



YUKON RIVER DRAINAGE FISHERIES ASSOCIATION

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Greetings from the Yukon River Drainage Fisheries Association!

Here is a summary of the #10 2024 Yukon River Salmon In-Season Management Teleconference held Tuesday, August 6, 2024. Call lasted 51 minutes. 64 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 a grant from the US Fish and Wildlife.

Political Representatives participating:

Mike Wood, Alaska Board of Fisheries

Communities participating: 16

Management Reports:

Alaska Department of Fish and Game

Bonnie Borba, Fall Season Research Biologist, Emmonak, Alaska

The Fall Chum salmon run size projection based on the Summer to Fall relationships was 377,000 fish and is lower than last year. The average run size is for over 950,000 fish. We are switching over to in-season assessment to determine the run size and watching to see if the age 4 fish are as weak as they were for the Summer Chum salmon. As of August 2nd, both cumulative CPUEs (Catch Per Unit of Effort) for Lower Yukon Test Fish and Mountain Village are below average, and the midpoints for Fall Chum salmon passage usually occurs between August 10th and the 13th for these projects. The Mainstem Yukon River Sonar project, operated near Pilot Station, transitioned to Fall Season counts on July 19th and as of August 5th the cumulative passage is 91,000 Chum salmon. This compares to the median cumulative passage of 235,000 Chum salmon by this date. The midpoint for this project usually occurs August 10th for Fall Chum salmon. On August 3rd and 4th, there were some high winds down here in the Lower Yukon that prevented fishing and the LYTF (Lower Yukon Test Fishery), we had some gusts up to 60 miles an hour. When we got the fish on the 5th, catches were low in Big Eddy, but more fish were observed in the Middle Mouth. Genetic mix stock analysis will be used to provide stock assessments for the remaining Summer Chum salmon and the main components of the three main stocks for Fall that we use, the Teedriinjik, Sheenjok, Draanjik as the one group, the Canadian stocks and the third group is the Tanana Fall stocks. The first stratum from the Fall Season, from July 19 through August 5th, is on the way to the lab now. During this time period, there were two small groups of Chum salmon that passed. The first group was expected to contain Summer Chum salmon, and the later group should contain increased numbers of Fall Chum salmon based on the fish we saw here in Emmonak. The preliminary age composition of 224 chum salmon sampled from the drift gillnet fishery in the Lower Yukon project through August 2nd consisted of 44% age 4 and 55% age 5, which compares to those 2001 to 23 historical averages of 61% age 4 and 38% age 5. We're still low on the force, but they are starting to increase a little bit. The percentage of female Chum salmon from August 4th was 45% which is below the historical average of 54%. The average length of Chum salmon as of August 2nd was 572mm which is below the historical average of 583mm for this time. The Fall Chum salmon drainage wide escapement goal range from a minimum is from 300,000 to 600,000 fish, and there are also several individual tributary goals. Monitoring of escapements in the Upper Yukon portion of the drainage within

Alaska will include sonar operations beginning shortly. Teedriinjik, hoping to get in by August 7th or 8th, the Sheenjek River is in currently and we may have our first estimates tomorrow. The crew from both of our agencies and US Fish and Wildlife Service runs the Teedriinjik and the Fish and Game is running the Sheenjek and they're setting up now. Eagle sonars average transition date from Chinook to Fall Chum salmon monitoring is around August 19th, last year the transition occurred on August 23rd. We will be using these in-river assessment monitoring projects to determine if escapement will be achieved for the drainage wide goal as well as the goals on the Teedriinjik and the Canadian Components, Fishing Branch River and the Yukon River Mainstem at Eagle. Coho salmon typically enter the Yukon River in mid-August, with the bulk of the run occurring between August 16th and the 27th at the Mainstem sonar. The Mainstem sonar project has captured its first Coho salmon on July 28th and the Lower Yukon Test Fish captured its first Coho salmon on August 2nd.

Christy Gleason, Yukon Area Fall Season Manager, Fairbanks, Alaska

I'll provide a Fall Season management update. We are expecting a low Fall Chum salmon run this season, as Bonnie mentioned. For management, we did allow some subsistence fishing for Summer Chum with selective gear, which is the dipnet, hook and line, manned fish wheel, in the early portion of the Fall season. Then we closed subsistence fishing to protect Fall Chum salmon, as we are not expecting to meet the Canadian Treaty objectives for Fall Chum. So currently, the Fall Season management is announced through Sub Districts 5 A, B and C which includes the communities of Tanana and Rampart.

US Fish and Wildlife Service

Holly Carroll, Yukon River Area Manager, Fairbanks, Alaska

I just wanted to give a brief update from the Federal side. We've got the Teedriinjik Sonar team up and running, up there in that drainage. They've been installing sonar there and we should be up and counting probably by the 8th, which isn't the usual time we try to get the sonar going. A lot of our other research has wrapped up, although we do have a fellow at Sheefish project going on, so there's some fishing for that. I wanted to give a brief update on the public hearing last week to discuss Fall Season Management because in the Fall Season if we need long term closures in place like we're expected for the Mainstem because as Christy said, the run is pretty weak and we may need to protect the Canadian components for quite a few months. Because of that, we might need to take 'Temporary Special Actions' to extend those closures longer than 60 days because the Emergency Action Authority only allows us to do actions that are 59 days. We had great attendance at that hearing. We had representatives from the Intertribal Fish Commission Executive Board. We had Fishery Advisory Council members present. We had a member of the Federal Subsistence Board on the call. We had Members from the Board of Fisheries. It was a really good discussion with a lot of folks represented. One of the interesting things that I wanted to share is, we had taken a new action in the Summer Season this year. We were making a big effort to protect the Chinook. We had these two-week closures in place where even though we've been allowing liberal use of the 4-inch and smaller mesh gillnets. We closed it for two weeks while the Kings were running, so that there wouldn't be any incidental harvest of that species in that gear. We were hearing a lot of feedback again, about people thinking that perhaps those closures need to be longer in future, especially to protect Kings that are running for four weeks. So that was an interesting feedback. That feedback did kind of also convey into the Fall Season because people had similar concerns that if we're not going to be meeting Fall Chum goals, especially in the Upper part of the drainage into Canada. That maybe we need to have 4-inch closures during the Fall Chum season as well, because people do feel that there could be incidental harvest of Fall Chum in 4-inch and incidental harvest of a lot of female Fall Chum because they are smaller and a lot of the same conservation concerns that we're hearing for people who really want to protect and rebuild the Chinook runs are also wanting to see that same protection and thought towards rebuilding on the Fall Chum. I just wanted to convey that that was a lot of the feedback. We heard on that call and so managers were made well aware that there are some people who think we maybe are not taking enough of a conservative approach for Fall Chum. A lot of good feedback received at that meeting. One of the things I wanted to remind folks is, while we are allowing 4-inch opportunity for non-salmon, we do assume that fishermen are going to set those in side sloughs, since that's often where the resident species are. Your nets do need to be 60 foot or less and if you are catching daily, a

few salmon. That's not the intent of that gear. We really hope that people aren't using 4-inch, to target a little bit of meeting their salmon needs. We're meant to be providing those opportunities for folks who want to get these other species to try to offset the salmon. We heard a lot of concerns that people might be using those gears to target salmon and we really hope that that's not the case and that if you are catching salmon that you'll pull your 4-inch gear or move it to somewhere where you're going to catch more resident species. I just wanted to offer up that little bit of a summary of some of the highlights, feedback we got about the Fall Management strategy and also some reminders about the 4-inch.

Department of Fisheries and Oceans Canada

Adam O'Dell, Fishery Biologist

At our Porcupine River camp, near the community of Old Crow, an estimated 319 Chinook salmon have passed as of August 4th, compared to 371 on this date last year and the average of 2,515. This is a minimum estimate due to the interruption in sonar operation caused by extremely high water earlier in July. We are approaching the period of crossover between Chinook and Chum salmon, so estimate for Chum passage on the Porcupine will be starting in the next two weeks. As with last season, our crew on the Porcupine River is not test netting for Chinook salmon this year and we will be holding off on netting Chum salmon as well. Our DFO technicians are on site at the Eagle Sonar camp and supporting this program, along with ADF&G, through the season. The Eagle sonar is located about 29 km downstream from Alaska's border with Canada; it is a collaboratively delivered project with ADF&G. In support of the 2024 Chinook Radio Telemetry program, DFO crews have installed 12 towers throughout the Yukon. These towers aren't equipped with satellite uplinks, so we won't be able to review data until receivers are pulled post-season. The Big Salmon Sonar is operational with an estimated 715 Chinook as of August 3, compared to 1,159 on this date last year and the average of 2,707. The Klondike River Sonar, operated by Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in First Nation is also operational and the most recent estimate is 168 Chinook as of July 31. This compared to 200 on this date last year and the average of just over 1,122. Sonars on the Pelly River, operated by Selkirk First Nation have been operational since July 4, and as of August 4 there has been an estimated cumulative passage of 2,051 Chinook salmon, compared to 1,191 on this date last year and the average of about 4,624. The Nisutlin River sonar, located in the Teslin River watershed, is now operational and reporting daily passage of Chinook salmon. The first update was provided for August 4, with an estimated cumulative passage of 114 Chinook. Last year on this date, the cumulative passage was 320.

Environmental Conditions: Air temperatures across much of the Yukon have started to rise in recent days following about a week of cooler weather. Water temperatures have also been cooler the past week, but we're likely to increase with the increase in air temperatures.

Canadian Management: There will be no changes to Canadian management to report for Chinook salmon. In line with the newly signed 7-year Agreement and the preliminary low Canadian-origin Chinook salmon outlook for 2024, DFO has closed the recreational fishery for 2024 and will continue to close through 2030, and the current long-term closures in both the commercial and domestic fisheries will be extended through 2030. For Canadian-origin Chum salmon for 2024, with the low outlooks of 55,000 chum for the Yukon River and just 15,000 Chum for Fishing Branch River we are not anticipated to meet spawning objectives in Canada. The public angling fishery has been closed for 2024 and the commercial and domestic fishery long term closures will continue. Spawning Objectives for Chum are 70,000 to 104,000 for the Yukon River and 22,000 to 49,000 for the Fishing Branch River.

Organizational Reports:

Gale Vick, BBAYK Group

A reminder that the US Fish and Wildlife Service is still looking for agenda items for the upcoming RAC (Regional Advisory Council) meetings this Fall, you can send those to Brooklyn David at OSM. An update on the Council appointments, as probably you've all heard. Becca Robbins Gisclair from Washington State was not appointed. At the last minute, there was a flurry of lobbying, and the lobby was able to talk with the Secretary of Commerce and get her to overturn Governor Inslee's request. We still have another option for getting her on the counsel, we're looking into that right now. The Chinook ESA (Endangered Species Act) petition for the Gulf of Alaska had a hearing at the 9th District Court a couple of weeks ago, and that is

available online for everybody to listen to. It's very interesting and that determination is still pending from the District Court. Then the AYK (Arctic-Yukon-Kuskokwim) group is drafting a letter to the Alaska Delegation to request independent funding opportunities that will come out of that recent final report for the Alaska Salmon Research Task Force. We're going to get that draft put out hopefully by the end of this week to organizations in the AYK. So many of you might get to see that. Then the NOAA commentary for that ESA petition is extended to September 5th. Then NOAA has an ecosystems draft road map and comments are due August 30th for that one. A reminder that the Alaska Board of Fish ACR (Agenda Change Request) deadline is August 30th this year, which is a little later than normal. You have to look at the criteria, it's a very high bar for getting an ACR approved, but if you go to the Board of Fish website, it's got all the information there. Fairbanks safety did have a meeting a week or so ago and we decided not to put in ACRs because we're going to address many of our issues at upcoming board meetings and then with the upcoming AYK, proposal which are going to be due April 10th, 2025. So that's going to come sooner than we think so we need to be talking about those proposals. Finally, the FAC Fisheries Subcommittee meeting starts October 7th and then two days later is the full AC. Our fall schedule, I'll be getting out a revised fish calendar, which has got all these dates on it, so I'll get that to Serena as well as any others hopefully in a few days and I think that's the most important things.

Elizabeth McDonald, Council of Yukon First Nations

Not a big update and apologies I missed the last couple meetings. We've had a flurry of activity with salmon season here and Council of Yukon First Nations just had their General Assembly last week. I was at Lake Lebarge at Ta'an Kwach'an's Fish Camp, which was wonderful. Most Yukon First Nations right now are out in the field running their Chinook salmon projects. Sonars, video monitoring, we are on Tatchun Creek, I think it's going in this week. Few other projects, there's also been quite a few salmon events. More cultural connection or First Nation youth camps, fish camps happening as well as people are trying to stay connected to salmon despite not being able to fish. Particularly for some First Nations, it's been about 30 years. So they're very valuable, which makes it hard on First Nation staff because that means not only are you out in the field working your weekends, but you're also hosting events. It gets to be exhausting, but by the end of the month, things should start slowing down as we move into Chum season here on this side.

Community level reports:

CANADA

Whitehorse:

Elizabeth McDonald - Here the sight in Whitehorse, the salmon we see the most, Chinook is at the Whitehorse fish ladder. I don't think any salmon have gone through. I missed that but he would have said if there we're, but that's what we're all waiting for and they should be here. Maybe if we go below the fish ladder, you might be able to see them, that's like the thing in the Whitehorse area for salmon that's really exciting. We are again in a heat wave, it seems to be across the whole Yukon for the most part. It's quite warm up to 30°C. I'm headed up to Dawson tomorrow and it's supposed to be even a little warmer up there. Hot weather coming in from some cool weather. The water level seemed kind of on the high side and we should have salmon here any day, which is exciting.

ALASKA

Y5abc&d

Fort Yukon:

Kara'lissa Tremblay (Emailed report in) - The phones are down here in Fort Yukon since yesterday. No one is fishing at the moment. Waters have been low and no changes. We have been having nice sunny days, after all the rains.

Rampart:

Janet Woods - Pretty quiet here in Rampart, nothing really happening, nobody's fishing. Really quite waters, that's about it.

Charlie Wright - Jan pretty much got my report for me. Nice and beautiful here, good to be on the river. Wishing we had some fish to take advantage of this Fall. Hope and pray for a better outcome for everybody.

District Y4a&c:

Huslia:

Charlene Vent - There hasn't been much fishing. Our water came up. I did have one person tried dip netting and she got 7 fish like that. Other than that, there's been a lot of people out of town, that's all we got.

District Y3:

Russian Mission:

Basil Larson - Welcome back Serena, missed you these last couple of teleconferences. There's no fish camps in operation, there's no nobody running out there with the dip net, nobody with 4-inch nets, not even us mushers. Been pretty windy, pretty rough, a lot of rain. The river is dropping quite a bit, then after the Humpies passed, the water started receding. It's on the rise again, so hopefully that means fish. All the fishing going on is basically for whitefish. Everybody is out picking berries, one of the main ingredients that goes into a delicate dish, where everybody on the YK Delta needs whitefish and berries. The kids go out to get the whitefish recreationally and they been doing well enough to feed our dogs. There's a lot of pikes, the Humpies slowed down quite a bit. There's been no bear sightings lately. As everybody is switching to the changing of the season and reflecting on the Summer Season. Food security comes into mind. Everybody chopped their King harvest by 100% and their Summer Chum harvest by probably 75%. Everybody's hoping for a little bit of Fall fish to put away because we do harvest with the season. There's critters to harvest all year round but nothing makes up for the loss of salmon, and we're feeling that pretty hard out here, especially with the price of gas, food and everything. Food security comes in center, it's on everybody's mind. Especially being between the headwaters, where the fish are born and out in the sea where the salmon grew up. We're caught in the middle and we endure all the restrictions. We shoulder all the blame. We just want some rules and regulations put out everywhere else where the salmon goes, to keep it there. We're not the problem is what I'm trying to say. Other than that, we've been having a lot of rain, a lot of winds. No fish camps in operation, no bear trouble, there's no drift in the water. Everybody is currently worried about the moose, the food security these last three years. Cutting our salmon harvest almost completely off and everybody basically doubled up on everything else. Moose is the most dominant common factor in our diet. That's starting to get us worried too, the sustainability of that resource. There's still some worry about the ripple effect of the cyanide spill.

District Y2:

St. Mary's:

Matty Beans - Water temp today down here in Saint Mary's was about 54°. Rainy, wet weather, windy. One day of sunshine and look like another week of rain coming.

Mountain Village:

Nita Stevens - There's nothing really going on other than people berry picking. Nobody hasn't been doing anything on the river lately.

Open Discussion / Questions:

Mike Wood, Board of Fisheries - I was wondering if Adam or Elizabeth might be able to give me some information about when the Chinook typically pass through the Whitehorse fish ladder and also the Chum and some history on that? Maybe they could just send it to you and I'll get it from you if that works.

Call ended 1:51 PM