



YUKON RIVER DRAINAGE FISHERIES ASSOCIATION

PO Box 2898 Palmer, AK 99645
Tel: 907-272-3141 Toll free: 877-999-8566
Fax: 907-272-3142 E-mail: serena@yukonsalmon.org

Greetings from the Yukon River Drainage Fisheries Association!

Here is a summary of the 15th, 2020 Yukon River Salmon In-Season Management Teleconference held Tuesday, August 25th, 2020. Call lasted 98 minutes. 63 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: 13

Mt. Village
St. Mary's
Pilot Station
Marshall
Russion Mission
Nulato
Koyukuk
Rapids
Eagle
Nenana
Fairbanks
Dawson
Whitehorse

Community level reports:

District 2-Coastal/Lower Yukon

Mt. Village:

Nita Stevens - Water is still high down here. We're lucky to beat everyone down to the beach. Some days we catch 2, sometimes 8 fish. Everyone is out berry picking and some people are bird hunting and logging here.

St. Mary's:

Bill Alstrom - Same as Pilot, nothing to report here.

Pilot Station:

Martin - Good afternoon, nothing to report.

Marshall:

Norma Evans - There has been no fishing but one person had a 4" net out for whitefish in Poltes slough. Overall just a few families that were ready to fish in the beginning who had gas. They got to meet past 75% of their summer/fall salmon needs. 75 % of the population of 408 people were less than 40-50% of their needs.

District 3-Coastal/Lower Yukon

Russian Mission:

Basil Larsen - There has been foul fish weather all week. It's been raining and crappy. Wind went from North and Northwest to South and Southwest wind. There was a bad accident on the Kalskag over on the Kuskokwim. The lady involved was from Russian Mission. We are in shock. There has been no fishing on the Yukon river. The only people fishing are the nuts like us, dog mushers. We've been setting nets on the mouth of small creeks. We are still in berry picking mode, starting to get into moose hunting. A couple of moose hunters said they saw a couple in the meadow. Also saw a bear. We have a couple beach watchers. RyanAir is the only freight runner that has been coming here, out of Aniak. They're not taking any passengers. Other than medical or freight you have to charter to get out of here. There was a lot of drift earlier this week but none now. The beach is getting sticky. School is starting cultural week. They are going out hunting, picking and gathering. They will have to write about it. Weather is getting cool, cold.

District 4a-Upper Yukon

Nulato:

Mickey Stickman - We had an early moose hunting season that is gonna end today maybe? Or the 31st? As far as fall fishing there is zero fishing, everyone has given up hope. People are lucking out with moose already. The last rain over ripened the berries so no one is out picking. All there is to do is gather wood or go moose hunting. The next fish we will get will be in October when we get whitefish. We always set a whitefish net for a week before we put our boats away. The protocols are still no travel into Nulato for outsiders, If you're coming home you need to quarantine for 2 weeks, We're pretty much on lockdown. Guards on the river and hill.

Koyukuk:

Ben Jones - Nothing to report. The water has been the same since last week.

Districts 5a, b, c & d

Tanana/Rapids:

Stan Zuray - Water is mostly steady and slightly high with some small drift. There's about 4 camps still open in the Rapids area. We have mostly cleaned up and given up hope. The other camps have dogs to feed. Around the 20th people need to pack up and go back to the village. We're all pretty hopeless. COVID-19 protocols stay the same. Masks are required at the general store and gas station. The other gas station conducts business outside so they are not needed there.

Eagle:

Ruby - Obviously no fishing is happening in Eagle. Fall weather is here. Trees and willows are turning yellow. River is up high, up at the willow line. Moderate debris level especially out of smaller tributaries. Most people picking berries, hunting caribou, putting up garden vegetables. The kids are back to school. The beach is eerie with no fishing.

Districts 6a, b & c

Nenana:

Victor Lord - The river is pretty average here. Not much going on. I am pretty busy with other (personal) things going on, not fishing. Not much to report, just hearing bad runs on the fall run.

Fairbanks:

Virgil - Not really anything to report besides that it rained here a lot this morning. Other than that just listening in.

Stephanie- YRITFC - Nothing to report, just listening in, if folks have questions for me please reach out.

Dorothy Shockley - Just listening in. I do have some comments for when it is appropriate.

Canada

Dawson:

Sebastian Jones - Don't really have anything to report. There's no fishing going on, no fish. There's a fair amount of water running down the river.

Whitehorse:

Elizabeth MacDonald- YSSC - A lot of rain and high water. More rain is coming. Not too many Chinooks. Fish ladder has a really bad run. We thought last year was bad and we have about ½ that this year.

Dennis - I was on the river with First Nation doing some acoustic tagging. I was fortunate because they had been out there for 18 days and hadn't caught any chinook with their nets. They caught 4 in the end, and I got to be there for the first one caught.

Management Reports Agenda:

Bonnie Borba- ADF&G Fall Season Research Biologist- Fall chum salmon are typically dominated by age-4 fish however, the 2016 parent year escapement has shown extremely poor survival in chum salmon runs throughout the state. This is only the fourth time in 43 years that age-5 fish have dominated the fall chum salmon run. Both the LYTF and MVTF fall assessment projects are tracking below the historical averages for fall chum and coho salmon. Six small groups of chum salmon have entered the Yukon River since the transition to fall season representing 65K, 62K, 17K, 27K, 23K and we are still waiting for the sixth group that entered on August 23 to pass the mainstem Yukon River sonar. The first fall chum salmon arrived at the Eagle sonar project August 24 but the transition from Chinook to fall chum salmon counting will be awhile yet, watch for it in the daily updates. Genetic mixed stock analysis on chum salmon from August 3-16 that passed the mainstem sonar, contained 88% fall chum salmon. The sample of fall chum salmon included 69% U.S.-origin and 31% Canadian-origin stocks. The Fall U.S. stocks included 43% Border U.S. stocks (Teedriinjik/Chandalar, Sheenjok, and Black) and 57% Tanana stocks. The Tanana stocks were higher than average and the Border US stocks were lower than average for that time period. The mainstem Yukon River sonar operated near Pilot Station, as of August 24 has a cumulative count of 201,000 chum salmon which is below the median of 651,000 fish. The fall chum salmon passage typically passed the 3/4 point by this time of Year. After mixed stock analysis was applied to the passage estimates at Pilot to remove summer chum salmon (roughly 76,000) the estimate of fall chum salmon is 131,000 fish as of August 24. Based on these inseason assessment projects, the fall chum salmon run size is projected to be less than 300,000 fish when using the latest run timing and projected to be less than 200,000 fish based on median timing. The run is currently tracking as the lowest run size on record. Update on coho salmon. Coho salmon primarily return as age-4 fish, this year they are returning from the 2016 escapement. As of August 24, the cumulative mainstem Yukon River sonar passage estimate is 42,000 fish and is below the median passage of approximately 90,000 fish for this date. The three quarter-point for coho salmon is typically on August 27 at this project. The run of coho salmon in the Yukon River appears to be late and weak -similar to what is occurring in the Kuskokwim River. That is all I have, Andy Padilla, the project leader for the post-season salmon harvest assessment program would like to say a few words.

Andy Padilla- ADF&G Post- Season Project Leader- Project leader for subsistence salmon surveys, we do every year house to house, however not house to house this year. Over the phone or through the mail. We will be sending mail surveys this year. You can fill it out by hand or online this year. We will send a link, and post it on facebook. We coordinate with YRDFA we hire a local person in each community to track down people and to be a collection point for mail surveys. Following CDC guidelines, trained for social distancing , masks, and hand sanitizer available. They will be making announcements on VHF or posting things at PO in each community. We will start the 1st week of September in Emmonak and work our way up the river as the season progresses. Please take opportunities to take the survey so we can hear your concerns, not just at the conference but in a confidential way too.

Jeff Estensen - ADF&G Yukon Area Fall Season Manager - Not much has changed. All salmon fishing is closed throughout the drainage. Looking at 131k fall chum in the river and projecting

to be at 161k when all is said and done. Well below the 300k salmon that we need to have any fishing at all. We have another group coming, but there is no reason to believe that there are going to be enough to get us even remotely close to where we need to be. You may use 4" mesh or less to catch any non-salmon species. We just ask that people don't fish where they might catch fall chum. Looks like the passage will be 58-68k, which will be the lowest passage. The department is looking at maybe using wheels that are manned for coho and releasing all fall chum. And possibly using dip nets - this would be for subsistence only. Stan asked about any fish coming before the 20th. It's very unlikely that we will be able to open any fishing. Typically the first week of September is when we think the run is done entering the river.

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

Gerald Maschmann - Acting Yukon River Federal In-season Manager - Sorry there is not better news. Sums it up pretty good. Reiterate how important those harvest surveys are for us. If you could help those surveyors out, we'd appreciate it.

Department of Fisheries and Oceans Canada

Jesse Trerice - Fisheries Manager- The numbers that are being observed at Eagle are only around 36,000. In light of the poor observation at Eagle we have had recommendations to cease fishing. First Nations are in support. For fall chum - they have caught one chum in Eagle test. The sonar will switch to counting chum when we get there, but we are not there yet. The Chum return shaping up to be the worst on record. Unlikely that Canada will have a harvest share either. Over the next few weeks we will monitor run to see if any harvest could happen in Canada but it is unlikely. Canadian in-season management is largely informed by info at pilot including genetic results Canadian meeting plans, DFO has a call with first nations representatives tomorrow. For the stock assessment - Chinook counts - porcupine sonar near Old Crow is not running this year. We'll run a sonar fishing branch in early September to mid October to count chum. Eagle counted 33,000 chinook yesterday, the run is nearly completed at Klondike Sonar which is at 406 Chinook as of 8/14 - their last day of operations. 17% of average cumulative passage for the same date. For pelly sonar - ceased op on 8/22- counted 6600 - 71% of cumulative average. For big salmon sonar - 107 operations were completed at 25% of average count. The run through fish ladder dismal - whitehorse fish ladder 166 - 16% of average by same date. For the sex comp - 54% compared to long term average of 42% - silver lining in current state of salmon. Very happy to hear that teleconference will be extended for 2 weeks. Believe that having weekly connections helps us and helps binds that tie us.

Questions and discussion:

Wasslie Alexie- Russian Mission - We are all having a hard time with the subsistence, the salmon and the COVID-19. The airlines, we rely on Ryan Air. If this airline gets shut down we will have no mail or freight to Russian Mission. Using a 4" net is like fishing for sardines. Is it possible to have them open up just dip nets so we can catch the bigger white fish in the river?

Jeff Estensen - Yukon Area Fall Season Manager - For legal non salmon gear, you are able to use dip nets as long as you release salmon live.

Wasslie Alexie- Russian Mission - So it is legal to use the dip nets to get other species of fish, other than the chums?

Jeff Estensen - Yukon Area Fall Season Manager- Yes that is correct.

Martin- Pilot Station - ADF&G report 8/24 says daily cumulative was 200.... question regarding daily passage? Is that the number that was being counted here at the sonar project in Pilot Station.

Bonnie Borba- ADF&G Fall Season Research Biologist- 201,000 is the cumulative chum salmon (fall and summer) that have passed Pilot station. 131,000 fall chum reported.

Martin- Pilot Station - I'm asking what the daily count is? 27,000 on 8/24? Is that a hard number that they are counting every day? As of 8/24?

Jeff Estensen - Yukon Area Fall Season Manager- 131,000 is the count of fall chum passage. Not sure what you are asking.

Martin- Pilot Station- Sure that we will get to see/ talk about this more since YRDFA teleconferences are extending for 2 more weeks. so subsistence users can put some fish away for the winter. Like we have every year except this year. We would like to use our 6" nets. Targeting fall chum.

Bonnie Borba- ADF&G Fall Season Research Biologist- Actually the daily count was 2,700 and then 1,500. So with our count at 131,000 it is unlikely that we will make it to our required point (300,000).

Jeff Estensen - Yukon Area Fall Season Manager- By law, we are unable to allow ANY fishing (including subsistence fishing) unless the run reaches 300,000. Not much we can do.

Fred Huntington- Galena - Seems like a time ago 107k and then a week later was 176k by the sonar. What is the total count?

Jeff Estensen - Yukon Area Fall Season Manager- The actual number of Fall chum by 08/24 is 131k fall chum salmon. Using that number and making a projection, the run size should be about 161k, which will be the worst numbers on record. Normal years we just report chum salmon. But because the run size is so small this year it is important for us to know the actual number of Fall chum passing the sonar.

Dorothy Shockley- Fairbanks - Today I received an email in regards to commercial fishing in Area M. Is it true that they are still commercial fishing in that area?

Jeff Estensen - Yukon Area Fall Season Manager - At this point in time, I do not know the status of fishing in Area M. I can find out and call you on the phone.

Dorothy Shockley- Fairbanks - Apparently they are. Apparently a few years back, when we had a low summer chum run, there was through DNA, a lot of the fish were caught in Area M. That is one concern, question. This person who emailed saw that people are heavily commercial fishing in Area M. Major concern. When we have low runs in the Yukon, are the people who are fishing out in the Ocean, do they have limited commercial fishing? At any point? to build up the runs that are coming into the rivers.

Jeff Estensen - Yukon Area Fall Season Manager - Please restate the question.

Dorothy Shockley- Fairbanks - Concern over the years that ocean fishing is affecting our runs. having done a major overview on fisheries when I worked in the Senate. In thinking about it today, when there are low runs coming into the rivers in Alaska, are there limitations on the

ocean fisheries in their commercial fishing? Are they cut back at all or do they just continue fishing like nothing else is happening? It is all connected. If we are limited and can't catch fish and eat our traditional food, and provide for our families, it should go out to the ocean as well [the impact?]. We should have people involved in ocean management as well so they can hear our concerns.

Jeff Estensen - Yukon Area Fall Season Manager - The high sea fishery is not managed by us. I know that the pollock fishery is a big issue, and I know that there have been presentations this year on that. There have been things put in place for bycatch so that when they reach a certain number they have to either move, or quit fishing. But those bycatch numbers don't even remotely start to explain what we are seeing in the river this year. I will also remind people that the Yukon is not the only place that is seeing low runs in Alaska. It is important that these intercept fisheries are being watched and addressed, but it doesn't address that the complete run of 4 year olds haven't come back.

Basil Larsen- Russian Mission - I totally agree with what Dorothy had to say. River management will do /can do only so much. We are managing the last 10% of their life as compared to where they are born and whether they stay for a couple of months compared to what they do out in the ocean. Maybe we get some of the Ocean high seas fishery managers on this call.

Jeff Estensen - Yukon Area Fall Season Manager- I have an update here. They are fishing commercially in Area M but on local pink salmon and chum stocks. Not catching fish that would be bound for somewhere else such as the Yukon.

Stephanie- YRITFC - Follow up, if ADF&G could. I understand that right now they are only fishing on local stocks but what about over the whole season. Genetics some of those fish are bound for the Yukon river. Would be good to have an update for the next teleconference. Of what is harvested? Of 650,000 chum salmon harvested, how many of those do we think we're bound for the YR? They didn't come in below expectations, they came in WAY below expectations.

Bonnie Borba- ADF&G Fall Season Research Biologist - This fishery that we are talking about have harvested 223k, some of the genetics that they've done in the past, it was less than a percent of fall chum.

Fred Huntington- Galena - You know, when you talk about the catches in the harvest for area M, it is the whole cycle that is being caught as bycatch, not just the 4 year olds.

Paul Herbert- Fort Yukon - Guy talking about 4" net, catch a chum let it go. He doesn't know what he is talking about. And Area M is a billion dollar industry. They are not going to stop catching them until they catch the last one.

Jeff Estensen - Yukon Area Fall Season Manager - Folks are still able to use 4" or less. We are asking for people to use it in places where you are going to catch fall chum. We didn't say you have to throw it back if you catch it, but if people are using it to catch fall chum, then we will have to take a look at it and maybe dial it back.

Ruby- Eagle - Curious with super high water this year. How do those types of conditions affect spawning and viability of offspring?

Bonnie Borba- ADF&G Fall Season Research Biologist - If they are spawning in a tributary the silt can settle and cover them. Fall chum are usually spawning after the glacier is shut off. We haven't usually had that many problems with fall chum and high water. Summer chum has seen it. It can have different effects for different places. It depends on a lot of things. We usually don't have high water into fall chum spawning time.

Mickey Stickman- Nulato - One of our practices in Nulato is that we usually provide fish nets for white fish in the beginning of October right before the ice runs. With no teleconferences before then, how are we going to know when we can fish white fish in the middle and beginning of October. We use the 6" mesh net so we can get the bigger white fish. With no fall chum fishing, every single fish we catch is going to be very important to us and everyone on the river.

Jeff Estensen - Yukon Area Fall Season Manager - Eventually we will make the determination that the fall chum run is over, much like how we switch from summer to fall chum. could be 1st week in September, depends on fall chum run timing. unless we get a big pulse. Pilot will operate through sept 7. At some point fall chum run will be over. tail end migrates upriver. We will be allowing folks the opp to fish with gillnets and not be restricted to 4" eventually fall chum run will be done on the Yukon, then each districted will go back to gillnets.

Bill Alstrom- St. Mary's - I have a question for Jeff: Do you know the Andrefski and the Anvik rivers are big spawners for summer chum. We didn't have the weir on the Andrefski and I don't know what they have on the Anvik. But do we have any kind of an idea what the escapement for that species (summer chum) the waters were too merkey for aerial counts. Wondering if the department is counting and how?

Jeff Estensen - Yukon Area Fall Season Manager - I think you are asking if we have any idea what went up those two rivers since we didn't have weirs up that way.

Bonnie Borba- ADF&G Fall Season Research Biologist- Andy did ariel surveys and counted 10,000 on the Andrefski . on the anvik river he counted 8,000.

Bill Alstrom- St. Mary's - Brood year for summer chum, I believe that might have been 2015 or 2016. What were the numbers for the brood years for summer chum?

Bonnie Borba- ADF&G Fall Season Research Biologist - I do not have the tables in front of me right now, 2016- 1.9 million summer chum. I don't know the escapement for that year.

Gerald Maschmann - Acting Yukon River Federal In-season Manager - Sonar 1.6 mil, 2016- 1.9 mill - total run 2mill. They were good runs.

Bonnie Borba- ADF&G Fall Season Research Biologist - But you have to subtract the harvest. They flip back and forth between 4 [year olds] and 5s [year olds].

Martin- Pilot Station - As Bill stated there has been very little monitoring activity other than the middle mouth. I had a question, last summer I witnessed the heat stressed salmon. The excellent quality salmon floating on the sides of the river. Were there any reports of heat stressed salmon on the river?

Gerald Maschmann - Acting Yukon River Federal In-season Manager - We haven't heard any issues on heat stress. The main issues we've heard about was ick. We didn't have any unusually high water temperatures.

Jeff Estensen - Yukon Area Fall Season Manager - It was a very cool rainy summer for the interior part of the Yukon. One of the coolest summers I think we've had on record.

Martin- Pilot Station - It's been pretty cool here in Pilot with the weather we've been having. So many salmon made it to the spawning grounds. Something has happened this summer. monitor the boundary between Alaska and the far east. decimation by pollock fishery. aliens. If we don't have answers this summer, it might look more bleak next summer. We really need to shut down the pollock fishery.

Serena Fitka - YRDFA: The Annual YRDFA Board meeting will be held December 15th and 16th via Teleconference. YRDFA will be hosting a Post-season meeting on December 17th via teleconference. So please mark your calendars. YRDFA Board has a vacant seat in District Y1, Seat 1, this is a 3-year term. The Alternate Seats that are currently vacant are Coastal Alt 1, Y1, Alt 1, Y2, Alt.1, and Y5 Alt. 1. The YRDFA Board has created 2 Young Fisher seats on the Board. If you are interested in any of these opportunities please contact me at 907/272-3141.

During this unusual time YRDFA felt it was necessary to keep the lines of communication open between our communities, organizations, and management. We will be extending our teleconference calls for 2 more weeks; The calls will take place on September 1st and September 8th. We understand that September is hunting season for many; however, we felt during this low run year we may need to stay connected. We will also be hosting monthly Off-season teleconferences calls during the months of Oct, Nov, Jan. and Feb. During these teleconferences they will be topic driven. I encourage you to keep informed by checking our website at www.yukonsalmon.org or by liking our Facebook page Yukon River Drainage Fisheries Association.

call ended 2: 38

Toll free fishing schedule hotline: 866/479-7387

Fishing Schedule hotline in Fairbanks: 907/459-7387

Contact info for ADFG YR Fall Season Manager; call 907/949-1320

Contact info for ADFG YR Summer Season Manager; call 907/267-2324