



YUKON RIVER DRAINAGE FISHERIES ASSOCIATION

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Greetings from the Yukon River Drainage Fisheries Association!

Here is a summary of the 10th, 2020 Yukon River Salmon In-Season Management Teleconference held Tuesday, July 21th, 2020. Call lasted 131 minutes. 87 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 Office of Subsistence Management and the Yukon River Panel.

Media participating: KZPA Fort Yukon
Political Representatives participating: None

Communities participating this week: 22

Alakanuk
Mt. Village
St. Mary's
Marshall
Russian Mission
Nulato
Huslia
Allakaket
Galena
Ruby
Tanana
Rampart
Stevens Village
Beaver
Fort Yukon
Eagle
Minto
Nenana
Fairbanks
Dawson
Teslin
Whitehorse

Community level reports:

Coastal District 1-Lower Yukon

Alakanuk:

Ted Hamilton - I checked with 4 fishers last week and no one fished. Everyone was berry picking. We only have humpy's and very few chums coming in the river. High water and little debris.

District 2-Coastal/Lower Yukon

Mt. Village:

Nita Stevens - I had 9 households that I interviewed, no one fished. The water is starting to drop. Some people said fishing was poor and some didn't get enough summer chums and kings, so they are going to fish the fall season. Sandbars are starting to show. Some say subsistence fishing was worse than last year. Some people are having boat issues. Hopefully they get their motors running before fall fishing.

St. Mary's:

Bill Alstrom - Nothing to report, just listening in.

Edna Crawford- Boreal fisheries - Just wanted to say I am online.

Marshall:

Norma Evan - Most subsistence activities are on hold. Most people are berry picking. Water dropped about 4' from last week. No debris.

District 3-Coastal/Lower Yukon

Russian Mission:

Basil Larsen - Last week was my last official interview week. I didn't interview this week, but there has been very little to no drifting activity. I've seen one boat in the water. Everyone is berry picking and waiting for fall fishing. Water is dropping fast. Lots of sticky mud. A couple of the traditional berry picking places are cut off. The concern of sustainability is swelling. People took about half of what they normally did. People are waiting for fall season. I talked to one lady at the store and they put away 2 quarts of king strips and a couple of buckets of chum. They are splitting that between 3 people. A lot of cold wind and rain. When you want to make strips from fall chum, it requires a lot more fire for heat. It will take twice as much work, but it is worth it.

District 4a-Upper Yukon

Nulato:

Mickey Stickman - I tried fishing for 7 hours last night. There was 1 good size King and 1 small one. We quit now and are waiting for fall chum. Water dropped quite a bit. There is still debris in the water, so you have to be really careful. It is cottonwood that is waterlogged and barely floating. There was only one other person fishing last night. People are starting to pick berries.

Arnold Demoski - Pretty slow for everybody. My family did good these last 2 openings. We have a good harvest and are pretty proud. Everyone is pretty much satisfied here. The water is good down here, It's dropping and continuing to drop. People are gonna wait for fall chum.

Koyukuk River

Huslia:

Zoe - Some people have said that the King fishing was not good. But fishing for chum has been good.

Allakaket:

Pollock - We caught kings earlier. Caught 5 fish in 1 day which was good. Rainy right now. It's pretty muddy and there is high water.

Districts 4b & c-Upper Yukon

Galena:

Howard - There was significant activity last week during the 2 day opening. 59 degree water temp. Water is slowly dropping, we finally have some beach. There were 8 boats out on the 16th, there were big shiny fish, and people are home jaring now.

Ruby:

Rachael - Everything was doing really well on the last pulse. We were getting the big kings. People harvested enough for smoke houses and jaring. The water has been fluctuating. It was dropping and then raining, so it is raising now. People were getting fish with (...) in the meat. Another complaint was they were getting silver kings with pale meat. Everyone did pretty good on this last opening.

Districts 5a, b, c & d

Tanana:

Stan Zuray - Water levels are average and mostly stable. No drift. Last opening there were less fish than the one before. To most fishermen it seems to be showing a decline in numbers and quality. Seems early for that. Some will not be fishing kings anymore they say. 2020 may be the worst for infected fish. The COVID-19 protocols remain in place. Masks in stores and tribal council permission to travel into town.

Rampart:

Brooke - We had 2 24 hour openings last week. We had a small king harvest, and a small chum harvest. We had 1 infected and 1 pale King in our harvest. 3 sightings of boats and floatplanes. No citations. I believe this will be the last week for fishing. I am now in Fairbanks.

Stevens Village:

Peter - Fishing was really good for the last opener. We were catching like 20 a day. Water is dropping off. The harvest was really healthy. We stripped a lot of them. No Chum.

Beaver:

Rhonda Pitka- We are probably about 1/3 of last year's harvest. Fish that we have been getting are healthy. People have gotten some pike. Water has been dropping and it is rainy and cold.

Fort Yukon:

Andrew Firmin - I went and interviewed 10 households, 6 fished. I talked with some wheel fisherman. Wheels outfish 10 to 1. Most people did ok, but one family did not. Many people are having a hard time with the openings being short periods. Water did go down, so that helped some. Overall people haven't caught as many fish as they are used to. People aren't sharing and so they feel ok about what they've gotten, but it isn't even half of what they normally catch.

Walter - I fished the 48 hour opener. The last 12 hours it started to pick up. But even then it was 10-15 kings. I do think we need more fishing time.

Shannon - 3 families fished and caught three kings in total.

Eagle:

Ruby - I contacted 5 households, 3 were fishing. All fishers are using 6" or smaller. No wheels in the river yet. Water levels are rising again. It's been raining and the water level is almost to the willows. One reported catching 20 kings caught. One was infected with ICK. 4 large females were released in good condition. We appreciate the time to fish, and appreciate enforcement being in the area this week.

Districts 6a, b & c

Minto:

Jeep (Phillip Titus) - 2 fisherman that reported. One got 19, one got 20. It takes 2 hours to get out there to the river.

Nenana:

Victor Lord - River looks good. One fisherman called me and was very concerned about the closure for king fishing, I'll comment on that later.

Fairbanks:

Dorothy Shockley - I fished around Hess Creek last week. We did ok, the water level is down. A quarter of the fish we caught were white, few are a little soft. The rest were good. I was surprised to catch bigger ones with 6". The family probably caught maybe a ___ of they usually do. It's good to hear that people are doing good out there.

Stephanie Quinn-Davidson - YRITFC - Listening in. Fishing out on the Kenai today, fishing is slow. I have a lot of respect for everyone out there working hard. If any tribes out there want to reach out to me we are working on a COVID-19 relief package for villages.

Canada

Dawson:

Natasha - Last week we had the first fish camp for youth and caught 28 king salmon. We have about 6 nets in the water. Fishing is reported to be really slow and people are very concerned about the lack of fish and numbers at Eagle Sonar. We're about half way through the run so we'll see what happens next week.

Teslin:

Carl Sydney- No fish or salmon here yet. The water is going down but it's raining and raining

Whitehorse:

Elizabeth MacDonald - Didn't make it down the river this week but I think the water is still high. Expecting chinook here soon. Nothing to report yet because the fish aren't here.

Dennis - Fortunate enough to paddle the Teslin River. Super high water.

Management Reports Agenda:

Jeff Estensen - Yukon Area Fall Season Manager- In rainy Fairbanks. Nothing but rain for quite a while. Fall season underway. Seen District 1-3 transition. Other districts will be transitioning as the Fall chum moves up river. bonnie will tell us what we are expecting for a run this year

Bonnie Borba- ADF&G Fall Season Research Biologist - The summer chum salmon run size is estimated to be less than 800,000 fish which is well below the average of 2.1 million. Based on the relationship between the summer and fall run sizes the preliminary projection for fall chum salmon run is less than 450,000 fish. The fall chum salmon run size projection may be adjusted, depending on the results of the genetics, looking to see if the summer chum salmon occur later throughout July without the typical overlap with fall chum salmon, as occurred in 2019. Additionally, we intend to assess the age data after getting an actual fall chum salmon pulse in the river, which may also provide refinement of the projection. Fall chum salmon are typically dominated by age-4 fish most years. I am going to start off describing what we are seeing in the summer chum salmon run. The second stratum of chum salmon genetic samples from the Pilot Station sonar test fishery (from June 29 through July 9) consisted of nearly 100% summer chum salmon, of which, 81% were lower river stocks, 13% were bound for the middle Yukon River and 6% were bound for the Tanana River. The proportions of lower and middle stocks are near average for this time period. Genetic chum salmon samples from stratum 3 (July 8 through July 19) are headed to the lab at this time and results should be available later this week and posted in the daily update. The age composition of 405 summer chum salmon sampled from the LYTF project (June 2–July 8) indicates the run is composed of 83% age-5 fish, which is higher than the recent 10-year average of 45%. The average length is 571 mm from a sample of 415 summer chum salmon, which is slightly above the 10-year average of 563 mm. The samples were 70% female, which is above the long-term average. These size and percent female trends are likely being driven by the smaller percentage of 4-year old fish in the samples. All regions of Alaska are still tracking extremely low chum salmon returns. Updates on the fall assessment project includes that the LYTF transitioned to fall season operations July 16, drift gillnets were switched to 6" mesh and are operating in both Big Eddy and Middle Mouth sites, thanks to YDFDA for supporting continued data collection for this important project. Currently the CPUE for fall chum salmon is below the historical median at all sites. MVTF is funded by Yukon River Salmon Research and Management Fund and began fall season operations on July 18. This project will also collect ASL data to supplement that of the LYTF. New sites were selected last year downstream of town which we will be using again this year. Currently the CPUE for fall chum salmon is well below the 2019 and historical median. The mainstem sonar operated near Pilot Station transitioned to fall season July 19. All chum are reported as fall chum salmon however we will be analyzing genetics to determine the transition time frame between summer and fall chum salmon. Cumulative counts for the first two days are 18,600 fall chum salmon which is near the average of 19,000 fish. No coho salmon catches have been reported in any of the projects so far this season. A subsistence fisherman has reported catching one coho salmon this last opening in the lower Yukon. Coho salmon typically enter the Yukon River in August with the bulk of the run occurring in mid-August. An average run size of coho salmon is approximately 243,000 fish.

For full management report follow link

<http://www.adfg.alaska.gov/static/applications/dcfnewsrelease/1194367401.pdf>

Jeff Estensen - Yukon Area Fall Season Manager - As Bonnie mentioned, we are looking at one of lowest projections for fall chum salmon - less than 450,000. In terms of commercial by management plan we need at least 500,000 plus more to allow for commercial. Thus no commercial openings have been announced for Fall chum for the drainage and it may be the case for the whole season. also not sure if we will meet escapement and treaty goals. Y1-3 are in full regulatory schedule. Early next week, districts can expect full regulatory schedules with 7.5 " mesh. Mix of summer and fall chum coming in. Near the end of month/ early August as summer chum drops off, and mostly fall chum is in the river, we will have to look at the run and

see if adjustments need to be made for 2nd and 3rd chum (which are mostly Canadian of origin). Waiting to see how things shape up. FYI- fall chum tends to come in with strong SW winds at mouth (Alakanuk, Emmonak, Kotlik). Expecting some good winds Thursday and Friday.

Fred West, Fishery Biologist Contact info for ADFG YR Summer Season Manager; call 907/267-2324

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

Gerald Maschmann - Acting Yukon River Federal In-season Manager- Chandalar will not be operating. It usually monitors fall chum but is closed due to virus concerns.

Holly Carroll - Summer Season Manager for ADF&G - Bonnie covered Summer chum. As for Kings - they will continue to trickle in past sonar but bulk of run 158,000 Chinook - lower end of forecast - well below average run size. 150,000 sized runs can meet goals or not meet goals. Management is essential and controlling the fishing is essential. Run of that size has a surplus about ½. Every area of river had restrictions to time and gear. We estimated that Canadian origin run at Pilot was about 75,000. We had a higher than proportion Canadian origin. That means below average US stocks, headed to Koyukuk, Tanana (20-30% of run), Andreafsky River. Pause over these being weaker. We protect front end of run because it has more Canadian in it. Then we fish lower river stocks. Escapement project in Chena. Counts at that project are 600 king salmon. Not apportioning counts with the tower. This is well below goal. This is why we have restrictions on the Tanana River. We hope that some people were able to harvest some kings but once we had evidence that this run was low, we have to restrict fishing. As soon as counts are dominated by chum gill nets can go back into the river. Canadian portion of river, Eagle Sonar is an escapement project, fish escaping into Canada. First pulse has not arrived here yet. Too early to project total run at Eagle. But these early counts are not good. We have to maintain cautious approach. To Fort Yukon fishers, we greatly appreciate your reports. We hear that you are not catching and how difficult it is due to high water, channels, etc. But passage in Eagle just doesn't warrant that. Some fishers are doing well others are not doing well. 3 fish for 3 families is not what we intended. Natural environment is not working for us. When people below FYU tells us that when we should have been catching, we were not. Indicates run may not be as strong in the upper river as we expected it to be. Coupled with that, last year we saw a discrepancy between what we saw at Pilot and at Eagle. But we do not have the heat this year. Countless reports of ICK in the flesh, Mr. Stan Zuray gave a report, he has studied this in the past. Do not know the measured effect. If we think the quality of the run is weak, we need to stay the course. Eagle will have their shortened period. Cannot thank everyone enough for all the reports they have gotten. Even Koyukuk because we do not have escapement projects there this year.

Gerald Maschmann - Acting Yukon River Federal In-season Manager - Holly, good overview.

Department of Fisheries and Oceans Canada

Jesse Trelice - Fisheries Manager- (difficulty hearing her) Pelly River and Yukon River are higher. And Kluane Lake is lower. Below average Chinook plan for 2020, coupled with what has been observed at Pilot..... we anticipate that a conservative approach will be approved. respect conservation of ... any Chinook harvest that is available ... first nations, governments. As you've heard, the Chinook have started migrating past the Eagle sonar site, with 8,000 Chinook counted as of yesterday. Signification less than recent 10 year average, from Canadian management perspective still early in the run, as the run which has been anything but normal so far has really only just started here. Looking for numbers to climb over next week or so. 3

sonar projects operating in Yukon. Klondike has counted 126 Chinook. Pelly river sonar 667 Chinook. Big Salmon has counted 4.

Questions and discussion:

Mickey Stickman- Nulato - Wondering about fall chum. For us, 500,000 fall chum spawn up in Allakaket so I was wondering if they were gonna do a project there? Because that's half the fall chum right there.

Gerald Maschmann - Acting Yukon River Federal In-season Manager - Henshaw Weir typically measures summer chum. Koyukuk usually gets a small percentage.

Holly Carroll - Summer Season Manager for ADF&G - We are unable to operate Henshaw Creek, operated by TCC, decided early on due to COVID-19.

Sonia - I wanted to call in and let everyone know we are really thankful for 50% fish that we usually get. We fish with 6", the kids come and it's a huge highlight for them. We really appreciate the opportunity to fish, we need a couple days in a row to fill our smoker. My other comment, if we can't get king salmon to eat we would like fall chum. There's only maybe a few of those on a great run that is edible for people, the rest are for the dogs. For us up here in Eagle there are 8 big dog kennels. We use them for subsistence uses. We really depend on fall chum and are concerned about commercial fishing during that time.

Jeff Estensen - Yukon Area Fall Season Manager - Well aware of the need for the fall chum (considering restrictions for chinook) ultimately we thrive to meet escapement goals. We will definitely take into consideration this year the need for fish up there.

Ruby- Eagle - I want to thank Sonia for being on the call and want to echo what she's saying. We appreciate management for listening and feels good to talk to everyone on this river. We have not been able to meet subsistence needs the last 2 years, especially the fall chum. My three children have grown up on chum as we don't target kings. August might be too early.

Victor Lord- Nenana - I wanted to reiterate the closure of king salmon on the Tanana. The numbers, I want her to know it's tough up here on the Tanana to hear about the closure. There is a lot of work that needs to be done for subsistence and wheels. I am proud to be American but also proud to be Indigenous. I'm proud of the man who opens his fish camp and traditional knowledge to people. When you cut off these salmon you affect the culture. Holly I know you are doing your job and appreciate your numbers. An article came out yesterday about rising temp in the water near spawning grounds. Ruby, the silvers with the pale meat, is that more obvious nowadays then before?

Jeep (Phillip Titus)- Minto - This sounds like the Toklat. I don't want to see this again. Getting cut off fishing and no one is using (the resource). There are hardly any fishermen above Nenana. That I know of.

Walter - What percentage of Canadian bound fish and how much is the surplus for subsistence. Do the escapement numbers actually produce more returning fish?

Holly Carroll - Summer Season Manager for ADF&G - If you are asking how many CN fish there were. At Pilot we calculated ~75k. Surplus was 18-25k for the whole river of kings. Last year's king harvest was 50k. About half should be available. We won't know until we know what the true CN run size is once we get the escapement in Eagle.

Walter - According to _ the low escapement in the past...

Holly Carroll - Summer Season Manager for ADF&G - We are trying to match our escapement goals. We need to try to meet that goal for spawning and for Canadians to harvest. There is nothing indicating that we will be on the higher end, so we have to stay conservative.

Walter - Looking at the charts, I'm getting them every day. What is going on with the run?

Holly Carroll - Summer Season Manager for ADF&G - We have the same question. This is the weirdest shape run that I've ever seen. We have a lot of questions, hopefully we will get some answers in the postseason. Thanks for looking at the data.

Dorothy Shockley - Last week I asked about the runs in the Ocean. With both predictions Chinook and fall chum to be low. I asked what the numbers were in the ocean. Are those numbers low also?

Holly Carroll - Summer Season Manager for ADF&G - We don't assess the abundance of all species at all times. We watch the pollock fishery and see if they are catching a lot of Kings. We don't want that, but it is an indicator. This year's data tells us what is going to happen in 3 years. We don't really have an ongoing assessment that tells us ocean abundance right now.

Dorothy Shockley - The fish that they are catching - are they higher or lower in numbers?

Holly Carroll - Summer Season Manager for ADF&G - We can't tell that information in season, but we can gather that information postseason.

Martin - I was requesting Fall chum management to lift windows, since there is no commercial fishing on the lower river. Very few people will hang and dry salmon because of the flies and larvae. annual cultural traditional grounds. I was lucky to be part of the Yukon Salmon exchange program. I saw that end of the river. The king salmon have been a staple part of our diet. I don't have any, I have 2 kings in the freezer. I have dried probably 7. Most of the time we miss our opportunity to harvest as many fish as we can. We are abiding by the ADF&G regulations and their short windows. I feel it's my traditional subsistence right to get what I want when I want it. I am trying to get what I need. I want to see people in Pilot station get what they need. There is not a second round of stimulus money. There is no commercial fishing. I'm not sitting behind a desk or on a road system where I can go to Costco to get what I need. Everyone is quarantining, the store has run out of everything. It's that scenario. It's not something we see on TV. My people in Pilot prepare for tomorrow. Using YRDFA to track the salmon every day and see the numbers. I have not seen 7 boats or more out on the river at a time. When you don't have gas money or the money to buy the parts. What happens. We might have to fall back on fish wheels. Think about it... When it does, reality has not set in yet. I'm just sad that salmon up the river are able to get.... play it by ear and listen and see what happens down here.

Gale Vick - I just wanted to respond to something Victor Said. There is a new study from UAF, I am going to get it and you can add it to the website if you'd like.

Carl Sydney - I have to bite my tongue and be careful of what I say. It's been about 25 years that we've gone without salmon. That is not our cultural way. I've heard comments about Canadians needing it for their cultural purposes. We need it for our diet. I've helped to reestablish a fish camp. We are tired of holding back. We've been trying to relay information down the river, and it seems like no one is listening and everyone is giving up. We aren't able to buy salmon with COVID-19 this year, so we need salmon. We won't take as much as we used to. But we will take some. I wish we had 4 or 5 different species to take from, but we don't have Chinook. Hopefully one day we will get there and will be able to take as much as we want. It's not the number that comes across the border, but it is the quality that is important.

Walter - You are just closing Yukon River kings. Are the tributaries also closed? (Porcupine, Chandalar, Sheenjik)

Holly Carroll - Summer Season Manager for ADF&G - We have not closed fishing in the tributaries at this time.

Randy Mayo - I fish between Stevens Village and Rampart. It has been in decline for many many years. Most of us know that. Listening to the fellow from the Yukon, we passed the point of no return many years ago. I still go to my fish camp as a cultural practice and make due with the little that we get. I live next to a Costco, but it makes no difference. I am thinking about my kids and grandkids, not this winter. I've sacrificed many years, maybe 1 jar of fish, compared to when I was younger, a whole smoke house full. Are we thinking about our grandchildren? I don't agree with management a lot of times, but with the poor run coming in, I am thinking about the future of the run and generations. What are they going to have in the way of cultural and nutritional needs here. Sometimes I feel like we are not listening to forewarnings.

Virgil - We have people on this Teleconference who have been involved in our Salmon Treaty. People need to get interested in THAT. That is the only way we are going to have fish for our grandchildren and our great grandchildren. We are going to have to get political and get rid of these hatcheries. Marine environment - there are too many hatcheries and wild fish have to compete out there with them. Younger people need to get involved in the Yukon River Panel. Only way we will ensure we will keep the fish for future generations.

Basil Larsen - Russian Mission - I second what Virgil just said about hatchery fish growing out in the same area as the wild salmon competing for food. The hatcheries for the Yukon are small compared to the PWS. But that is a lot of fish to pump out there. In river management can only do so much. If we want to get the number back up to historic levels, I think we do have to look into where they grow up and help them grow up. And also where they spawn and out migration. I second Virgil on that comment.

Victor Lord - Thank YRDFA for including Canada in our conversations because they are a big part of our river. To Carl up there, some of us do listen and I've heeded your warnings in the past. Even going back as far as Galena, the late Harry Wilde, he pleaded to our people. Listen to these people in the headwaters. They are fighting for the backbone of our fish. It raised me. I'm well over 6' and I'm healthy. I appreciate Canada being involved.

Martin - (Request) - What we saw this summer were a higher number of jacks going up the river. Might be a genetic mutation. They are always traveling up the river when they should be out in the ocean waiting to get 50 or 60 lbs like years ago. I haven't heard any reports of why they are coming back as jacks. Might be this warming weather. Something is making them come back up the river immature. There are a few ladies here who cut sockeye. Sockeye is not from the Yukon. Lots of pinks or what we call Humpies. Talk about when you pay attention and you are part of the environment. One lady said when there are less berries, there are more fish. When there are more berries, there are less fish in the river. The river has always been steep on this end. The water has been high all summer. Someone needs to tell me why are the king salmon returning up the river as jack kings or missing.

Fred West- ADF&G - I can answer part of that question. The fish are returning, not necessarily as jacks. Age composition is what we expected. Age 5 - normal. Age 6 is more than we expected. Fish are smaller at age than they normally are. Age Comp is what we expected.

Why are they returning smaller? Something to do with ocean conditions. They are not growing as big as they used to. There is some research that needs to be done on that.

Bill - I've been listening to all these comments and discussions about the plight of our king salmon. Our salmon are not the only species being affected. Out in the ocean - tuna, etc. I think it has to do with the climate. We see it. Everyone sees it. It is not like it used to be. We should not be pointing fingers at everyone. upriver, down river. It is not like years ago when villages were small. Not very long ago, native people in the lower river were all nomadic. Now there is more population in the villages and this puts a strain on the salmon species. How are they supposed to sustain all these people and numbers? I don't know if this has been factored in.