



## YUKON RIVER DRAINAGE FISHERIES ASSOCIATION

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### **Greetings from the Yukon River Drainage Fisheries Association!**

Here is a summary of the #9 2024 Yukon River Salmon In-Season Management Teleconference held Tuesday, July 30, 2024. Call lasted 63 minutes. 48 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:** 17

### **Management Reports:**

#### **Alaska Department of Fish and Game**

##### **Bonnie Borba, Fall Season Research Biologist, Fairbanks, Alaska**

I'm going to provide the initial Fall Season Assessment. The Fall Chum salmon run size projection based on the summer to fall relationship is 377,000 fish and is lower than last year. The average Fall Chum run size is over 950,000 fish. We will be using in-season assessment to determine the run size and watching to see if the aged 4 fish are as weak as they were for the Summer Chum salmon. As of July 28, both the cumulative CPUE for Lower Yukon Test Fish and Mountain Village Test Fisheries are below average. The first quarter points for the Fall Chum salmon passage usually occur at the end of July for both of these projects. The Mainstem Yukon River Sonar project, operated near Pilot Station, transitioned to Fall Season counts on July 19th. As of July 29th, the cumulative passage is 42,000 Chum salmon. This compares to the median passage of 136,000 Chum salmon for this date. The median date at Pilot Station for the first quarter point is July 30th. Pilot Station passage should increase the next couple of days as a small group of Fall Chum salmon are moving through. Genetic mix stock analysis will be used to determine the mixture of Summer and Fall Chum salmon, the third stratum of Chum salmon. Genetic samples from Pilot Station sonar test fishery from July 8th through July 18th consisted of 96% Summer Chum salmon, of which 73% were Lower River stocks. 13% were bound for the Middle Yukon River and 14% were bound for the Tanana River. Lower summer stocks are average, while the Middle River stocks are below average, and the Tanana River components are above average for this time period. Once the next strata are sampled, we will provide stock assessment for the remaining Summer Chum and the main components of the three falls stock groups. The first one is Teedriinjik, Sheenjek and Draanjik, the second group is the Canadian stocks, and the third group is the Tanana Fall stocks. The preliminary age composition of 39 Chum salmon sampled from the drift gillnets in Lower Yukon Test fish Project through July 24th consisted of 39% age 4 and 59% age 5 fish, which compares to the 21 to 23 historical averages of 59% age 4 and 40% age 5. The percentage of female Chum salmon through July 27 was 49%, which is near the historical average of 51%. The average length of Chum salmon as of July 28 was 568mm, which is below the historical average of 582mm. The Fall Chum salmon drainage wide escapement goal ranges from a minimum of 300,000 to 600,000 fish, and there are also several individual tributary goals. Monitoring of escapement in the Upper Yukon portion of the drainage within Alaska will include sonar operations beginning around August 8 on the Teedriinjik and

Sheenjek rivers. Eagle sonar's average transition date from Chinook to Fall Chum salmon monitoring is around August 19th. Last year, the transition occurred later on August 23rd. We will be using these in-river assessment monitoring projects to determine if the statements will be achieved for the drainage wide goal as well as on the Draanjik and the Canadian components of 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 August 16 through the 27th at the Mainstem Sonar. The Mainstem sonar has captured its first coho salmon on July 28.

### **Christy Gleason, Yukon Area Fall Season Manager, Emmonak, Alaska**

I'll provide a brief management update. As Bonnie mentioned, we're expecting a low Fall Chum run this season. The run is projected to be 377,000, which is just within our trade cycle of 300,000 to 600,000 but as she mentioned, we're looking at the age 4 class pretty closely because the Summer Chum run was weak for age 4. That may mean that we have a lower run than expected for Fall Chum. During the Fall Season, we know that the majority of the early Chum salmon are primarily Summer Chum based on genetics and on how the fish look, and though we did allow for selective gear for subsistence fishing, that includes dipnets, beach seines, hook and line, and manned fish wheels for Chum salmon. The 1st 10 days of the Fall Season and Chinook salmon must be released alive. Management strategy is to close after the 1st 10 days of Fall Season because it's unlikely that we will meet the two Canadian treaty objectives once the true Fall Chum arrive here in late July and beginning of August in the Lower Yukon. Though currently for fishery management, the Coastal District through District 2 is closed to subsistence fishing for Chum salmon. District 3 will close tomorrow for Chum Salmon. District 4, salmon closure dates are already announced. And Sub District 5 ABC will be announced here on Friday.

### **Fred West, Summer Season Research Biologist, Bethel, Alaska**

For Summer Season, there's not much to report. The Chinook ran past the border, past Eagle most likely around the midpoint which is the midpoint for late timing is around July 29th, the third quarter point will be August 3<sup>rd</sup>. The run size is well below average but slightly better than what we saw in 2022 and 2023 at this time but we're not going to meet the 21,000 border passes goal, but the run is a little bit better than the last couple of years, but still not great by any means. As far as projects, we've got the Radio Telemetry Project is still tracking fish as they're going up river using aerial surveys and remote towers. A few fish have passed into Canada, and they're also tracking them within Canada, using aerial surveys and remote tracking towers. If you do come across a fish with a tag, it'll have both the spaghetti tag near the dorsal fin and then also the internal radio telemetry tag. If you encounter a tagged fish and you were able to get the tag number, you can call 1-877-467-2104 to report information about where you caught it or where you saw it and where it was observed, and it would be very, very helpful. Andreafski River, that project ended on July 22nd. They had a few days of high water, so the weir wasn't fish tight. We got some estimates there, but they're well below average and we would consider them minimum. We were able to do an aerial survey last week on the 25th and they saw 70 Chinook salmon and 1,265 Summer Chum salmon, which are still well below average but and they're not really a full count like the weir would be. They just got them flying over and get an index of what's there. They're still well below average, but slightly better than the counts that we got from the weir. Those are probably some of the lowest counts on that system. For the Anvik sonar, they stopped counting on the 26th of July. They have ended up with 99,648 Summer Chum, which is below the median cumulative passage of 450,229. That count is a little bit better than it had been the last couple of years and that was still a minimum count because they ended up with. They had to pull the sonar between July 15th and 18<sup>th</sup> because of high water. The Chena River, they counted up to 322 Chinook salmon, which is below the average of 4,700 Chinook. They counted 289 Summer Chum down, which is below the average median of 2,300. They ended up having to stop counting as of yesterday because of high water. They lost visual counts and they also had to pull the sonar because of high water. Similar situations for the Salcha, they had to stop counting yesterday. Their cumulative passage was 719 Chinook, which is below the average of 6,800. They saw 997 Summer Chum, which is below the median of just over 4,000. Both the Chena and the Salcha counts should be considered minimum because they also had a few days where they weren't counting in the middle of season as well. So those are considered minimums. As far as Eagle sonar, they're currently through the 29<sup>th</sup>, they're up to 11,711 ± 200 fish. It's well below the cumulative average of 35,929 for this

date, but like I was saying earlier, it's a little bit slightly better than it has been in the last couple of years. So we'll see how that run progresses.

### **Deena Jallen, Summer Season Manager of Yukon River, Emmonak, Alaska**

I just want to remind folks that if you have any questions about the fishery management in your area to please give one of our offices a call. There's staff down in Emmonak and in Fairbanks and you can also always call the toll-free fishing hotline if you've got questions about what's going on in your area. We have transitioned to Fall Season Management in several of the Districts and in other Districts, we're just kind of finishing out Summer Season fishing restrictions and trying to get as many of the Chinook salmon up to their spawning areas as possible, that this continues to remain our focus for the Summer Season as we reach the end of the Summer Season Management as the fish are making their way up the river. You do want to call Christy down in the Emmonak office (907) 949-1320. She can take any Fall Season questions or management questions. If you want to get a hold of me, I'm up in the Fairbanks Office, which is (907) 459-7274 and can answer any more Summer Season questions and to remind folks that you can call the toll-free hotline to get current counts and management actions at 1-866-479-7387.

### **US Fish and Wildlife Service**

#### **Holly Carroll, Yukon River Area Manager, Fairbanks, Alaska**

(Update given from information provided last week) The Fish and Wildlife Service team are going to be launching their Teedriinjik Sonar Crew, so they won't be on the YR DFA call this week, she sent me something. Wednesday, July 31<sup>st</sup>, that's tomorrow. They're going to be holding a public hearing to review the Fall Management Strategies, which involves possibly closing the Mainstem River to protect the Fall Chum unless they start to see harvestable surpluses because those closures could be longer than 60 days in some areas for the federal management because those closure of temporary special action. To do that, they need to hold a public hearing so people can hear about it and weigh in on it and give feedback to Holly or the Fish and Wildlife. That public hearing is happening tomorrow, Wednesday, July 31<sup>st</sup> in the late afternoon. It's from 4:00 PM to 6:00 PM. The phone number is 833-436-1163 and the passcode is a nine-digit number which is 571396562#. It is a 2-hour public hearing about the Fall Management Strategies.

### **Department of Fisheries and Oceans Canada**

#### **Adam O'Dell, Fishery Biologist**

I'll start up with the stock assessment update. Our Porcupine River camp, which is near the community of Old Crow. We have an estimated 248 Chinook salmon having passed as of July 29<sup>th</sup> and this is compared to 279 on this date last year and the average of around 2,200. This count this year is considered to be a minimum estimate due to interruptions in sonar operation earlier in July caused by some extremely high water that we experienced on the Porcupine River and some in operations. As we approach August, we're going to start to turn our attention to Chum salmon. In the coming weeks, as a recent years crossover dates from Chinook to Chum salmon fall approximately around August 8<sup>th</sup> to August 15<sup>th</sup>. As with last season at this project, also our crew on the Porcupine River, we're not test fishing or test netting for Chinook salmon. We anticipate we won't be test netting as well for Chum salmon, once that season rolls around. On Sunday, the group from Alaska who are participating in the Educational Exchange, they visited the Porcupine Camp at Old Crow. They had a pretty quick tour, I think they were running a tight schedule. So they're out there for maybe just under an hour and just showing the camp. The sonar operation and I believe they just discussed nuances in salmon and in their experiences relative to where they're all coming from. Our DFO Technicians remain on site at the Eagle Sonar camp, supporting this program along with ADF&G throughout the season. So just as a refresher, I know Fred touched on Eagle sonar, our numbers quite thoroughly, but the Eagle sonar is located about 29 kilometers downstream of the border with Alaska and Canada. It's a collaboratively delivered project with ADF&G and a pretty critical one for estimating Canadian-origin salmon. In support of this year's Chinook Radio Telemetry Program, our crews have installed 12 telemetry towers throughout the Yukon. These towers aren't equipped with satellite uplinks, so we're not able to provide updates on data in season, but we will need to wait until postseason until the receivers are pulled and we download that data. But our first aerial telemetry surveys scheduled for this

Thursday and Friday, which we plan to cover the extent of the Canadian portion of the mainstem Yukon River. It could provide some updates, potentially next week on any tags that we're detecting on that flight. The Big Salmon sonar, this has been operational for a few weeks. There's an estimated 252 Chinook past this site as of July 27, and this is compared to 573 on this day last year and the average of 857. I'll start with the Klondike River sonar, which is operated by Tr'ondek Hwech'in First Nation, this is pretty much right at Dawson City. This sonar is operational and the most recent estimate is for 129 Chinook as of July 28<sup>th</sup>, compared to 182 on this date last year, the average of just over 1,000. There's sonars on the Pelly River, operated by Selkirk First Nation. They've been operational since July 4<sup>th</sup> and as of July 29<sup>th</sup>, there's been an estimated passage of just under 1,300 Chinook salmon compared to 821 on this date last year and the average of about 3,400. Lastly, the Nisutlin River sonar, located in the Teslin River watershed. It's currently being installed. They've had some sonar issues, so this should be up and running and estimates provided soon. With that, I'll turn attention to a quick environmental update and then hand it off to Jaclyn. The weather conditions continue to be cool and wet through much of the territory. The Northern Yukon, including Old Crow, however, has experienced some quite high air temperatures until the recent cooldown in the Upper Yukon River. There was a pretty large rain event that has caused high levels in the Southern Lakes and portions of the Yukon River that's starting to flush through or has been for a few days. Water levels elsewhere remain near average, with some, such as Kluane River being below average and water temperatures recorded at ours and others assessment sites within Canada. The water temps have been actually quite favorable for salmon and so far this season the Porcupine River, some temps have exceeded 20° but for a very short duration and they will fall back down essentially the next day. I think current temperature is around 15°, 16° there.

### **Jaclyn Kendall, Fishery Manager**

I'll start with a brief report for Chinook salmon in terms of management. There will be no changes to the Canadian management strategy for 2024 with the very low outlook and the agreement in place. We have closed the recreational fishery for 2024 and the current long-term closures in both the commercial and domestic fisheries will be extended and those closures go through to 2030. So as Adam was indicating, we are still in Chinook assessment programs now, but looking to the future in terms of Chum with the low outlook expected there for both Mainstem and Fishing Branch, we're not anticipated to meet spawning objectives in Canada. With that in mind, the public angling fishery, has also been closed for 2024 and the commercial and domestic long term closures. We'll continue as well for Chum.

### **Organizational Reports:**

#### **Gale Vick, BBAYK Group**

I just got some disturbing news that we'll be talking about in the BBAYK and that is the Council appointment that we had expected out of Washington state for Becca Robbins Gisclair is not going to happen. They're going to stay with the current Trawler Industry Representative and that was just announced this morning. It was a very surprise announcement and we're going to be checking into it. That is very disturbing for us as we are concerned about the amendments for Chum management. So that's all I know in that particular subject. There are a number of deadlines coming up that people should be paying attention to. One is the ACR or Agenda Change Request. If anybody has it from their local ACs (Advisory Councils), those are due to the Board of Fish by August 30<sup>th</sup>. The Fairbanks AC met on their proposals, we did not come out with any ACs, but we came out with a lot of good discussion that will be applied to proposals going forward into upcoming Board Fish meetings. I just got back from being outside with family, so I don't have my agenda written for this week and there are a lot more items of course, and I encourage people to call me if they or Karen Gillis at Bering Sea Fisherman's Association. Our BBAYK meetings are non-agency meetings. So, we don't have agency people on there on a regular basis, but they are invited at certain times to discuss issues.

## Community level reports:

### Y5abc&d

#### Eagle:

**Andy Bassich** – Not a lot going on here. Water levels are extremely low. They've been extremely low all year here. I've never seen a summer with water levels this low, consistently. I wanted to pose a couple of quick questions for Fred. When we get into the discussion. I wanted to know if there were any Chinook salmon still passing Pilot at this date? Some of the late runners. I have as we'll get into the discussion for Christy, our Fall Manager. I'm wondering if there is any consideration for protection of Fall Chum, as they travel through the Mainstem with 4-inch net closures like they did for Chinook salmon, which I think was probably very effective and helped a lot. So just a heads up for some questions, I'd like to discuss during that question and answer period.

#### Fort Yukon:

**Kara'lissa Tremblay** - Fishing was closed, my report is nobody fished the 5 households I interviewed and we have been having rainy weather. The water level is the same as last week, no changes.

#### Tanana:

**Stan Zuray** (emailed in report from the Rapids) - Water levels are low, surface water temps hit 66° but now dropping with rainy weather. No one is fishing at Rapids at the moment and most of the people who came to their camps have left the area. This last week I saw most people that did fish did so for 2 days and got enough whitefish and Chum salmon to feed themselves and the few dogs most people have left. 4" nets were then pulled. There is much uncertainty about the Fall Chum fishery here and it seems most people are making other plans now. Summer Chum are present here now but almost all the Summer Chum in this area are at the end of their migration and are of very poor quality, about 5% have some color to their flesh.

#### District Y4a&c:

##### Huslia:

**Charlene Vent** - Most of our people were at culture camps last week, so there was no fishing. Our water is pretty low here and a lot of rain. I think a lot of people are waiting for Fall fishing and that's all I have right now.

##### Anvik:

**Sherry Kruger** (emailed report in) - Our surveyor in Anvik conducted her final interviews as people were wrapping up their fishing. She reported that covid did not have an impact on these fishing families this year. Two fishers were able to get some salmon, about half of what they need, with beach seines and fish wheels. While two other fishers were not able to get salmon this year. One fisher was able to get other fish such as pike for their dogs. The other 3 fishers I interviewed had to work this summer or didn't want any other fish. All 4 fishers believe closure are necessary to protect the salmon runs. No one was able to harvest enough fish for the winter.

#### District Y3:

##### Russian Mission:

**Basil Larson** - Our water did come up a little bit and it's holding. There's been no drift in the water, noticeable change in the wind direction, kind of toward Fall Season, no more warm, real warm winds, even with the storms. There's no fish camps in operation. Ever since a couple of weeks ago, everybody wasn't expecting to fish at all. We all expected low numbers. So we were happy when we were able to get a little bit of fish. Everybody's still conservative out here and even just a taste, everybody was happy. Somebody mentioned to me that they cut their Summer salmon harvest in half or in three quarters, hoping to get a chance at some Fall Fish, which is looking kind of bleak at the moment. There was a brown bear yesterday, right in the middle of town. Russian Mission has three sections, there's the lower town downtown, where you're down by the river, you climb up the hill a little way. There's a section called Midtown, then you're

climbing a little higher than there's Uptown, but there was a brown bear that showed up in Midtown last night. It has not been dispatched, so it's still considered a threat to our town. Everybody still watching out for it and haven't seen it since. There's been a lot of fishing activity going on with the kids setting out for whitefish, pike, Humpies, trout, no Silvers yet. My son and my nephew went out riding and they were so amazed that they got a small, probably 4 or 5 year old King in one of the local streams, and they let him go. So that's a promising sign. They weren't going after it, they were using little trout hooks. But the kid's been averaging probably they'll go out and they'll get enough pike, and Humpies for probably 3 or 4 days of cooking in one round trip so. These past few weeks, this weather hasn't been cooperating. Everybody's kind of switching gears from Fishing to waiting for blueberries. Around here, we don't get any salmonberries, we get the blueberries and they're not ripe yet, but people still go and check. The cyanide spill information is all over the news, or radio, finally and a lot of people have been calling me and approaching me and telling me about it. That's still fresh in everybody's mind. Some people run having little deep conversation saying they feel pretty hopeless, caught in the middle of where the salmon grew up down in the sea and where they're growing up in the headwaters, those two places. Everybody figures should be protected and addressed a little more, especially when the bycatch numbers meet or exceed the total number of salmon into the Mainstem of the Yukon River. Everybody thinks management should take another step and not manage just us. A lot of people feel pretty torn up. Wondering if all this sacrifice that we've been doing, letting all the fish go by now, hearing about the cyanide spill, wondering if all our efforts are going to be for nothing. That kind of stinks, especially being caught in the middle. We see the last probably just 5 to 10% of the salmon's life as they passed by. We don't see them on their way out, but we try to utilize them on their way in. They spend probably 80% of their life out to sea and probably 15% of their life where they're born. We think those two places should be addressed and protected a little better. Everybody's wondering if it's safe enough to let their kids swim and be all out, recreational stuff in the water because that's what the kids do all Summer long with these no fish returns. To keep fish camps going. A lot of people just basically use them as BBQ stops and swimming posts. It's been these last few years.

## **District Y2:**

### **Mountain Village:**

**Nita Stevens** - I spoke with 5 households and they're happy with the fish they caught, but they were hoping to get more when they had openings for salmon and so they're happy. They got to put fish away compared to all the other years since the close has started. Some are waiting for Fall Chum, hoping to make strips out of the Fall Chum and culuunaq. People are picking berries, salmonberries and waiting for the blues to be ready. Hope we'll get blueberries in our village. That's about it, but I'd like to thank everybody for giving them a chance to put some fish away this year.

### **Open Discussion / Questions:**

**Andy Bassich, Eagle** – To repeat, I was wondering if there are any Chinook salmon still passing by Pilot Station? Oftentimes, there's some stragglers that come through, usually they're female fish. Then the question I'd like to discuss with Christy is if there's been any consideration for protection of Fall Chum into the Upper Yukon by closure of 4-inch mesh gear?

### **Fred West, Summer Season Research Biologist**

So the last day of passage so far has been the 25th of July for Chinook. They caught 1 Jack and that portioned out to like, I think, 76 fish for that day. The day prior would have been the 22nd. They encountered 1 fish on the 22nd, so those are the last kind of two days of the Chinook. Last year, the last day they saw Chinook was on the 23rd. So it's similar to last year.

### **Christy Gleason, Yukon Area Fall Season Manager**

To answer your question about the 4-inch setnet for Fall Season. What we're looking at for Chinook salmon is their salmon decline is much worse than the Fall Chum salmon. Also the Fall Chum salmon were not experiencing a difference between estimates between the sonar projects and the Lower River and the Upper River. The Chinook are also experiencing other factors such as disease of ichthyophonous. That kind of goes

into our decision of keeping the 4-inch open for non-salmon during Fall Season. Right now, due to Chum salmon conservation, 4-inch gillnets are limited to 60 feet or shorter in length and they need to be operated as a setnet near shore. So that's an additional restriction that we put on that gear trying to avoid salmon. When fishermen call us, I do encourage them to place their nets inside sloughs and side rivers and lakes to really go after the non-salmon species and avoid salmon. I let them know if they do start to catch salmon to go ahead and move their net, that we're experiencing a really low Fall Chum run. Fishermen can always choose themselves to not use a 4-inch net altogether. I've traveled the river a little bit this summer, both in the Upper Yukon and then Lower Yukon here. I have not seen very many nets out at all, and even then the few I saw were inside sloughs. So I think people know this is a really low Fall Chum run and they are doing what they can to harvest Summer Chum when we had that opportunity and now stop fishing now that the Fall Chum are present.

**Andy Bassich** - I guess my concern is people in the Upper Yukon, once you enter into 5-wide districts haven't fished for 4 years now. With the Seven-year Agreement, nobody will be fishing for Chinook salmon, which leaves Fall Chum, the only salmon for subsistence and cultural. I think it's really incumbent upon the both departments to try to rebuild the Fall Chum runs as soon as possible. These restrictions would have been already for 4 years, can hopefully allow for a very limited harvest, super important to the Upper River. We have no other species, not even non-salmon species in any abundance up here. So very critical to rebuild. I also need to remind the departments that no statements have been met for Fall Chum on the Porcupine. For many years and for the Yukon for many years, for Canadian, and so it's going to be really important. I also want to educate people that back in 2000, we had similar crashes for Fall. What we ended up doing in our community, because we are large harvesters of Fall Chum when they're abundant is, we stood down for a year or two and shipped other fish in to help get everything up for the rebuilding effort, and that was very, very effective for rebuilding the Fall Chum very quickly in 1999 through 2001 Fall Chum crashes. So I just wanted to point that information out and then the only other thing I wanted to say for the gentleman from Russian Mission. I think the concerns about the cyanide are valid, but however those are almost 1,000 miles or over 1,000 miles Upriver and on a side tributary of the Mainstem. I think to alleviate some of the people's concerns that all their efforts of not fishing are going to go in vain. I think that's kind of an unfounded thing. I think it's really important for people to continue to protect these low Chinook runs and Fall Chum. I applaud them for their efforts. I really appreciate what the people in the Lower River are doing to try and allow for Chinook and Fall Chum passage, because it's vital to the people up river as well as themselves for their future and their kids future. So just wanted to make those comments that I think it's really important for people to continue and their efforts are making a difference. They need to feel positive about those efforts that they're making in conservation. I know it's hard on everyone. The farther up the river you go, the less there is, but we really appreciate all the effort from people in the Middle and Lower River, this fishing season.

*Call ended 2:03 PM*