

U.S Fish and Wildlife Service

Yukon fish management team



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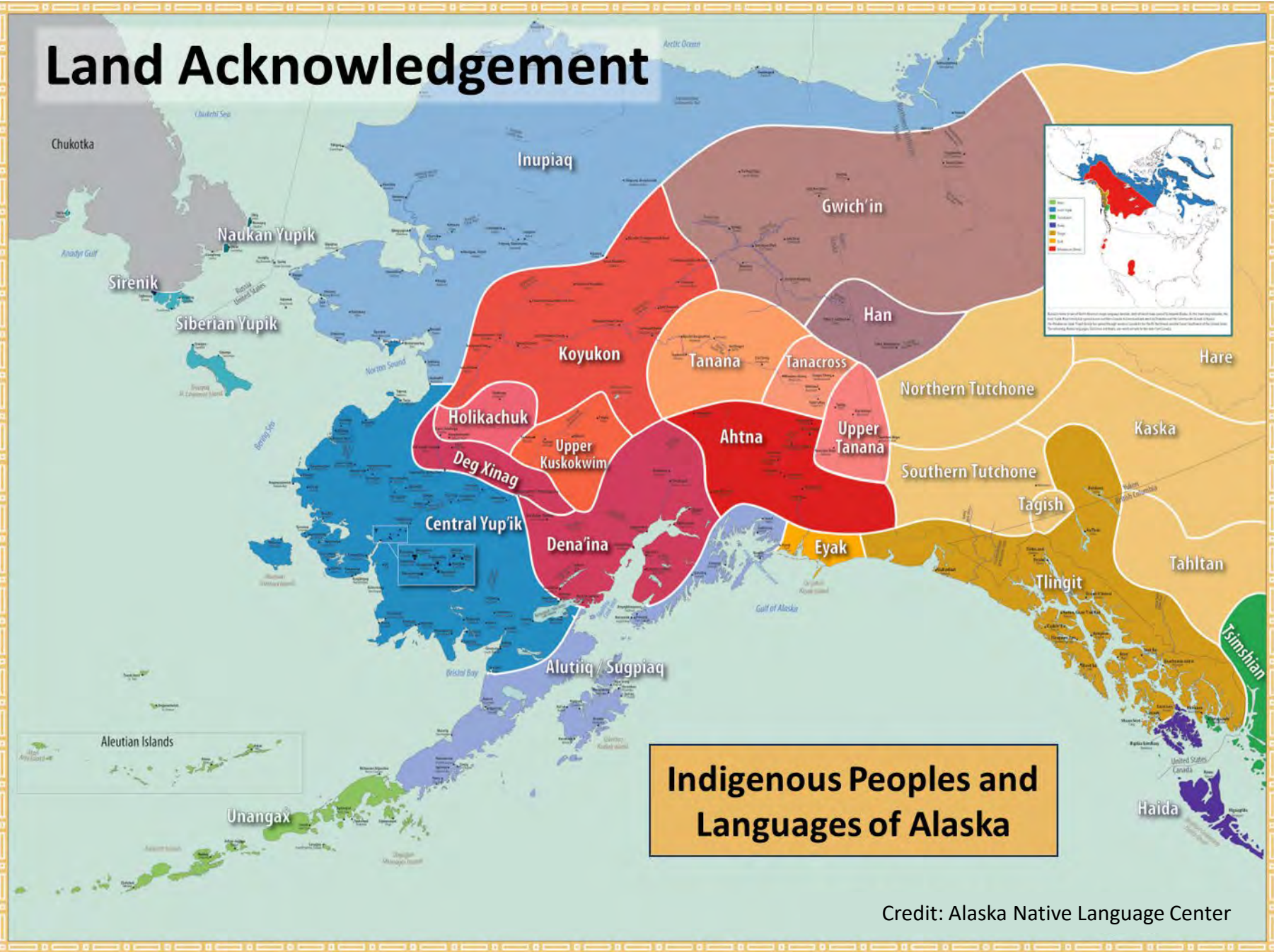


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Land Acknowledgement



Credit: Alaska Native Language Center

Outline

- Drainage-wide View
- Collaborations
- Uplifting Indigenous Knowledge
- 2024 Federal Management



Yukon River Drainage





Salmon connect Yukon River communities, cultures and people
Customary and traditional use [subsistence use]

Collaborative Fisheries Management

- Regional Advisory Councils-Federal Subsistence Board
- Yukon River Panel
- Yukon River Intertribal Fish Commission
- Yukon River Drainage Fisheries Association
- Tanana Chiefs Conference Convention
- Co-stewardship Symposium
- Tribal Consultations
- Phone calls, and emails with Yukon fishers

Feedback is received to negotiate fisheries management with ADF&G to maintain a unified approach

Your voices influence how the fishery is managed

Tribal Consultations

- We hold Consultations with the Yukon River Tribes and ANCSA Corporations to discuss fisheries management
- We make a **Federal management strategy** with this feedback
- Government-to-Government Consultations can occur anytime upon request

2024 Tribal Consultation Summary

- We are working to increase participation
- **Most leaders supported the management strategy**
- They emphasized the importance of cultural and ceremonial use opportunities

Handout includes summary



Yukon Fisheries Overview

Uplifting Indigenous Knowledge



Feedback on Current Restrictions

Coastal Leader - “One thing our elders [say] nowadays, they remember the times when we weren't regulated, when we were able to fish all the time, and we only fished for subsistence, and we subsisted until we had enough. We don't just keep on fishing and fishing because we want to. It's something that we know needs to be done, so we can have fish for the winter, and we fish for multiple families.”

Coastal Leader - “We would like to exclude the waters surrounding Chevak, Hooper Bay and Scammon Bay from the Yukon River fishing closures. We are only subsistence fishers, we do not commercial fish. The salmon in our area may not be bound for the Yukon River.”

Lower River Leader - “I've been trying to get the lower [Yukon River] tributaries, what are known as nonsalmon spawning tributaries, to switch over to 5 1/2 or 6-inch gillnets, specifically for whitefish and sheefish.”

Lower River Leader – “Past practices used to protect the first pulse of Canadian origin Chinook salmon. Subsistence fishery for Chum should be dipnets only at the tail end of the king run.”

Culture & Conservation

Middle River Leader - "It's not about having a king salmon. It's about the act of fishing and using our Indigenous Knowledge, giving thanks to our salmon relatives and to the Creator, and to also pray for them to increase and keep coming back home. It's all part of the ceremony. That's what I'm getting at. If this [Cultural/Ceremonial use] were to have any real meaning, those are the things we're looking for. I think it should be for a culture camp that the Tribe is helping lead."

Upper River Leader – "I just really want to see salmon come back to our rivers and for the salmon to be healthy and to thrive like they once did. Our elders really miss fish. They were raised on fish. They grew up on fish their whole lives....Fish is something that's in our hearts."

Middle River Leader - "We need to enforce the rules, we can't be fishing, the numbers are not there to be fishing, I don't want to fight over fish, and protest fish."

Rebuilding Salmon Stocks

Adaptation

Upper/Middle River Leader – “Culturally, as the Athabaskan People, we are an adaptable People. That's why we've survived in these cold, harsh lands for over 10,000 plus years, we adapt to what our food systems are doing, and we don't waste. That's why we have this hard time with bycatch. It goes against the grain of us to our core. But speaking that, we have to adapt to conserve the Chinook and we have to adapt to the other fish that are available. But it's going to take time because so many of us people, my age and younger than me, have learned to only rely on salmon season.”

Rebuilding Salmon Stocks

US/Canada 7 Year Agreement

Middle River Leader - “I appreciate the big, bold steps needed to conserve fish, and I know it's kind of a bitter pill for a lot of people because of the bycatch commercial fishery and the hard feelings that are going on with that. We would love to be able to see fishing closures spread equally between the commercial fishery and the subsistence fisher people. But I appreciate them taking that big, bold step, that’s something that needs to happen, and it needs to happen on multiple levels.”

Upper/Middle River Leader - “Because the salmon are a lot smaller now and have a lot less eggs, it's going to take that number of fish to get enough fish back on the spawning ground to make a difference... if we have a full life cycle [7 years] with the proper number of fish getting on the spawning ground, there's a good chance.”

Upper/Middle River Leader – “There are loose rules about escapement in tributaries, [they are not always being met for Chinook or Chum] we need to see a life cycle of escapements being met via western and local knowledge. Increasing goals for fall and summer Chum as well as Chinook. Chum should be part of the 7-year Yukon River Panel agreement.”

Marine Commercial Fisheries

Lower River Leader – “We are on our, what, 3rd or 4th year of no fishing? Yet, False Pass and Area M, keep fishing, taking the fish that come from the Yukon, Kuskokwim, and Norton Sound. You know if this kind of trend keeps on, the USFWS, Fish and Game, Department of the Feds will have to shut down because there's no fish!”

- Area M and the NPFMC Pollock fishery continue to occur during historically low Yukon River salmon runs
- Leaders say marine commercial fishing is prioritized over subsistence, impeding recovery of Western Alaska salmon
- Leaders encourage USFWS to support Yukon salmon injustice in marine waters

Drainage-wide frustration: burden of conservation primarily on in-river communities and people

Ecosystem-based Approach

Headwaters Leader – “What we do to the water outside of us, we do to the inside of us. When the water is clean and looked after, fish will be healthy. Our breath is in the water. Our life is in the water. We need to give back to the land, not deplete things so much.”

Upper River Leader – “I am concerned about the impacts of mining, clear cutting, and water quality issues within the Yukon Drainage watershed.”

Upper River Leader – “The impacts of hatcheries on Pacific salmon around the Pacific Rim needs to be discussed more. This is an international problem that needs to be addressed to save our wild Yukon salmon.”

“Salmon know no borders”

We NEED to think about the entire lifecycle!

Nonsalmon Harvest

Lower River Leader – “I wanted to address predation with our Northern Pike. I hardly hear anything about our Pike here on the Yukon River. Even in the tributaries, they drive the other species of fish, like Grayling further and further up the tributary. They are carnivores. How much of the salmon fry do they eat? With our subsistence being heavily regulated, I don't know how we can manage a Pike fishery, or I don't know how we can reduce those numbers to ensure our salmon fry make it back out to the ocean...I think managing the Pike alone would help the salmon fry survive.”

Lower River Leader – “We need to fish with our 4-inch [nonsalmon gillnet] because predator populations will go unchecked. My family is also going to use 4-inch to target Pink salmon.”

Leaders have mixed feelings about the 4-inch gear potentially harvesting too many Chinook and causing drop out mortality

Spirituality & Tradition

Upper River Leader - "There's more to it than just the meat. It's a spiritual experience. That fish gave its life to you to help feed you and your family. The ways you would respect the fish is cutting it nicely. And then using every part of the fish. That's a huge one because the fish gave itself to you, so you shouldn't dispose of anything that you can't use. And then use it to your full ability. After you use the meat or the eggs or the fish head, there are still those salmon bones in there, you can use those salmon bones to make jewelry. So, you should respect it and just make sure you use it to your full ability."

Middle River Leader – “We should be allowed to teach Indigenous indicators, by dropping a net, and if we get a king, then we've been blessed, and we can have our first salmon ceremony to honor the fish for returning home.”

A top priority on the Yukon River is getting back in relationship with our salmon. We NEED Indigenous guardians!

YRITFC & Tribal Consultations

“We need something outside of this colonial structure”

The Yukon River Intertribal Fish Commission (Commission):

- Great way to gather representatives from all parts of the river
- Works toward co-management and co-stewardship of fisheries.
- The Commission has provided management recommendations in past seasons
- We support the Commission and will work with them at their upcoming meetings

**Pairing Indigenous Knowledge and western science
benefits managing Yukon salmon populations for
future generations**



Yukon River Collaborative Management

55+ Yukon Tribal Governments



2024 Federal Special Action (FSA)

THE FEDERAL SUBSISTENCE BOARD RECIVED A SPECIAL ACTION REQUEST ASKING THE BOARD TO:

- Close Federal public waters of the Yukon River drainage to the harvest of Chinook, summer and fall Chum, and Coho salmon except by Federally qualified subsistence users in 2024, and
- Require Federal subsistence fishing schedules, openings, closures, and fishing methods within Federal waters to be determined by the Federal Fisheries Manager.

THE BOARD SUPPORTED THIS REQUEST therefore management will be similar to 2023.

Concern raised in FSA:

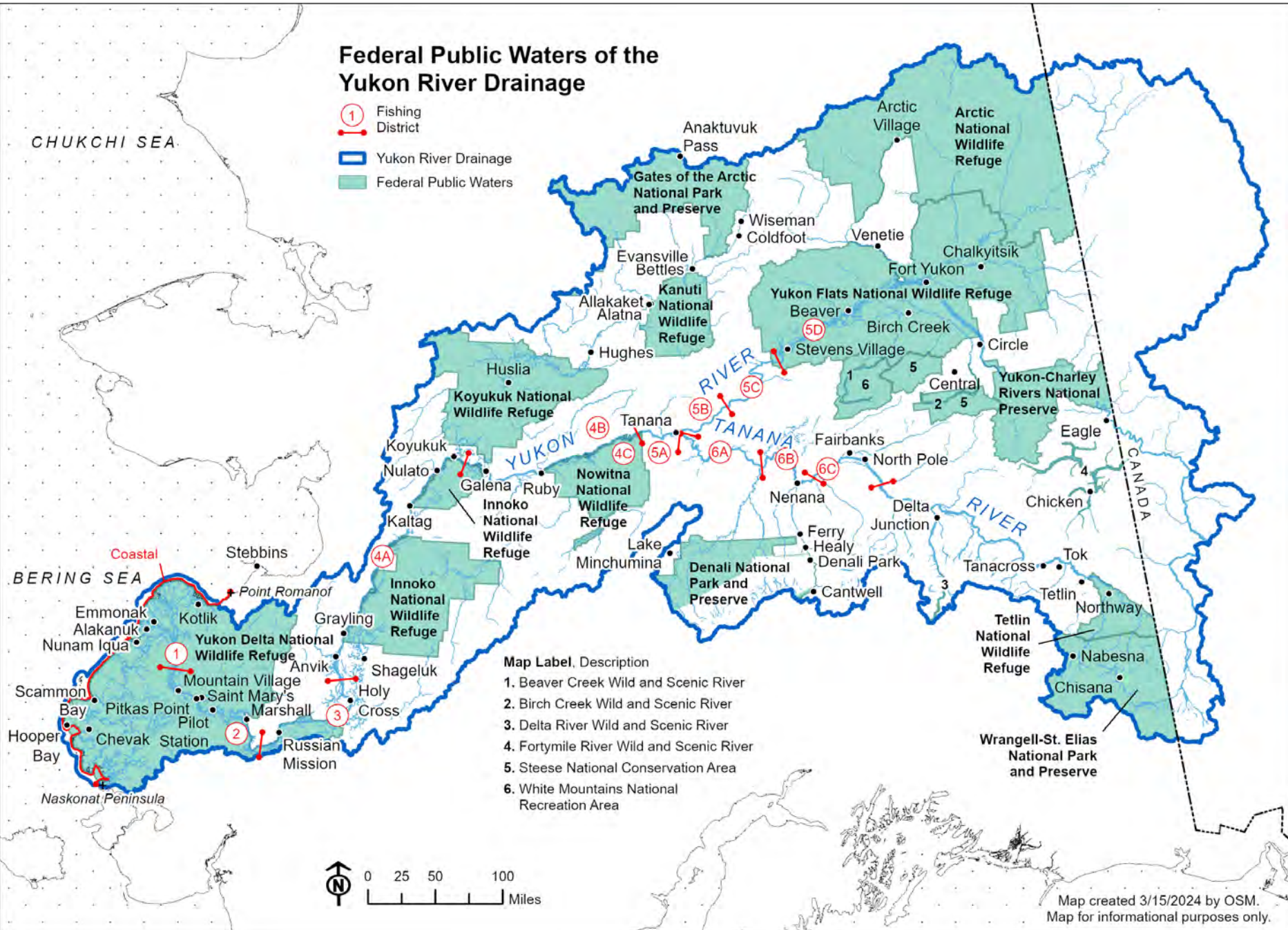
“The Feds only mirror State management”

How Do We Federally Manage?

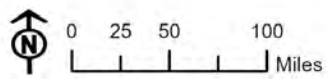
- Use forecasts to create a Federal management strategy
- Share proposed management plans with the State and other stakeholders
- Management decisions are made in coordination with the State to avoid confusion about fishing schedules, and why restrictions or closures may be necessary.
- No management strategy will work without coordination with ADF&G given the patchwork of jurisdictions

Federal Public Waters of the Yukon River Drainage

- 1 Fishing District
- Yukon River Drainage
- Federal Public Waters



- Map Label, Description**
1. Beaver Creek Wild and Scenic River
 2. Birch Creek Wild and Scenic River
 3. Delta River Wild and Scenic River
 4. Fortymile River Wild and Scenic River
 5. Steese National Conservation Area
 6. White Mountains National Recreation Area



Map created 3/15/2024 by OSM.
Map for informational purposes only.

2024 Federal Salmon Management

Chinook Salmon

- Run requires closures
- Salmon fishing closed - June 1 and limited to federally qualified users only




CLOSURES

Summer Chum Salmon

- Closed to start. Wait until chum goals projected to be met inseason
- Subsistence fishing may be allowed with selective gear. Chinook live release required
- No commercial or sport fishing of salmon



**CLOSED
TO START**



**SELECTIVE
OPENERS**

2024 Federal Salmon Management

Fall Chum Salmon

- Run requires closures
- Canadian-origin run expected to be poor
- Subsistence opportunity in Alaska tributaries after escapement goals have been met



CLOSURES



**LIMITED
OPENERS**

Coho Salmon

- Run could require closures
- Or limited harvest



CLOSURES



“It is not the strongest of the species that survive nor the most intelligent, but the most responsive to change”

-Charles Darwin

Coming together to conserve our salmon:

Inriver management takes adaptation

Things to explore with your community and here:

- Improving our outreach on respectful practice - dip nets
- Balance nonsalmon fishing with incidental harvest of Canadian origin salmon
- What does the future of cultural practice and harvest look like?

In every chair a leader, It takes ALL OF US to steward the salmon!

Yukon River communities and people will forever be safeguards for the salmon returning home to spawn.



**Quyana, Mahsi' choo,
Anaa' baasee, thank you
Questions?**

