



YUKON RIVER DRAINAGE FISHERIES ASSOCIATION

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Greetings from the Yukon River Drainage Fisheries Association!

Here is a summary of the 14th, 2020 Yukon River Salmon In-Season Management Teleconference held Tuesday, August 18th, 2020. Call lasted 76 minutes. 51 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: Yukon News- Whitehorse

Political Representatives participating: None

Communities participating this week: 12

Alakanuk
Mt. Village
St. Mary's
Pilot Station
Marshall
Russian Mission
Galena
Rapids
Ft. Yukon
Eagle
Fairbanks
Teslin

Community level reports:

Coastal District 1-Lower Yukon

Alakanuk:

Frank Alstrom - No one is subsistence fishing here. There is white fish and berry picking. It is pretty warm down here. A lot of humpies.

District 2-Coastal/Lower Yukon

Mt. Village:

Nita Stevens - No one is fishing here. Water is high. Test net caught 8 chum and 3 coho yesterday. Other times it was 0-3 at the most. Hopefully next year we will be able to do subsistence and do better than this year.

St. Mary's:

Bill Alstrom - Not much to report from down here, it's really warm for this time of year. The water went down a little but not much, we have no beach. Haven't heard of anyone fishing because of the closure. Not much to report, just listening in.

Pilot Station:

Martin - No subsistence activity. Very few single digit numbers of salmon being dropped off by ADF&G test fish. More and more people are showing up at the dock down there waiting for salmon. We have never experienced this type of closure, especially for our subsistence. The water is dropping, the weather has been extremely nice here. People have been picking blackberries and getting ready for moose hunting.

Marshall:

Norma Evans - Hello from Marshall, There has been no fishing but community members do call still and ask when we will be back on the fishing schedule? Other subsistence activities are still in place. Berry picking and goose and moose hunting are going on. It's been fairly warm all week, in the mid 70s. Compared to previous years the water is still high. It is a few feet below the spring break up high water level. There's been little to no debris in the river. That's all for Marshall, thank you.

District 3-Coastal/Lower Yukon**Russian Mission:**

Basil Larsen - There has been dropping water, steadily. We've been having a lot of North and Westerly wind. It doesn't get rough when we have those winds. A few gusy setting nets and getting whitefish for Numuk and eating. Then they give us all their old pikes and whatever fish they get. I did take a ride about 30 miles up the Yukon River, staying on the North side and went into all those creeks that are popular spawning grounds. We usually see lots of carcasses and there is none. There is no smell of fish, no sign of bear life. No tracks or anything like that. Few moose hunters up that way caught a lot of bears. They caught a black bear eating berries, and they ran into Brown Bears. Bears abandoned their fishing grounds and they are in the berries and that is not a good thing. People are going after birds and berries. The gnats are out in full force now. That is the report from Russian Mission.

Districts 4b & c-Upper Yukon**Galena:**

Fred Huntington - The water is dropping, about 4 feet in the last 10 days. No one is fishing and most are getting their dog teams ready. It's gonna be a pretty sad winter with no fish.

Districts 5a, b, c & d**Tanana/Rapids:**

Stan Zuray - Water is steady and about medium level. There are about 6 camps. We're getting small numbers, due to no summer chum. Because they were all fall chum the quality wasn't

that good. People are still running nets for some food but mostly for the dogs. No report of summer chum and it will probably stay that way. COVID-19 protocols stay the same.

Fort Yukon:

Andrew Firmin- Only a few people are fishing. They are reporting small catches and no one has met their subsistence needs. People who are fishing have barely gotten enough for their households and not enough to share.

Eagle:

Ruby - The water is coming up again here on top of what was already pretty high water. We are still seeing the orange substance in the Eddies and current but not as thick as last week. Curious if anyone else has seen this, especially upriver? Many households are still absorbing the news about not being able to fish for chum this year. Some are thinking of buying carcasses from a hatchery for dog food. People are rehoming dogs. People are frustrated and find this unbelievable. People are not upset and understand the need for the closure.

Districts 6a, b & c

Fairbanks:

Virgil - Sitting here listening. It's nice here, 75 degrees and a sunny day. It's a good forecast and hopefully the water goes down.

Canada

Teslin:

Carl - Nobody is fishing. We just purchased salmon from another First Nation - Taku River from Atlin. They still haven't showed up yet, well we don't know anyway because no one is fishing. High waters and raining. Thank you for starting at the headwaters.

Management Reports Agenda:

Bonnie Borba- ADF&G Fall Season Research Biologist - Updates on the fall assessment projects include that the cumulative CPUE for both LYTF and MVTF are both below the historical average for fall chum and coho salmon. The mainstem Yukon River sonar operated near Pilot Station as of August 17 has a cumulative count of 178,000 chum salmon which is below the median of 454,000 fish. The 3/4 point for fall chum salmon is typically on August 19 for this project. Mixed stock analysis was applied to the passage estimates at Pilot to remove summer chum salmon (roughly 76,000) and resulted in an estimate of 108,000 fall chum salmon in the river as of August 17. Based on the inseason assessment projects the fall chum salmon projection is for a run size of less than 300,000 fish using late run timing and projecting only 200,000 on median timing which would be the lowest run size on record. Genetic mixed stock analysis on chum salmon from August 3-16 are headed for the lab yesterday, watch for the results later this week in the Yukon River daily update. For coho salmon, as of August 17, the cumulative mainstem Yukon River sonar passage estimate is 17,000 fish, is below the median passage of approximately 46,000 fish for this date. The mid-point for coho salmon is typically on August 22 at this project. The return of coho salmon is primarily age-4 fish from 2016 parent year as well. Coho salmon on the Kuskokwim are currently running late and tracking the second lowest year at the Bethel test fishery. The Yukon run also appears late and weak.

Andy Padilla- ADF&G Post- Season Project Leader - I'm the project leaders for subsistence surveys. We conduct these every year to count salmon in the Yukon River. Due to COVID-19 we will not be doing these in person. we will be mailing surveys and people can do it on a computer. We coordinate with YRDFA to hire local assistants to help track down people and make radio announcements and help with the mail surveys. These people will be local people who will help collect the mail surveys and also assist or help our surveyors to conduct the over the phone surveys. We will be following CDC guidelines. Not entering anyone's homes to do the survey. Please take this opportunity to do the survey. It is really important this year to help document everyone's concerns and also how many fish people got this year. Please take the time to do the survey when it comes in the mail or when you get called on the phone
I can be reached at 459-7294.

Jeff Estensen - Yukon Area Fall Season Manager - Good afternoon everyone - It is really turning out to be a poor year for fall season fisheries. The reports that we are hearing all along the river supports what we are seeing, that there aren't many fish in the river for both fall chum and coho. We are looking at a total run size now of below 200k fish. This would be the lowest on record! Where we stand, **there is no salmon fishing on the entire drainage** . We have to have a run size of at least 300,000 fish. The way things are looking and now being 8/18 and past half way point of the run, the way things are coming in. It is unlikely that there will be ANY fall chum fishing this year in the Yukon River. You never know, there might be a big pulse but I don't know... And they are just looking at Coho, we are approaching the halfway point. The coho salmon run is not looking stellar at all. As I mentioned, subsistence salmon fishing is CLOSED but people can still use 4" mesh or less to target non salmon. Except 5D, that goes into effect tomorrow.

For the full management report:

<http://www.adfg.alaska.gov/static/applications/dcfnewsrelease/1211917191.pdf>

Jeff Estensen, Yukon Area Fall Season Manager, ADFG Ph# (907) 459-7217

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

Gerald Maschmann - Acting Yukon River Federal In-season Manager - That sums it up. It is a miserable run. Thanks.

Department of Fisheries and Oceans Canada

Jesse Trerice - Fisheries Manager - No Report Available.

Questions and discussion:

Ruby - Eagle - Thank you Management for allowing us to use the 4" net. It is a really important tool to be able to put food on the table. I have one particular question: Why is dip netting illegal in 5D?

Jeff Estensen - Yukon Area Fall Season Manager - Right now, subsistence fishing is closed. All gear used for dip netting will also be closed.

Ruby - Eagle - My understanding is that this question is why is it NEVER legal? Is that true that 5D is never allowed to use dip nets?

Jeff Estensen - Yukon Area Fall Season Manager - They are legal when subsistence is open.

Victor Lord- Nenana - The Yukon management, I realize the Tanana River is managed by Yukon River management but the pressure up here on the Tanana River is like 2% compared to the Yukon. Fishermen get run off year after year, it worries me. I worry about the fish but I also worry about the people. We have high blood pressure. I wish the Yukon River management would lean off sometimes. The pressure is not as intense here on the Tanana river and I'd like to keep my people on the river.

Jesse Trerice - Fisheries Manager - There was one thing that I forgot to mention: Just to let Ruby know that I am going to ask the commercial fishers if they've seen any of that orange stuff in the river.

Sebastian Jones - Dawson - Yes, we've seen it and it seems to come from spruce tree rust that gets into the river. It is natural and it doesn't seem to cause any problems.

Jeff Estensen - Yukon Area Fall Season Manager - That is the consensus of our office is that it is Spruce Rust. Moose seem to be eating on it, and it doesn't seem to be any source of harm for the fish. Might actually provide nutrients.

Frank - a guy in Nunum and I have been sending pictures back and forth of chinook salmon that we've caught and have been concerned about. We fileted them. The meat was red but the eyes were strange. 3 have oval eyes. Some guys commented that they are farm fish. The only problem we didn't do was check their bellies to see what they were eating. We know NOAA is looking for the small fish during their project. The Chinook salmon are distinctive. They have a funny little eye. A lot of the Beluga whales are chasing the fish up the river. We are curious if we caught fish from somewhere else, like they come in the river and then go back out. They are like a King Salmon on steroids because of the way they look. Can someone shed some light on that?

Deena Jallen- U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service - It is kind of hard without a picture. Can you send them to Serena so we can take a look at them? Did you say what size they are?

Frank - They are regular Kings. Catherine might have some pictures from Stan.

Deena Jallen- U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service - If Catherine can send me the photos we can take a look.

Martin- Pilot Station- With the closures of fall chum, half dried half smoked, little torpedoes. They have to go up past rapids and past the border. The salmon we catch here got that fatty Omega acid that helps sustain our culture. Before ADF&G started managing our diet. Pilot station used to host an annual dog race. There are 2 kennels, both with more than 10 dogs. They are not used for leisure, they are used for work and transportation. Last week Stephanie stated that if an emergency disaster was declared it would only be for commercial purposes. My question is what happens to us, the subsistence user? I just need to know. I heard from management. I am hoping that the salmon are running late. Especially with COVID- 19... Letting management know that I don't have anything that is going in my freezer, in case we have to have food security in this pandemic. Is someone else going to give me salmon? The food that I've grown up with. We've been talking about this for years and years and now it's happening. I just need someone to say "everything is going to be okay" I just heard someone say that people are starving up in Canada, and we might be in that boat, too.

Jeff Estensen - Yukon Area Fall Season Manager - The disaster fund is just for commercial fishers. Stephanie said that they are looking into that and seeing if it could be extended. The

other option is the CARES act. ADF&G is going to administer how that money is going to be distributed. They are working hard on that. This is as of August 7th, I don't know if there is anything new. This information should be on our FB site, and you can also give me a call directly, and I will help put you in the right spot. This seems like it would apply to a lot of different folks. I hear you loud and clear. This has been a horrible year. I think your concerns and what you are saying right now is not lost on the department. Please get a hold of me and I will get this information to you.

Serena Fitka- YRDFA - I also want to give an update. YRDFA and the YRITFC are working together to come up with something. we want to wait until all the numbers are in before we do anything.

Carl - Teslin - I totally hear what you are saying. We have been without salmon for over 20 years. I hear you where you are coming from. My heart is with you. Especially up around the Tanana area. We have been purchasing salmon from another First Nation but it feels like they are taking advantage of us because they know of our situation. We can barely afford to buy what we buy and it only lasts until Christmas. Concerned about what those guys from Alaska said about the tributaries. Does anyone know about what is happening out in the ocean? Has there been any monitoring out in the ocean?

Jeff Estensen - Yukon Area Fall Season Manager - Referring to high seas, there is no indication of what is being harvested and what we are seeing this year. What we are seeing this year is due to the 4 year olds and so what happened in 2016. And it appears to be state wide and not just for chum but all other species. We ID'd anything that happened in the Yukon River that might have had something to do with it - there is nothing to identify. As for the ocean, I don't need to say how complicated it is. Then the micro organisms, feeding each level, all the way up to the ocean. Not possible to ID one thing that is affecting the run THIS year. We will have to investigate and report out. In sum, it's because we are not seeing the 4 year olds

Nita Stevens - Mt. Village - I just have a comment, I noticed pictures from Unaklet - they took salmon up there. My cousin took photos of salmon that they have hung to dry. Is that normal for them to get salmon runs this time of year? Or are salmon going up that way instead of up the Yukon.

Jeff Estensen - Yukon Area Fall Season Manager - They definitely have salmon up that way. They get salmon runs up in Norton Sound. I would not call that unusual. This time of year, that would be expected. Not unusual.

Nita Stevens- Mt. Village - What about in June, Kivalina already had salmon on their fish racks. And we didn't have any.

Jeff Estensen - Yukon Area Fall Season Manager - No, it doesn't sound unusual.

Call ended 2:16