



YUKON RIVER DRAINAGE FISHERIES ASSOCIATION

Greetings from the Yukon River Drainage Fisheries Association!

Here is a summary of the Yukon River Salmon Pre-Season Management Teleconference held Tuesday, May 12, 2020. The call lasted 150 minutes.

Estimate of participants: 116

Background: Yukon River salmon management Pre-season teleconference is usually held face-to-face in conjunction with the Annual YRDFA Board Meeting. Unfortunately, under the circumstances of Covid-19 we had to look to other methods to have managers and fishers throughout the Yukon River drainage to discuss fishing conditions and management strategies. Funded by the Dept. of Interior-Office of Subsistence Management.

Media participating: KEAA Eagle Community radio, and KYUK Bethel, Alaska.

Political Representative or staff: None

Welcome - Wayne Jenkins, YRDFA Out-Going Director:

Welcome everyone to your 2020 Yukon River Fisheries Preseason Planning meeting. This is Wayne Jenkins, YRDFA's Past Director. Before beginning our meeting let's start with an invocation.

Invocation; I'd like to ask YRDFA's co-chair Victor Lord to lead us in an opening prayer. Victor?

Watch out for our villages with this coronavirus, watch over King salmon, it is a resource to us and our livelihood. May everyone have fish on their table by the end of the season. AMEN...

Introductions:

Thank you, Victor so much for those words! As we get underway, I would like to introduce YRDFA's new Director, Serena Fitka and welcome her to all of you as she begins the adventure of directing our many programs for the fishers and communities of the Yukon River. Serena, would you share a few words, please?

Serena Fitka – Thank you Wayne, good afternoon and thank you all for joining our Pre-season call today. It is a privilege and honor to be working as the new Executive Director for YRDFA. I grew up in St. Mary's and travelled to many communities along the Yukon River. I look forward to what lies ahead for this amazing organization and I encourage you all to continue to participate in future calls and meetings. Enjoy the call!

Thank you, Serena! So, for a little background. YRDFA, partnering with ADFG, USFWS are hosting today's call as an alternative approach to our usual Spring in-person meeting which we had to cancel due to the Covid19 pandemic. It is critically important for Yukon River fishers, fishery managers and other stakeholders to communicate prior to our fishing season for preparation and understanding on projected run strengths, management strategies covering harvest and conservation, meeting

escapement goals etc. It is vital that managers and fishers engage before the fish arrive for creating clarity on management approaches, community needs and how communications will be handled this year. Thank you all for joining in on the call today and remember there will be two extra calls this season on May 19 & 26 as we begin our usual fishing season Teleconferences two weeks early for providing a communications link for Yukon river fishers during this challenging time.

Meeting Guidelines:

Here are some meeting guidelines to go by. As we have many more folks on today's call as we usually do on our summer calls, I would like to share some basic guidance for a smooth and constructive meeting today. Please mute your phone by pressing your mute button or pressing *6. To unmute please press *7 and when you are finished speaking press *6 again to mute. Open lines and background noise make it very difficult for folks to communicate well. If someone has an open line, I will need to halt the call and request they mute their phone so we can continue our discussion. Thank you for your cooperation.

Lastly, I want to remind everyone we have a lot of folks on the call. During our periods for asking questions please identify yourself by name, village and whether you are a commercial or subsistence fisher or both. After that the moderator will give you the go ahead. This will help when two folks have a question at the same time. Once the first person is finished the moderator will say "next?" for the next question. Please be patient as we will get to your question. Thank you for working with us on this important call.

Holly Carroll, ADFG Summer Season Manager – It is very sad the Pre-season is not in person. Happy that fishers were able to call in. Fisher's input really helps with the management strategy. Fred West will give a quick summary of our assessment.

Fred West, ADFG Yukon River Biologist –

Chinook Run size – 120,000 -144,000, slightly smaller than last year. Based on Canadian origin Chinook outlook.

Summer Chum size 1.7-2.1 million.

Project status due to Covid-19:

- Emmonak Field Office will be closed, Lower Yukon Test Fisheries middle mouth will be operated by Yukon Delta Fisheries Development Association. LYTF Middle Mouth will not be running,
- Anvik River sonar will not operate, which assesses summer Chum run strength.
- Henshaw Creek weir, run by Tanana Chiefs Conference.
- Pilot Station Sonar will operate.
- Subsistence harvest sampling of Coastal and District 1 to determine origin of stock of subsistence harvest in lower river is funded by the Restoration and Enhancement Fund.
- Samples of age and size for summer Chum if there is commercial fishing.
- Planning on running Chena and Salcha towers, which provides spawning information for chinook and summer chum on Tanana Rivers.
- Eagle Sonar we are currently planning on operating and this is to assess border passage of Chinook and Fall Chum.
- Post-season aerial surveys are planned to operate.

Holly Carroll, ADFG Summer Season Manager – In summary, Fred listed all the other assessments that we do. Some projects will not operate, they assess escapement and do not assess managing fishery in season. Those projects not happening will not affect fishing.

Gerald Maschmann – USFWS

Gerald is Acting Federal Manager for Season. Fred Bue retired. Federal Emmonak Office will also be closed this season. Andreafsky and Gisasa Weirs will be cancelled this season. They will find other ways to assess those streams. Federally funded Henshaw Weir, operated by Tanana Chiefs Conference, had high water last season that caused damage. Weir operation is cancelled, but will use this year to do some repairs.

Holly Carroll, ADFG Summer Season Manager – The Pre-season is to present last year's data and this coming year's season. The in-person meeting would provide Marine Research with graphs and charts; this call is focused on the coming season rather than data presentations.

Mid - point of projected Chinook run is similar to last year. 10-year average run size. Should allow us to do some harvest for subsistence. Could see fishing that looks similar to last year. We did have record warmth main stem water temperatures. Saw a lot of dead chum last year. Addressing that this season, we manage the fishery, we are not managing based on last year, we are managing based on the data presented to us. Tried to keep management strategies similar.

Like to provide a lot of opportunity on the trickle at the beginning of the run. Important for religious reasons and for sheefish. Last year we did it with 7.5" gear with ½ the time. This year we are starting with 6" gear. Biggest fish will go by. Provides opportunity for summer chum.

Then we assess the first and second pulse. To see if we are coming in closer to upper end of forecast, then we would relax. If it is coming in lower, then we will need to adjust management.

Feedback from last preseason meeting, reduction of fishing time, fishers said they wanted to fish on weekends. In every district they try to make sure that each district opening has a weekend included.

In 2018, at preseason planning meeting, fishermen feedback said the use of 6" in upper portion in river. This is a good management tool. In district 5, majority of Chinook are headed to Canada. We restrict District 5 to 6". We will be doing that this year.

Why don't we restrict to 6" everywhere? We do that because of the clog of summer Chum.

In all districts you will see a lot more use of 6" this year. We are hoping that we will harvest more summer chum and smaller Chinook. Local details are essential to management. Please keep sharing your information.

Questions:

Sven Paukan- St. Mary's - When Fred was talking, did he say Pilot will be operational this summer?

Holly - Yes, our team has been working on a safety plan and has been working with St. Mary's and Pilot Station. Yes, we are planning on operating the project with Covid-19 adjustments and ensuring safety of staff and communities.

Victor Lord- Nenana- A+ Holly for your efforts, thank you for making fishing available for memorial services for Chinook. Fishermen must work with managers, help them, and share information. To help the Chinook.

Eddie Summer - Every summer we get city people who come home to fish, villagers who come home. Will there be enough fish for city folks and village folks?

Holly - Everyone is eligible to fish from State standpoints. Every community will have to see how this looks for them. State of Alaska, it is everyone's right to come home and fish. Our regulations will not affect this. Normally we fish for our loved ones and to share. That will not be different, but if the run

strength of chinook is not great, make up with chum salmon.

Charlie Wright - Rampart- Want to echo Victor, you guys are doing a great job. This year and next year, please remember that we are still in conservation of kings. We need to conserve everywhere that we can. We are far from historical numbers. We have to lean on the summer and fall chums and hold out on the kings to make sure there is some for future generations.

Holly - Thank you. Last year we had a really good run size even though we took a conservative approach, but we did not get enough kings to Canada. Maybe the kings cannot be the bulk of our harvest. We have to be conservative in a way for those unknowns that we can't measure. We need to be careful, which is also why we are using 6" more.

Don Honea – Ruby – What kind of measurements are we going to make to get those numbers into Canada that we need? Are you taking extra steps?

Holly - chum run was late and that made it easier to get king salmon. Also, fish died before they made it to Canada and we have no way to measure. Most people now have 6" gear but if they don't have it they should find a way to invest in a 6" net. Last year was the first time in 4 years we came under Canadian passage goal.

John Lamont – Emmonak- Of the kings that did not make it to Canada, do we know how many were taken by subsistence? Only 3,000 kings taken in lower river, 250,000 kings counted at Pilot. Using a 6" is a bad idea.

Holly – Our total Canadian run last year was 73,000, our total subsistence take was 48,000. I do not have exact subsistence numbers, but knows there were more than 3,000 kings taking in lower river.

John Lamont - Emmonak –sonar numbers, thinks many were lost due to 6" gill nets. Witnessed this on Kuskokwim. Thinks using 6" is a mistake.

Bill Alstrom - St. Mary's – I'm glad the subject of kings at Pilot compared to border at Eagle came up. There is a disparity. What happened to those missing kings? There's a long stretch from Pilot to Eagle with no real monitoring going on. Lower river gets first of everything. When fish come in - chum or chinook, we are first to hit them. Lots of times fishermen, subsistence fishermen, are done with Chinook. Then you throw your 6" gear in the river and you get a bunch of chums that you do not want. We want couple hundred chums and maybe 50 kings. We don't want that much chums (that a 6" net produces). Will there be any monitoring the fish crossing the border?

Holly - If you have fish dropping out of a net dead, you would want to monitor that. But we do not have a way to monitor that. Districts 1-4 are going to encounter chums with that 6" net. Does not believe that king drop out in a chum clogged net, kills kings. Thinks fishermen need to check nets regularly. Basket kings.

Ed Sarton- Ruby – I heard about stress testing on fish. I heard about this at AFE.

Holly - Vanessa Von B is working on this. She may be able to give an update or we can do it on a future call.

Fred Huntington – Galena - most of tributaries to Yukon have been gaining in Chinook salmon. Passage at Canadian border was low. Last 10 years we have been fishing conservatively. Once the Chinook salmon get past Tanana, they are in the main Yukon on up. What we are doing is building up the other streams on the tributaries, but not Canada kings. I think we are going to mid-summer high water during the middle of season, lot of snow pack will be melting.

David Walker- Holy Cross - I notice in 2009-2013, there was good handle on bycatch, but now it is

increasing. Heard it was up to 16K. I know that pollock fishing is affecting our stock. We are conserving, I wish they would conserve in the Bering Sea. Good to have rule, but you have to enforce those rules. Last year we tried to report someone using an 8" net and law enforcement looked the other way.

Holly - Bering sea fishery is heavily regulated with fines. Their interceptions of salmon have gone way down.

Robert Okitkun - Kotlik - Concern on mining issues. Donlin Gold mine on the Kuskokwim; I heard that their tailings would drain to the Yukon? I have never got an answer to that questions.

Mickey Stickman - Nulato - Thanks to all managers and YRDFA for all their work. Charlie Wright talked about conservation, my family's subsistence calendars show our king numbers have gone down in 20 years. We also fish for other families. I was surprised by the 48,000 harvest last year because that is close to those years when the king numbers were high; 30 years ago.

Benedict Jones - Koyukuk - Water is really low. Expected high water due to snow but snow run off is seeping into the ground.

Martin Kelly- Pilot Station - How accurate is genetic testing from recent years compared to earlier years? Also, we to know point of contact for go ahead on Pilot?

Holly- Point of contact is Carl Pfisterer. As far as measurements at Pilot depends on getting a lot of samples. Last year we had good catches of Chinook at test fishery, increases accuracy. When we are looking as proportion of Canadian, we look at it by pulse.

Fred West – Overall, in most years, we have been doing genetics since 2005. Most of the time falls within confidence intervals. Some years that genetics over-represent or under-represent, but in general is good.

Martin Kelly- Pilot Station – In the last few years we talk about Traditional Ecological Knowledge being shared every Tuesday on Teleconferences. We are showing high numbers and we always ask that this be used as a tool.

Holly - Yes, we are using the TEK. In fact, last summer when our sonar counts were great, it was the fishermen who helped us understand if it is accurate. Last year, everything matched up, but we still can't account for the missing fish.

Alfred Demientieff – Holy Cross- Concern about fish near Holy Cross, seems like we get the tail end of every opener. Hard to catch fish when they are all gone.

Holly- We have heard that before about District 3. The whole point of the windows is to have a predicable fishing schedule, but this has no relation to when fish are present. The concept that fish will be there for at least one of the openings they need. We do not manage like we used to. Maybe we should think about the stagger of the openings.

Mike Peters- Marshall - Heard water is going to be high. Ice is still running in Marshall. Concerned about windows, schedule, etc. We are concerned because we have been conservative all these years.

Arnold ? – Our numbers since 2014 have been way below average for kings, a lot of people don't like the word "Moratorium", but I think we should start thinking about it if our numbers don't increase.

Charlie Wright- Rampart – I want to echo what Arnold said. This is the only tool that has worked effectively. Next year might be perfect year to not fish the kings and let them rebound good.

Andy Bassich - Eagle - Would strongly encourage people to fish for non-salmon species. We are going to have pretty poor runs and people need to learn to meet their needs.

Holly- What he said, “whenever people can take the opportunity to fish for other non-salmon species.” Want to stress that people can always fish with smaller gear or dipnet to catch other species. Dipnets are also legal gear for subsistence.

Robert Okitkun- Kotlik – I heard moratorium earlier. Our fishermen on the Yukon have practiced conservation a long time. Pollock fishermen been breaking our backs from the Bering Sea. Perhaps Bering Sea pollock fishery should go into moratorium. If that happened, I’m sure we’d have more kings return to the Yukon. I attended a conference in Anchorage one time, with presentations from all over. The Yukon kings are the biggest in the world.

Stanley George - Mountain Village - Advice on 4” net. When you do set a 4” net kings and chum bounce off and thinks there is some mortality. What happens when kings gills get closed and they get disorientated and they float down river.

Holly - Great point, but want to point out that when you have a 4” net in the water, it is not meant to target salmon. We intend for people to use that net to catch other species. When fishing for salmon you are going to be allowed to use 7.5” or 6” nets.

Stanley George – Mt. Village – When you use 6” gear for the salmon, the kings do bounce off, their gills close and they drop under the water. Have you done any studies of this?

Holly - Yes, I understand but we do not have the research to know if it is really lethal. We do tag fish. We do see fish do exactly what you are saying. We see some mortality but not excessive mortality.

Bill Alstrom- St. Mary’s – Because of Covid-19 we are getting more emphasis on getting salmon as people run out of meat and other food. When it comes to other species, we don’t really target them in the summer because the meat is mushy then. On dip netting, is that right when subsistence is open that dip netting cannot be used?

Holly- You can use dipnet when there is an opening.

Jack Reakoff- Wiseman- Has been on Kuskokwim Inter-Tribal Fish group, Dr. Schindler did studies on sockeye disentanglement. That pinched on the gills. The ones that made it to the spawning ground did not spawn out. Fungal attacks caused them not to spawn. Look at how many fish have marks on them. They should look at them at Eagle to see the fungal effects.

Holly- Haven’t heard from biologist made comments that it was an issue. They will look into it.

Virgil Umphenour - Fairbanks - We use to have test fish wheels; the department did on the Tanana river for 20 years and down where the Tanana River dumps into Yukon. I use to have commercial openings. They would run live boxes. There used to have king salmon; a lot of those salmon would have net marks and swim all the way to Nenana before they got caught. 40-50 years ago studies about the size of nets and it goes all the back to 1981 to Board of Fish. There were 13 different studies. Richer model comes from this. Stan Zuray and I have years of studies. I back-up Holly with her decision on using 6”.

Marvin Parent-Marshall- Last year’s heat wave can be used for projection forecast for this year?

Holly – No, based on escapement from last few years. In any stream with an escapement goal. We try to follow management measures. Koyukuk last year was not great, but no way to factor in one year impact on stock.

Martin Kelly – Pilot Station- Is this day one of a 3 day conference.

Serena Fitka - YRDFA- We are going to have early in- season teleconferences that start next week. Any more discussion for the summer season outlook? Any more questions?

Rex Nick – Pilot Station- Are we talking subsistence only?

Holly- No, we can talk about commercial. Summer Chum will be dependent on buying capacity. Start with dip nets and live release gear.

Rex Nick – Pilot Station- I had a question about test fish at sonar. Every year as I'm passing by, I stop and see how they are testing fish. Seems like they have high turnover. New people every year, even the people who have worked there for a while, I'm still see them throwing fish out of their net and back into the water, practically dead. Might want to keep an eye on that. That is one of my concerns about the test fish and the sonar.

Holly- I appreciate that feedback. Will talk to the crew. I am glad that we will be able to operate the sonar. We do have an AVCP staffer there who is on his 20th year.

Rex Nick-Pilot Station - Just want to make sure that people get their needs met in the village.

Holly - Whatever affect from the summer chum last year, we will see the results in 4 years. This year, the parent year is from 4 years and 5 years ago. We need to be careful with the commercial fishing because we do not have that assessment.

Wayne Jenkins - YRDFA – Holly, any last words before move on to Fall season?

Holly – Keep'em coming, remember that you can ask questions next week too.

Dorothy Shockley – Manley – How soon do sonar crew go to St. Mary's? I also want to echo what Charlie Wright said about conservation.

Holly - If you mean sonar crew, they head out end of May and are in place in early June.

Victor Lord - Nenana- Where would you set your test nets in the lower river?

Holly- Emmonak is furthest down river and will be operational usually around May 27th. Our local fishermen will tell us when it's time to set those nets.

John Lamont - Emmonak- Wondering if all the Tribal Councils are on the call to talk about their Covid plan?

Wayne Jenkins - YRDFA - I do not know.

John Lamont - Emmonak - Okay I thought that's why we were having this call.

2:50 p.m. – End of Summer Season discussion with 98 participants.

Jeff Estensen, ADFG Fall Season Manager

Bonnie Borba and I work on the presentations, but I will be giving the report. Understand unusual times because of Covid 19. The biggest concern is the safety and health of communities as well as our staff. Unique in the Yukon because we have a summer and fall season. We are committed to manage the Fall season that begins July 16th, but a lot could be different by July 16th. Because of Covid and other issues, likely nothing will be normal about this season.

Fall Chum salmon outlook for 2020 run size is 827,000- to just over a 1 million. Above an even year run size of 843K, we are looking good. Back in 2016, at Kluane Lake a geological incident, part of a glacier melted and spawning habitat was lost. This was 4-years ago so this could impact the Canadian origin fall chum, so we are watching the run. Many of you know that we give a forecast now, but we have a unique tool in the summer chum run. We can use it to project and revise our projection for fall season. It works well. We will have a report on this as we get closer to the fall season. Revision in our Outlook guides our early season management actions.

Coho, tends to follow a 4 or 5 year cycle. We have been seeing a below average run size, average run size is 240,000 fish. Finally got the funding for run timing and distribution project, but unfortunately, we will be delaying that project due to Covid-19 and beginning it in 2021.

- Emmonak field office will likely be closed. Opening will be dictated by travel restrictions.
- Lower Yukon Test Fishery – This will provide run timing and abundance. Yukon Delta Fisheries Development Association (YDFDA) will conduct test fisheries for us at Big Eddy and Middle Mouth sites. After Department is finished operating this each year, YDFDA has been taking it over for fall.
- Mountain Village test fishery - run timing and abundance information funded by Restoration & Management. Most folks are from Mountain Village, so there are no outside people coming in for that.
- Main stem sonar at Pilot is a go for fall season. These measures run size and harvestable surplus. Also, a platform to collect tissues. Good indication for how many fish are moving upriver.

July 16th – District 1 Fall Chum season starts and moves up river with the fish. Subsistence fisheries management could increase in fall chum and Coho need. We will consider to allow for 7.5" mesh and schedules open 7/7's. Chronic inability to meet treaty objectives with the Porcupine River, so likely some sort of reduced subsistence schedule. Not sure what is going on with buyers in Lower Yukon River on commercial fishing. We will update as we get information. We take a very cautious approach as we begin season and assess how run is coming in. The goal is to balance some commercial harvest to provide for upriver subsistence and treaty objectives.

- Sheenjik and Chandalar are looking to operate along with Eagle. Things will change between now and July 15th and we can do the best we can we keep you the public informed regarding the fall season.

I have an open door and open phone policy. If you for some reason you cannot get ahold of me please let Serena know and she can get ahold of me.

Gerald Maschmann- we are planning to operate Chandalar Sonar.

Mickey Stickman - Nulato - Fall chum run, 50% spawn in Henshaw Creek. Hoping that the closing of that weir is not political, because the State has given out money for the Ambler Road and it crosses Henshaw Creek. I agree with the moratorium on Chinook, but it would make us dependent on the Fall chum run. This is a big concern for me as a fisherman. I know that when we say we support a moratorium on Chinook fishing, we are relying on fall chum.

Bonnie Borba - Henshaw is usually closed before fall Chum arrive.

Bill Alstrom – St. Mary's - Down here in the lower river there are some subsistence for Fall Chum and Silvers. I know fall chum go into Canada. But what about the Silvers? Where are their main spawning ground?

Jeff Estensen- Some Coho have been documenting on mainstem into Canada, but not many. Mainly, they spawn in the Tanana River drainage and Delta Clearwater, which is a tributary of the Tanana.

Bonnie Borba – Some travel up the Porcupine. A couple of salmon stocks on the Tanana River. This Coho telemetry project in 2021 is going to be very helpful to learn where these fish go.

Jeff Estensen- Coho are important for subsistence and they have some value in the commercial fishery.

Andy Bassich – Eagle - Next year we are predicted less salmon, what are your thoughts (Jeff and

Bonnie)? I know you rely on the relationship between summer and fall chum salmon. Do you think there will be weaker runs next year? Can you project?

Jeff Estensen- You were referring to the cycling of high abundance of fall chum followed by periods of lower abundance. I think we look at this stuff every year. We don't just automatically assume everything will be fine. Strategy is to take things cautiously. Remains to be seen if we are going to go into a lower period cycle.

Bonnie Borba- We have 2017 coming back will be next year's 4-year old's. Richer model will say it is going to be lower because we had a huge escapement. 1.7 million. Even though models will show that it will be poor. That is the only run that we expect to be weaker.

Andy Bassich - Eagle – I have a concern that I keep hearing people say that they need to catch more fall chums. Take that into management considerations. Do the best you can. I look forward to good run where everyone gets what they need.

Jeff Estensen- That is why we do these meetings, to give us things to think about.

Christopher Beans - St. Mary's. Question, on the fry's going out to give a good estimate of what might be coming back from the ocean.

Fred Maschmann – We have been running the Juvenile program since early 2000s getting a good forecast on what's coming in.

Martin Kelly -Pilot Station- Conditions are normal. Raining and hoping for a good season. Cool 37F, light flurries and no subsistence activity at this time.

Closing:

Wayne Jenkins – YRDFA - In closing we wish to thank everyone on the line, all those who participated with your great questions and input, our fisheries management and staff.

I would also like to thank each of you; YRDFA Board & staff, Yukon River fishers, managers and others for your support and kindness while I was YRDFA's director. It was an honor and a privilege to work with you all on the many fisheries related issues that are so critical to the cultures and communities of the great Yukon River and it's bountiful and beautiful fish. Thank you all! Serena, would you close us out please?

Serena Fitka – YRDFA - Again, thank you all for calling in and hopefully we will be able to meet face-to-face. Thank you Holly, Jeff, Gerald and Fred for your reports. I enjoyed hearing from all the people from the River and please involve your young fishers to listen in on the meetings and hope to see them fill leadership roles in the future. Please don't hesitate to give me a call if you have questions, concerns or just want to talk.

Last, YRDFA would like to say thank you to Wayne for everything that he has done over the years. At this time, we offer our gratitude and appreciate his leadership and dedication to the people of the Yukon River. In the last couple months, Wayne has guided me through the organization, and I hope to exceed everyone's expectations as I move forward as Executive Director for YRDFA. I wish everyone a wonderful start to the fishing season and hope to hear everyone on the weekly in-season calls starting next week. Qu yana

Call ended @ 3:29 p.m.

Thank all of you for all your hard work!