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Greetings from the Yukon River Drainage Fisheries Association!

Here is a summary of the second 2023 Yukon River Salmon In-Season Management Teleconference held Tuesday, June 11, 2024. Call lasted 65 minutes. 61 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 USFWS.

Media present: Dan Bross with KUAC Public radio in Fairbanks.

Political Representatives participating: Mike Wood, Alaska Board of Fisheries

Communities participating: 12

Management Reports:

Alaska Department of Fish and Game

Fred West, ADFG Summer Season Research Biologist

There's not a whole lot to report, but we've got two projects operating in the river right now. We've got the lower river test fishery based near Emmonak and we're fishing for summer chum. For Chinook, we have changed that into the tagging project, so we won't have any kind of CPU information from chinook, but we do still have those indexed information for summer chum and currently we've caught I think 3 so far here in the last couple of days the current CPU is low compared to previous years, there are chum moving in the lower river. For Pilot Station, they have yet to catch a Chinook, but they have caught a few chums. So, they've got some assessment there and those numbers are way below average as well, like previous years, the run seemed to be coming in late like the last five years, so nothing unusual at this point. As far as Radio telemetry, this is the second year of the Range Telemetry project and we're hoping to tag about 500 salmon in the lower river and all the tracking towers are operational along the river. Yesterday, we caught our first Chinook, so Chinook are starting into the river. We'll be providing more information as the season goes on.

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

For management, we've been putting closures in of salmon gear based on Chinook salmon run historic timing. So those closures have been announced through District 4BC. So up through Galena and Ruby, they're going to close at 8:00 PM on Sunday, June 16th. And we've announced closures for upper and lower also in District 3 and down below. So, salmon fishing is closing based on Chinook salmon run timing. During those closures, fishermen can still use 4-inch or smaller mesh, set net 60 feet or less in length, and we encourage people to set those near shore and in areas where they're not going to catch king salmon, so they can try to let all the fish go up to their spawning grounds. During the closures, everyone can also use non salmon gear, including hook and line, segment, spears, hand lines. Leave all those non-salmon gears for non-salmon. I've heard of a lot of folks going out to the coast and getting smelt and we've also heard of people catching sheefish in the river. So hopefully those catches of non-salmon are helping to provide some welcome sightings and taste of fish at the start of the season. That's about all I have for management as we've been putting out in the announcements and the update. We do anticipate closing 4-inch mesh for two weeks to help protect the bulk of the King salmon run. We'll be looking at the timing of the fish as they come into the river to figure out when that closure is going to protect the most fish as they're moving up into their spawning grounds because we do have concerns for both Canadian and Alaskan stocks. Those closures will apply to the mainstem and to tributaries to help protect kings as they're heading upriver. After those two weeks are up, fishing will resume with 4-inch or smaller mesh for non-salmon and when we're projecting the summer chum salmon run to exceed the lower end of the drainage wide escapement goal. We'll also be announcing openings with selected gear types for summer chum salmon, but so far, we haven't seen very many. We're waiting to get a little bit more information at Pilot Station to figure out how that run is going to come in, if it's going to come in towards the lower end of the forecast, which would be 550,000 or hopefully up towards the upper end of the forecast, which would be 1.8 million for summer chum salmon. So, I appreciate folks giving us calls. We're down here in the Emmonak office, open 8:00 to 5:00 during the week and then 1-5 on Saturdays. We certainly talked to a lot of fishermen, and we really enjoyed passing on information and hearing from reports along the river. We also encouraged folks to call the toll-free hotline at 1-866-479-7387. We're updating that daily with information from Lower Yukon Test Fishery and Pilot Station SONAR, and anytime there's a change in the subsistence management.

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

Holly Carroll, Yukon Area Manager, USFWS

I don't have a lot to add to the update that Deena gave. I just want to remind people that if you have any questions about fishing or any feedback on the management, we love hearing from you. You can get in touch with us directly. You can call Deena there at the Emmonak office or you can call me. My work cell is 907-351-3029 and my email is holly_carroll@usfws.gov. The other thing I just want to remind people is that if you are in a community and you are not seeing our news releases, or fishery actions posted somewhere in your community. Please do reach out to us, please reach out to your tribe and your city governments. We are emailing announcements to them, but we know that because of staff turnover or changes in email, sometimes communities aren't hearing. If you are not hearing about these fishery openers or closures, please do call us

and let us know and we can sign you up or get more members of the community signed up to receive these announcements.

Department of Fisheries and Oceans Canada

Jaclyn Kendall - Department of Fisheries and Oceans - Fishery Manager

I'm going to be providing just a brief update today going over some stock assessment updates, bit on the environment and finishing up with some Canadian management updates. In terms of stock assessment, we really are just preparing for the upcoming field season at this point. DFO technicians will be going into the Porcupine camp to get that mobilized as of Monday, June 17th. That's a jointly delivered project by the Department Fisheries and Oceans and the Vantech, Gwitchin First Nation governments. Along with that, DFO technicians plan on meeting the Alaska Department of Fish and Game staff in Eagle, AK on June 24th to start mobilization of that sonar camp. In terms of environment, much of the Yukon this year has experienced above average early spring temperatures, right now being quite hot and sunny, and the exception there would be May, which was a bit milder and slightly below average. In terms of Canadian management, we are continuing to work to finalize the 2024 Canadian management strategy and anticipate that completion by the end of this month. As in previous years, conservation and a conservative approach will be a high priority within the management strategy. In light of the preliminary very low Canadian origin Chinook forecast of just 13,000, when we account for that expected on route mortality as well as measures agreed to in the new seven-year agreement. DFO will close the recreational fishery for the next seven years and the current long-term closures in the commercial and domestic fisheries will be extended. The Canadian intergovernmental In-season conference calls with Yukon First Nation governments and Yukon Salmon Subcommittee members begin in a couple of week's time, and that's where we will share updates on information collected by assessment programs over the course of the season.

Organization Reports

Gale Vick - BBAYK Group

Good morning everybody. This is Gail Vick, I'm going to report on the Bristol Bay AYK agenda items coming up Thursday morning. Basically, we're going to be talking about the Area M June fishery that just opened and the daily report that I just got from the South Peninsula is 848 chum have been caught and 1,306 sockeyes. So it's very early in that season right now. Then we'll be talking about processor updates. As you know, there's been a lot of change in the processor availability for 2024. Trident sold off a lot of their facilities to Silver Bay Seafoods and other processors have consolidated. Peter Pan sold off their facilities. They will not be operating in King Cove, but Silver Bay will be operating some of their facilities elsewhere in Bristol Bay. There is a new floating processor that's coming in that Northline owns, it's called the Hanna, it is state-of-the-art and is creating a bidding war in pricing in Bristol Bay. So that's good for the Bristol Bay folks. We'll be talking about Yukon River salmon rebuilding, there is a department paper out that we're trying to get more discussion about. We'll be talking about the Kodiak Council report that will be ending here soon, and the numbers for the Bering Sea bycatch and then we'll be talking about the update on the Chinook ESA listing for the petition for the Gulf of Alaska. And of course, the fire season information so that's kind of the basis for tomorrow is just our Thursday's discussion, but there are a whole lot of items on the agenda that are informational. Anybody who wants to attend those meetings, we don't normally include agency

people because this is the AYK discussion group, sometimes invited. If you are an AYK fisherman or resident, please contact me or Karen Gillis at Bering Sea Fishermen's Association. They are the host of the BBAYK meetings and hope that you can join us.

Taylor Bradley - Yukon Salmon Sub-Committee

Hi, this is Taylor Bradley. I'm the new Executive Director for the Yukon Salmon Subcommittee. I don't have much to update on. I've been in the role for a month and a half, so I'm really just participating and listening and learning at this point.

Community level reports:

District Y1:

Nunam Iqua: Stanley Pete

Nothing to report.

Alakanuk: Max Agayar

Nothing to report.

Emmonak: Billy Charles

Nothing to report.

Kotlik: Marvin Okitkun

Before the breakup, there's a lot of fishing activities for fish. They had success at certain times of the day as well as I know a couple of guys that had left out maybe four or five a day with their short nets, possibly about 30 feet long. There were a couple of nets here in Kotlik right after the breakup, out right in front of town, and I saw one guy pulling one. One morning, there were some. And as for Smelts there are a lot. Unlike previous years, there's a lot of them going up the river that I've seen here. Guys would just stick their dip nets. Wouldn't take much to fill a 5-gallon bucket, and they're selective that they retained the bigger ones.

District Y2:

St. Mary's: Matty Beans

Not so much going on water Temperature was 52 degrees today.

District Y4a:

Anvik - Robert Walker

Not much to report here, but we're getting more and more drift. Today the water is going to be rising slowly, not fast. So, our temperature is about 52° too and I had a question about what the ladies we're talking about? Maybe he or she could report after this about the downsizing of the Chinook salmon. I got a forward from somebody here. The Chinook are getting smaller, apparently, maybe somebody can report on that after this is over.

Fred West, ADFG Summer Season Research Biologist

Yes, statewide, potentially the size of Chinook is getting smaller for size and age but it's a nationwide trend also down in the states as well. So yeah, that's just a factor of the ocean conditions, the trend of size and age for Chinook are getting smaller overall.

District Y4a&c:**Galena : Howard Beasley**

The river came up suddenly after last week's report, and with a bunch of drift there was. Now since then it's gone down. There's no drift, but the water is still bank full and the water temperature right now is at 5-6 degrees at 13°C. I'd kind of encourage everybody, if they could to try to include that in their reports, because I'd like to track the trends on the what the water temperature is doing and see how that's going to relate to affecting the fish migration. Other than that, that's all.

Ruby: Rachael Kangas

Currently, the water level is really high and has been steadily rising. There is no beach on the left or right side of the river in front of Ruby. Very minimal drift, and I don't have anything to report for the water temperature. There is not anybody currently fishing here. I think everybody is busy with the summer job construction, things that are going on here in Ruby, so there's not really any boats in the water, that is all I have to report.

District Y5abc&d:**Fort Yukon: Kara'Lisa Trembley**

Not much to report. We've been having nice weather here, a little windy. I only heard from 1 fisherman who is fishing? He said he caught one white fish and a few pike, and the waters were coming up and no other reports.

Eagle: Andy Bassich

Water is extremely low here for this time of year and also very clear. I can actually see down into the Yukon maybe 6 inches or so, which is extremely unusual. So obviously I guess the glaciers aren't pumping out a lot of water right now. And this has been an unusually low water year after the breakup. In fact, the water is still continuing to drop a little bit, which is normally when the water is coming up high. So kind of unusual that way. In regards to the water temperatures, we're right around 57-58° right now and obviously very low current flow right now. I've had Nets, 4 inch mesh and 3 1/2 inch mesh nets in the river since the breakup, trying to get Pike and Sheefish for dog food. It's been marginal. Maybe catching a total of 5 fish every three days or so, and it's mostly sheefish. Sheefish and Pike are only 18 to 24 inches long or so, so small fishing, but helping to supplement with dog food. There is a lot of nice weather here. We had a high water event or heavy rain which caused the Yukon to come up about a week ago but since that flow out to 40 Mile left, it's been steadily dropping. So actually, a very unusual year up here for water flows and water levels for this time of year. I think that's it. Thank you. Oh, in regards to Robert's question on the fish giving smaller. I think the biggest implication we have with that is that the fecundity drops. The fecundity, the amount of eggs per fish drops off pretty considerably as fish gets smaller and smaller. So highlighting the real importance of getting female fish up in the spawning grounds with these low return numbers. That's all I have. Thank you and maybe just a suggestion, it might not be a bad idea to send out a reminder email of the teleconference day in advance. Kind of a group email. Just to let people know, I know there's not a lot of fishing going on because of the closures, but there's still a lot of important information out there that needs to get out to the people along the river.

Serena Fitka, YR DFA

Yes, we will definitely e-mail. We do share the updates on our social media and well go ahead and start emailing the teleconference via email. Thank you for that suggestion.

District Y6abc:**Fairbanks: Virgil Umphenour**

The water's low here, too. We had a couple of days where it was way up over 80, but then it cooled off again yesterday. But it's supposed to get hot again, over 80 in a couple more days. There is a big fire down by Harding Lake, but that's all I've got.

CANADA

David Curtis - Dawson City - Nothing to report.

Additional Speaker:**Alida Trainor, ADF&G Subsistence:**

I was curious after the preseason meeting whether your staff had a chance to type up the group breakout notes that were developed through those breakout group discussion topics. I remember you said you might send them out to attendees.

Serena Fitka, YRDFA

Yes, I did say that I would send them out and unfortunately we lost one of our staff members. Gabe Canfield resigned and moved on. So we are very happy for her. She moved on to Northern Latitudes, which is a great organization as well. So we're down a staff member. We do have those notes typed up. I just want to go through them and revise them and make sure they captured everything during those breakout group sessions we had during the preseason and I'll get those out to everyone. We will email them to the tribes as well.

Virgil Umphenour - OK, I don't ever remember where there hasn't been 1 Chinook salmon past Pilot Station SONAR by now. To anyone in the department that knows that answer.

Fred West, ADFG Summer Season Research Biologist - Historically, I don't recall. I'd have to look in the data more, but last year the first was observed on the 10th at Pilot Station and this year we tagged our first fish down here yesterday, so they're in the river. But yeah, I'd have to look to see when the latest fish passing in Pilot was. It's probably pretty close to be on Brown now.

Virgil Umphenour - OK, because it sure seems late to me and I don't know how late the ice went out down there this year.

Fred West, ADFG Summer Season Biologist - So we do have the NOAA who puts out a forecast based on a run timing forecast for LYFT or the Emmonak area of when the first Chinook should show up in the river and it's based on sea surface temperature and ice cover. They we're projecting the first fish to show up like 3 or four days later than not on average. So they were predicting that the run would be late. So yeah I guess this is not unusual. Maybe unusual, but it's not. Not totally out of the realm of what we might expect.

Virgil Umphenour - Okie Doke, I was just curious about that, but I do know that the ice makes a difference in the fish work. Kind of late going up to Copper River this year too, because of the ice.

Andy Bassich - I have a question for Fred. I was just curious how the early fishing for sheefish and other fish coming up in the Yukon took place this summer down at the mouth. Were people successful? You know, I haven't heard anything about that, I'm just kind of curious. If there is much effort put into that and if they're what the success rate was like down there?

Deena Jallen, ADFG Summer Season Manager - We haven't heard a lot about sheefish. We have heard reports from a few folks that they were going out to get sheefish. We did hear more from people telling us that they were getting smelt, right as soon as we arrived at Emmonak. They're telling us about going out to the coast to get smelt. So I would definitely defer to any of the folks from lower Yukon communities to help fill in more of what their observations were of sheefish in this early part.

Andy Bassich - I was just curious because I have heard in the past a lot of people really value that fishery, so I'm just curious. You know, if it's so transpiring and I think a lot of people are just pretty demoralized.

Deena Jallen, ADFG Summer Season Manager - We definitely heard of folks getting sheefish and we have a lot of calls at the office down here in Emmonak about folks wanting to see what gear type is open and let us know that they have either been fishing with 4-inch or they do plan to go out with 4-inch for sheefish. We don't always get a lot of reports back when people do go out and do that fishing activity.

Deena Jallen, ADFG Summer Season Manager - I guess the one thing I will add is we do have test fishers that are operating at Big Eddy and middle mouth and have been hot in the summer, chum drifts from middle mouth but they were let go or they were returned.

Michelle Kohl - I was wondering if someone could repeat the statement that passed Pilot Station again?

Fred West, ADFG Summer Season Research Biologist - We haven't seen any or caught any Chinook in Pilot, but for summer chum, the total count is 1439.

Serena Fitka, YR DFA - Can you please let us know what committee you're calling in from?

Michelle Kohl - Oh, I'm downriver from Nenana, about two hours down river. So not calling in from a community. I'm on the river right now and nice to hear from everyone, too.

Call ended 1:52pm