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Greetings from the Yukon River Drainage Fisheries Association!

Here is a summary of the 1st 2024 Yukon River Salmon In-Season Management Teleconference held Tuesday, June 4, 2023. Call lasted 45 minutes. 71 callers participated.

Background: Yukon River salmon management teleconferences are held annually every Tuesday in June, July, and August for managers and fishers throughout the Yukon River drainage to discuss fishing conditions and management strategies in real time as the salmon run is occurring. Funded by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

Media present:

Political Representatives participating: 0

Communities Called In: 25

Management Reports:

Alaska Department of Fish and Game

Deena Jallen, Emmonak, ADFG Summer Season Manager of Yukon River-

The Emmonak office is now open. No assessments. USFW started drifting May 29th. Pretty bad cold and snowy weather. Didn't drift but test summer chum salmon. Any fish caught will be donated. Pilot station sonar staff on site. Sonar equipment on both sides of the river. Mgmt announced the closure of the Coastal, Y1, and Y2 district. Fishing with 4 inch smaller mesh is open with 60 feet or shorter gear. All chinook must be released alive and summer chum until run is better. Closures in certain rivers.

Holly Carroll, US Fish and Wildlife Service Yukon River Area Manager

Federal closures will be the same as the state. Closures announced for District 3. Had phone calls on fishing closures. If they don't have info to get ahold of her numbers. Please let her know.

Rachael Baker with Alaska Dept. of Fish and Game

Department of Fisheries and Oceans Canada

Jaclyn Kendall, Fishery Manager, Yukon River

Stock Assessment:

DFO technicians are preparing for the upcoming field season, aiming to begin camp mobilization on the Porcupine River on June 17. The Porcupine sonar is located in the upper portion of the Yukon River watershed in Canada 2 km downstream of the community of Old Crow. It is a jointly delivered project by Fisheries and Oceans Canada and the Vuntut Gwitchin First Nation Government. Similarly DFO technicians plan to meet ADF&G staff in Eagle, Alaska on June 24

to begin mobilization of the Eagle sonar camp. The Eagle sonar is located about 29 km downstream from Alaska's border with Canada; it is a collaboratively delivered project with ADF&G.

Environmental Conditions:

Much of Yukon had experienced above average early spring temperatures, however, the month of May remained mild, but slightly below average. Snowpack information hasn't been updated since May 1. At that time, there was around average to below average snowpack in southern Yukon (Teslin and Upper YR), well below average in central Yukon (Pelly, Stewart, White, Big Salmon, Carmacks area), average near Dawson, and well above average in the north (Porcupine River, including Old Crow). Canadian Management:

- We are working to finalize the 2024 Canadian management strategy by the end of the month and before the arrival of the first Chinook salmon at the international border. This management strategy, which we refer to as the Integrated Fisheries Management Plan, will be informed this year by the new 7 year Canadian-origin Yukon River Chinook Salmon Agreement along with any recommendations from the Yukon Salmon Sub-Committee resulting from consultations with Yukon First Nation Governments and community members.
- The preliminary Canadian origin Chinook forecast is just 13,000 when we account for expected on-route mortality and in consideration of that very low expected outlook for this year, and the measures agreed to in the 7 year agreement, DFO will close the recreational fishery for the next 7 years and the current long-term closures in the commercial and domestic (non-indigenous food fishery) fisheries will be extended.
- Over the coming weeks, we will be working to set-up Canadian intergovernmental in-season conference calls where we will share updates on information collected by assessment programs over the course of the season.

7-Year Agreement between Alaska Department of Fish and Game and Department of Fisheries and Oceans

Commissioner Douglas Vincent Lang, Alaska Department of Fish and Game - Well, I think you just heard the last speaker from Canada give a say that they're abiding by the terms of the new Yukon agreement that we signed last spring. Basically what happened is that the Department of Fish and Game and DFO, after having years of conversations with people along the river that talked about the plight of Yukon River Chinook salmon, especially those of Canadian origin. We decided to take a different approach to trying to rebuild those runs, and what we did is we looked at it over a life cycle. We heard pretty consistently in our discussions with different users up and down the river that the current approach of annually trying to rebuild these stocks just wasn't working. It was time to take a different approach. So, we decided to use a 7-year approach. That's something we heard consistently up and down the river. Look at a life cycle of Chinook salmon and the goal here is to basically get Chinook salmon of Canadian origin rebuilt to a point where people along both sides of the river, both sides of the border, both in Canada and the United States, can start enjoying and harvesting those salmon for not only subsistence and cultural purposes, but hopefully sometime getting them back into the future for economic purposes too. What it does is it puts into place a 7-year hiatus on any kind of commercial, sport, personal use fisheries that are targeting Canadian origin Chinook salmon in the mainstem Yukon River, both in Canada and the Canadian tributaries and the United States. It does not close US tributaries. Those are still managed by the United States under our escapement goal provisions but right now those tributaries are closed because they are not expected to meet them.

It also acknowledges the importance of chinook salmon for ceremonial use and transmission of cultural knowledge, and it provides some opportunities so that while we try to rebuild these stocks, we can have some cultural opportunities in Fish Camps, where traditions can be passed on. It is also probably this is the most important thing in my eyes that it calls for development of a bilateral rebuilding plan and at the last panel meeting we had in Anchorage, I think.

It was several months ago. The Yukon River Panel got tasked with that rebuilding plan, and they have some very good discussions about how they were going to look at rebuilding these Chinook salmon runs and what it's going to take to get there. Then finally, it also asks for some increased commitment to the US, Canada panel process. Just so that we would get some additional funding into that panel process, and we would also get some additional money into needed research and management activities so that we can again rebuild these stocks. So that has been signed, it's in place right now. And I think the other important thing to realize is that if for some reason and we're all wrong as scientists in the near term, we can, and we can get to 71,000 fish past the Canadian border. We can open up subsistence fisheries on both sides of the border so, you know, it does give an out clause. It doesn't close everything down for seven years, but if we get to that point, we can actually have fisheries going on so.

But let me defer to anybody from Canada that may be on that would like to speak to the agreement from their perspective, maybe Steve or Bill.

Bill Wall, Department of Fisheries and Oceans Canada -

Hello this is Bill Wall, currently the area director for operations in Yukon and northwestern British Columbia. I just would like to convey my appreciation for Doug and his team and the hard work that they put into getting this agreement in place, Doug did an extremely good job of summarizing what that agreement contains. I just wanted to confirm Canada's support for that agreement. It's certainly not an easy thing. We all have to wrestle with it at this point in time. The elimination of, you know, fisheries that are critical to a very unique way of life is not easy. We've heard from Yukon First Nations, you know, their support for the agreement. But of course, it's with heavy hearts. But my appreciation to everyone up and down the up and down the river for taking a pause, if you will, on the harvesting Yukon River Chinook in particular, Canadian origin, Yukon River Chinook in hopes of better times to come in the future.

Community level reports:

District Y1:

Alakanuk:

Max Agayar - Let me report that people are smoking, egging and gathering. That's it for now.

Emmonak:

Billie Charles - Yeah, just want to announce this is Billy in Emmonak. People are starting to catch smelts in the lower river. There was snow this morning and I set net before restrictions. Once you fished, they weren't sure, but now there's some people that want to try with their four inch.

District Y2:

St. Mary's:

Bill Alstrom - You are welcome to report from here that we had some really wild winds yesterday. Other than that, I haven't heard of anyone catching fish yet. That's it.

District Y3:

Russian Mission:

Wassillie from Russian Mission. There is not much to report, but we've got high water this year and water is still coming up. There's some debris floating a couple days ago, but the wind started blowing and not very much fish out. I had my net out for two weeks and probably caught only about maybe 6-3 fish and two whitefish. That's pretty much it. Water's pretty high. It's gonna be a tough season besides.

District Y4a&c:

Galena :

Howard - The water is high, and will certainly go down now. No nets are in the water right now, but there have been people with rod and reel and the catch and sheefish and they're averaging about 150 small salmon fry and each fish, they're slaughtering the salmon and the drift has finally gone away. So it's getting better for traveling now. That's why they come here.

Unknown Caller- OK, the river is like Howard mentioned, Galena. The river is going down. There's not a whole lot of drift, and I don't know who's doing a lot of fishing, but I was just. I know it's real early in the season. Just don't know if the numbers are coming into the Yukon. It will be another week or two.

District Y5abc&d:

Fort Yukon:

Kara'Lisa Trembley - The water has been pretty high here on the Yukon end of porcupine. You've been having good weather. Sunny with wind, no reports on people fishing probably later on.

Nenana:

Victor Lord - The river finally came up cause it was low for a long time and there's a couple people fishing. I didn't stop to see if they caught anything but that. Pretty interesting but sheefish down there and I think they're missing a person that they're trying to identify in Ruby. Well And I might have to find that out there and try to get a couple of sheefish for eating and stopping them from eating all the fish I guess that's about it. Oh, I missed Catherine yesterday. I was in Fairbanks for seeing the doctor, and I couldn't cancel that appointment. So I was kind of excited about bumping into her too, but I'll catch up with her. Thank you.

Fairbanks:

Virgil Umphenour: Well, I'm sitting here. It's nice out here, about 72 degrees. It's supposed to get in the low 70s today. So we've got nice weather today. It's been pretty nice weather. But other than that really not a heck of a lot to report except my grandsons been out catching a few pike. That's about it.

CANADA

Dawson:

David Curtis - Nothing to report. Well, the waters are coming up now. Finally here. Pretty low early in the season. And yeah, all good. Thanks.

Whitehorse:

Elizabeth MacDonald- We had a really warm spring to start with and then it really slowed down and now we're kind of rainy, cool weather. Water levels are kind of normal to lowish in this area, which is a bit of a relief after the last few years of really high water. The breakup was really easy in the White Horse area. But I know there was some flooding and a lot of concern about flooding and the Porcupine and Dawson areas as well. Yeah, thanks. I'm glad to hear from everybody back on the call.

Open Discussion:

Sabrina Curtis - Sorry, I just wanted to introduce myself. My name is Sabrina Curtis. I'm a researcher working out at Carnegie Mellon University. I just wanted to introduce myself.

David Walker, Holy Cross – Yeah, I was just checking. I kind of lost track of the migration of the pinks. Is it this year they're supposed to migrate up the river this year? Does anybody know?

Fred West, ADF&G - This is an even year. So there should be a fair number of pinks that will come up and go into the Anvik area.

Call ended 1:45 pm