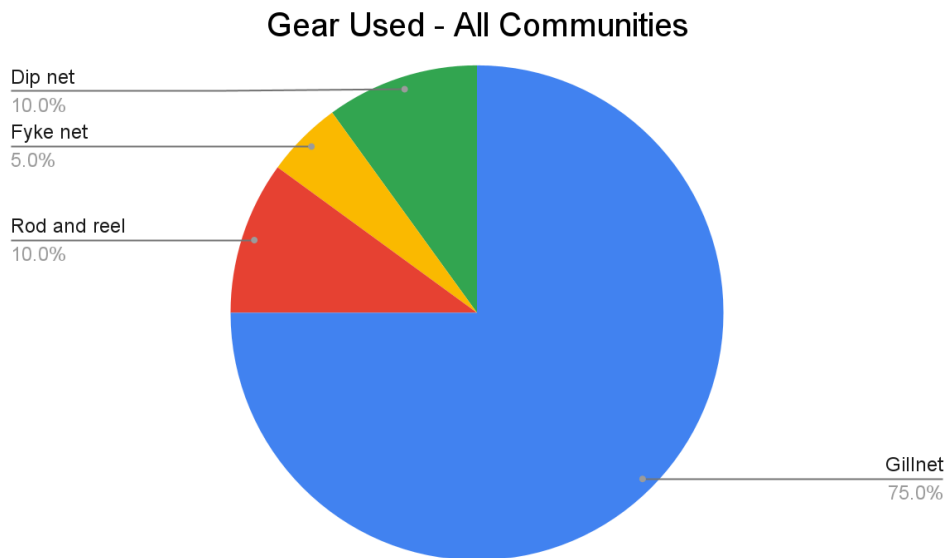


Figure 2. Gear used in 2025 season

Harvest by Community

Fishing activity was reported from four of the seven participating communities: Tanana, Mountain Village, Alakanuk, and Eagle. Tanana contributed the majority of fishing data, accounting for 77% of the season’s reports (17 submissions). Mountain Village contributed 13% (3 submissions), while Alakanuk and Eagle each contributed 4.5% (1 submission each).

Observations of Abnormalities

Fishing households were asked if they observed any abnormalities or diseases in the fish they harvested. Of the 22 responses received, only one 'yes' was reported. The observation came from Alakanuk, where a respondent noted that the livers of chum salmon appeared discolored.

Harvest Satisfaction

When reflecting on harvest levels, all fishing respondents reported that their catch was not sufficient to meet household needs.

Results for Non-fishing Data

Overview

In 2025, 81 of the 103 submissions received were non-fishing forms. This reflects the limited fishing opportunities available during the season due to low salmon abundance and continued regulatory closures.

Reasons for not fishing

On the survey form there are 8 options for reasons that households did not fish: bad weather, closure, gear issues, have not begun fishing, low number of fish, out of town, and other. Some of the responses we had this year that fell under the 'other' category include work and medical. The most commonly reported reason for not fishing this season was due to closures nearly 40% (Figure 3).

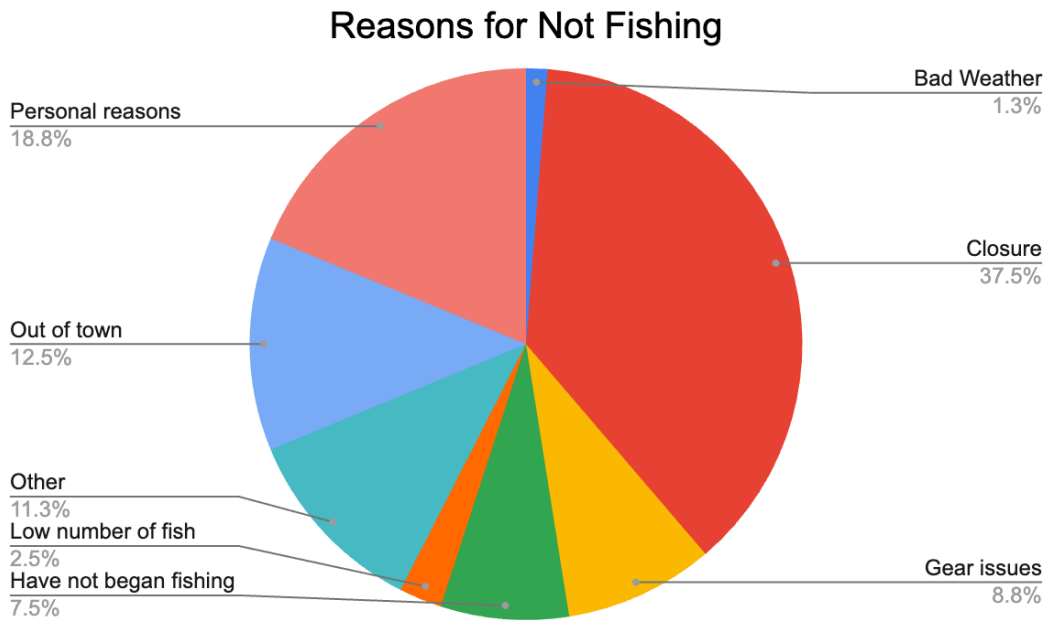


Figure 3. Reason for not fishing across all communities in 2025 season

Maintaining Connection to the River

This question was included to understand how households remain engaged with the river when they are unable to fish. Fishing on the Yukon River is not only a means of obtaining food but also a cultural and social practice. By asking how individuals are staying connected to the river without fishing, the survey sought to capture the cultural impacts of closures and reduced opportunities.

This was an open-ended question, and responses have been categorized into five groups: boating, traditional harvesting practices, spending time at camp, online/radio/virtual events, and reports that connection is being lost (Figure 4).

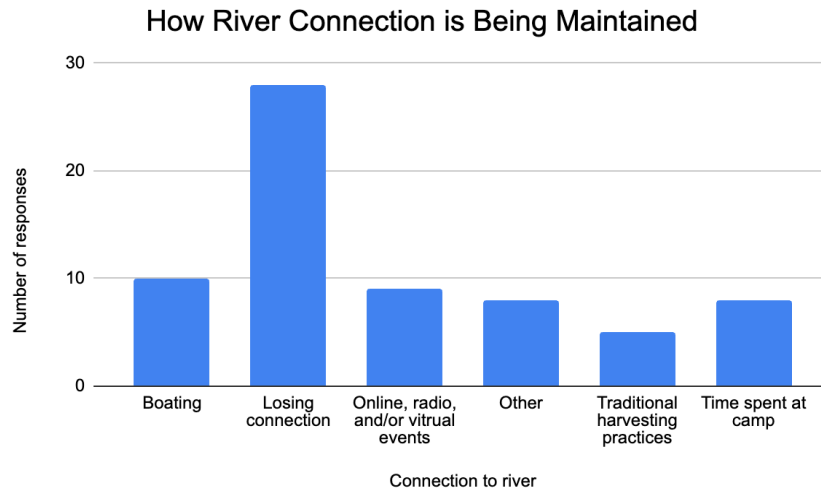


Figure 4. How river connection is being maintained across all communities in 2025

Activities Filling Time Instead of Fishing

Fishing, and the associated fish processing, is a time-intensive activity. With salmon fishing opportunities severely limited in 2025, households reported significant changes in how they allocated their seasonal schedules. To document these shifts, respondents were asked what activities filled the time that would have traditionally been spent fishing.

Responses were grouped into five categories: cultural events and activities (e.g., preparing for potlatch, attending culture camp, spending time with youth); traditional harvesting practices (such as gathering food and berry picking); wage work or home projects; other activities (including travel); and no replacement activity (households reported staying at home or that there was no way to replace fishing time) (Figure 5).

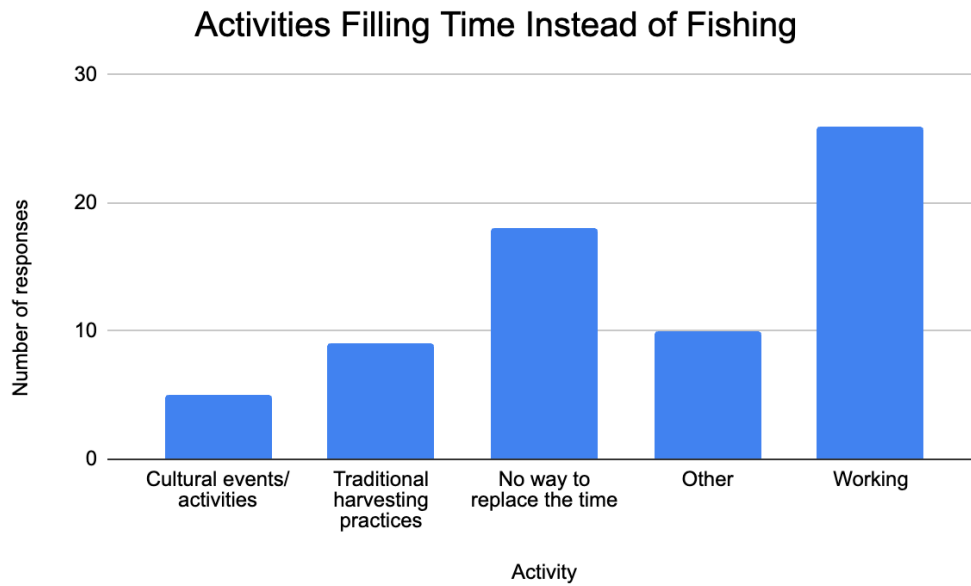


Figure 5. Activities that have replaced time that was traditionally spent fishing

Receiving Fish Through Sharing or Donation

Designed to document sharing networks of the subsistence system, households were asked whether they received fish through gifting or donation programs during non-fishing weeks. Documenting this reliance provides important context on food distribution, mutual aid, and the role of Tribal or agency programs (e.g., TCC distributions) in supporting food security.

Reports of fish received were documented in Huslia, Tanana, and Mountain Village. In Huslia, all fish reported as received came through Tribal distribution by TCC. In Tanana and Mountain Village, households reported receiving fish both through organizational distribution programs and through gifting/sharing by community members (Figure 6).

Households That Received Fish Through Sharing or Donation

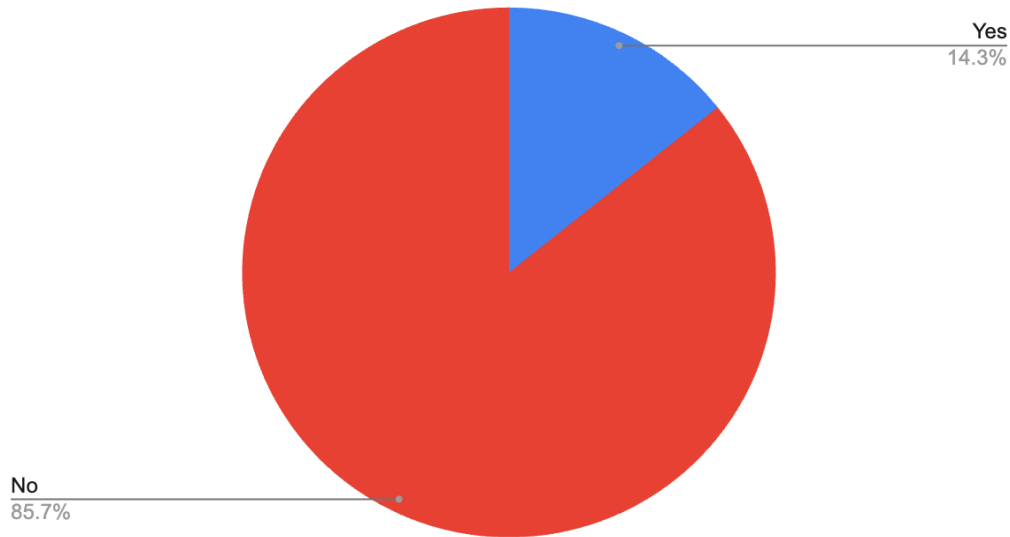


Figure 6. Households report if they received fish or not

Food Reliance and Food Security

To assess household food security during weeks without fishing, respondents were asked what foods they relied upon. This question was included to capture how diets are shifting in response to limited salmon harvest opportunities and to evaluate the extent to which locally harvested foods continue to supplement household reliance on store-bought items.

Responses were grouped into four categories: fish, moose, store-bought foods, and other. The *other* category included resources such as caribou, marine mammals, birds, and other game meats (Figure 7).

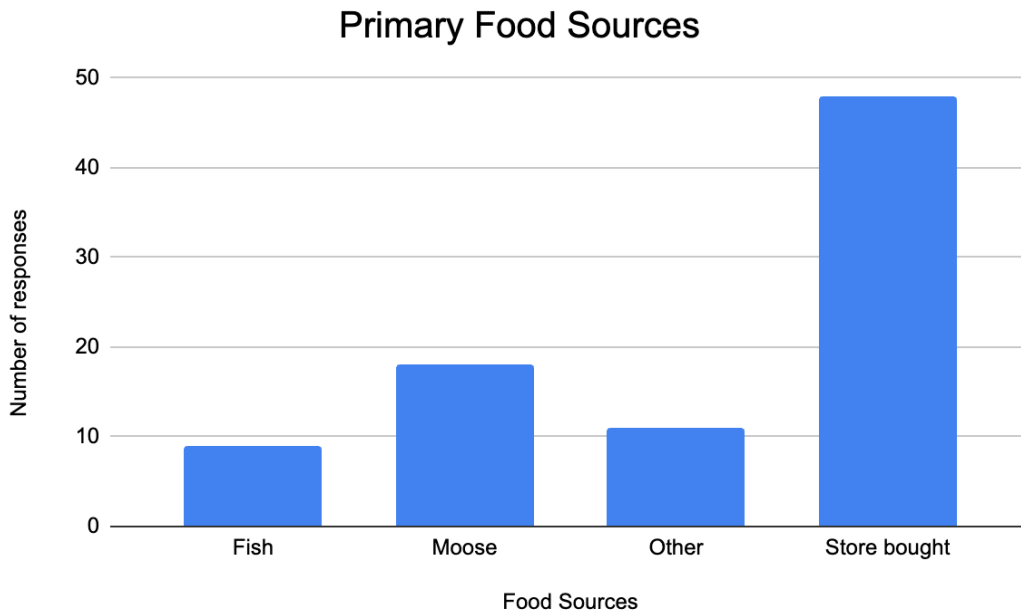


Figure 7. Household food sources over the 2025 season

Community Comments

A complete list of this season’s comments is provided in the appendices. The following section offers an overview of key themes and observations shared by each community.

Mountain Village

Few comments were submitted, but those received noted that people were waiting to see if fishing opportunities would open. For those who were able to fish, households reported that their harvests were not enough to meet subsistence needs.

Huslia

Comments primarily focused on receiving donated fish from TCC and on concerns about wildfires burning across the river.

Tanana

Many households expressed a desire for opportunities to fish for fall chum. Respondents voiced disappointment that the commercial fishery, once active on the Yukon, had ever been allowed and emphasized that it should not return. Bear activity remained a major concern, with numerous reports of damage to camps and cabins. Many attributed the increase in bear encounters to hunger. One household also noted that radio announcements regarding fishing opportunities and closures were sometimes inaccurate and that communication could be improved.

Alakanuk

Comments emphasized unmet subsistence needs, with the direct statement: “We need fish.”

Eagle

Only one comment was submitted, noting that a household fished and donated the few fish they caught to the Eagle Culture Camp.

Marshall

Many questions and concerns were raised for managers. Respondents expressed frustration with ongoing closures, describing them as “getting old,” and urged that tribes be more involved in river management. Some comments indicated that smaller gear restrictions have contributed to declining catches. The ocean was identified as a primary reason salmon are not returning, and people stressed that in-river restrictions are eroding traditional ways of life while ocean fisheries continue with fewer limitations.

Russian Mission

Although in-season fishing and non-fishing forms were not submitted, the community conducted one round of interviews and shared several themes. Many respondents suggested changes to test fishery methods, believing that this would provide managers with more accurate data. Other comments criticized the wasteful bycatch in ocean fisheries, contrasting limited in-river opportunities with fewer restrictions at sea. Food security was also raised as a concern: store-bought food is expensive, and people expressed that they miss not only the fish itself but also the cultural values and family time associated with fishing.

Discussion

The 2025 In-Season Harvest Survey provides important insights into how Yukon River households are adapting to limited fishing opportunities and regulatory closures. Several themes emerge from the results.

Low Participation and Limited Harvests

Only four of the seven participating communities reported fishing activity, with Tanana providing the majority of submissions. Harvests were dominated by whitefish and chum salmon. All respondents indicated that harvests were insufficient to meet household needs. These results reflect both ecological constraints and the regulatory landscape that has significantly reduced salmon harvest opportunities.

Adaptations to Closures

With 79% of submissions being non-fishing forms, the survey highlights how households are reallocating their time and resources. Respondents described filling traditional fishing time with cultural events, community activities, and other subsistence pursuits such as berry picking. However, a majority of households also reported that there was no meaningful substitute for the time once spent fishing, signaling potential long-term cultural impacts.

Cultural Connection to the River

Fishing is more than a source of food, it is also a cultural and social practice. Responses showed that while some households maintained their connection to the river through boating, time at camp, or community gatherings, others reported a growing sense of disconnection. This trend raises concerns about intergenerational knowledge transfer and the long-term vitality of subsistence culture.

Food Security and Reliance on Alternatives

Store-bought foods were the most frequently reported dietary reliance in non-fishing weeks, supplemented by moose and other locally harvested foods. Reports of households receiving fish through Tribal distribution (e.g., TCC) or community gifting demonstrate the continued importance of sharing networks. However, increased reliance on store-bought foods underscores the vulnerability of communities facing limited access to salmon.

Surveyor Participation and Program Implementation

While participation was low in some communities, surveyors reported that explaining the purpose of the new non-fishing form improved household engagement. The successful pilot of the non-fishing form indicates that qualitative, narrative data can complement harvest counts and strengthen the program's role in documenting community experiences.

Appendices

Appendix A: Community comments, 2025 season

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Community	Comment
Mountain Village	waiting to see if fishing will open & waiting for berries to ripen
Huslia	Want to fish after potlatch
Huslia	Wont be fishing for awhile
Huslia	Fire across river sending a lot of smoke in town
Huslia	Was supposed to receive fish from TCC this week (7/18/2025)
Huslia	TCC fish
Huslia	TCC fish
Huslia	TCC fish
Tanana	Wrote a long paper on this - should never be commercial fishing on the Yukon again if fish ever come back. Have little faith in management's ability to not run Kings into ground again.
Tanana	Not really. I just wish I could go and fish like I used to.
Tanana	Never allow commercial fishing in Yukon again if kings ever miraculously come back. Not that I don't feel a limited, carefully managed commercial could not happen, it's just I don't feel the State of Alaska Commercial Fish Division is not capable of managing it without running it into the ground again.
Tanana	Believe we must not fish for salmon till they come back is all
Tanana	subsistence should come first but obviously it doesn't.
Tanana	Need to close the fisheries that take Yukon Salmon not just the Yukon
Tanana	I got lots of negative things to say about management in the past and there is little that can be done now. Damage done. You have heard it all from me before.
Tanana	Agree with closures but need to close commercial forever in Yukon
Tanana	nothing to say this week
Tanana	no comments
Tanana	the bears need food
Tanana	Just wish these bad runs would be over. Use to love being at camp working on fish
Tanana	Send some fish to the bears.
Tanana	Why are we closed to all fishing when commercial fisheries still take some of the same king salmon.
Tanana	don't agree with the closures.
Tanana	Agree with closures though it's just terrible it happened
Tanana	Agree with closures but wish others had to close too. Especially commercial fisheries
Tanana	Hope something changes some year.
Tanana	No comment this week.

Tanana	If we ever get our salmon especially King salmon back there should never be commercial fishing allowed again in the Yukon. Salmon is too valuable to lives along the river. Commercial on the Yukon has never in my years been managed in a way that is protected from overfishing by management. I have zero faith it ever will.
Tanana	hope this is over with some day.
Tanana	May fish if fall chum harvesting is allowed on the early fish
Tanana	I would go to fish camp and can and make strips during fall chums if it was open before September
Tanana	If fall chum came in enough numbers to fish I would open camp otherwise it may not see a fish caught there all season. Have no more dogs to feed.
Tanana	would possibly fish fall chum if it opened early enough
Tanana	maybe would fish fall chum if it opened.
Tanana	would fish fall chum if happening
Tanana	would fish fall chum if open
Tanana	At this late date will not go and open camp
Tanana	would fish early fall chum if open.
Marshall	the fishing closures are getting very old why can't they find why the fish aren't returning
Marshall	why are they starting fall chum fishing while the summer chums are still coming in to the mouth of the yukon
Marshall	i wish we can manage the fish from when fish and game started to restrict us they have been letting us use smaller and smaller gear and that is why our fish numbers dropped rapidly so I hope that will change
Marshall	can we start managing our river
Marshall	is there any monitoring the fish in the ocean
Marshall	why is there no fish we have been cut off from fishing for over 20 years can you tell us that we are the reason the fish aren't coming back is that what fish and game is going to tell us again or is someone actually going to do something about the real reason the fish aren't coming back we know why the fish aren't coming back the problem is in the ocean and no one wants to listen who's pockets are the big fisheries in seem like what we tell them goes in one ear and out the other and we are tired of that we are sacrificing our way of life and our elders for what the people sitting in the high chairs and we can't do nothing about it and it is getting tiring
Alakanuk	What are the benefits of getting a fishing permit? Any job openings?
Alakanuk	We need fish openings here to store for winter. No fishing racks with fish.
Eagle	Donated fishing to culture camp
Tanana	May leave camp when closure happens
Tanana	Just wish we could fish
Tanana	It's terrible this has happened
Tanana	3 weeks is a long time to not fish right in the middle of trhe season.

Tanana	We don't have a Sat phone or any communications other than a radio and this year like last and maybe worse the radio announcers have been very misleading and inaccurate about openings and closure. Our camp is away from most of the others and it's hard to know the fish schedule at times. One announcer even seems like he's mumbling and doesn't care to be accurate.
Tanana	In favor of restrictions, just question why it took so long to do something. We were trying to tell the states something was wrong with king salmon in 1990 and by 1995 it was an obvious serious problem. I have written many articles etc over those years.
Tanana	Why are other commercial fisheries allowed to take Yukon king salmon and we can't even have a few for subsistence
Tanana	People need to be able to fish for subsistence
Tanana	I believe we must do something to get salmon back but everyone must help.
Tanana	Hope fall chum can be fished. Not at fish camp as not worth the effort . Just got a net in to feed 5 dogs I have.
Tanana	Need to open fall chum season so people can put up some fish. Nobody can afford to fish, time and money for a few whitefish and worn out summer chum which we have to hide anyway.
Tanana	will start to can some whitefish soon as it seems fishing may close when fall chum get here. Retired so can stay at fish camp when no fishing happens.
Tanana	Will fish fall chum if allowed but may just leave fish camp. Lonely at camp as often we are the only 2 people at Rapids often.
Tanana	would like to fish fall chum as it is the only thing that will allow family to come to camp and put up fish. Been at camp by myself all season with no family.
Tanana	would if available fish fall chum
Tanana	May fish fall chum if possible but don't expect it to open
Alakanuk	We need fish
Russian Mission	Improve test methods and spots along the Yukon to get more accurate info for managers to use
Russian Mission	Need fish to support healthy diet. Everything is too expensive to live on store food
Russian Mission	We are doing all we can to get these salmon back. We need the state to help in restricting deep sea fishing. We are not the problem. Please help us get our salmon back
Russian Mission	Only fishing for freshwater fish this summer. We need to get a few fish.
Russian Mission	Can ADF&G allow 4" nets in creeks open during summer? Seems like all the information that managers get is used against us. Protect these salmon still at sea
Russian Mission	Waste is part of daily life out at sea. What's left over from deep sea fishing and enters the yukon is "managed" cutting away at our lifestyle. By catch numbers are higher than what is entering the river. Help us save our salmon.
Russian Mission	was able to get a few salmon before 4" closures in June, would like to see less restrictions before the main pulse and imbetween summer/fall salmon to get a few fish. There's been a lot of sockeye filling up spawning creeks. Not many humpies.

Russian Mission	Improve test fishing grounds and methods allow us to fish before the main pulse to get a taste. Relax restrictions in between summer and fall. Allow 4" nets in creeks.
Russian Mission	Need openings for fish. Only rod and reel for fresh water fish for table food is not enough to put away.
Russian Mission	Please allow some fishing before the main pulse, in between summer and fall fish. We cannot have only meat, moose, bear, and birds. We miss fish, fishing, family teamwork, and feeding everyone. Fish camp is dry this summer. No humpies.
Russian Mission	need to update sonar and test fishery spots and methods . We have 1 channel and swift water where salmon swim in big schools. Dipping this year we caught and released a lot of small kings, smaller than chums.