



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 10th 2022 Yukon River Salmon In-Season Management Teleconference held Tuesday, August 9, 2022. Call lasted 123 minutes. 52 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 present: Olivia Eberts with KYUK, Bethel

Political Representatives participating: Jenny with Rep. Neil Foster's office.

Communities participating:

Whitehorse
Dawson
Eagle
Fort Yukon
Beaver
Tanana
Huslia
Marshall
Pilot Station
Mt. Village
Emmonak
Alakanuk
Nunam Iqua
Kotlik

Management Reports:

Bonnie Borba - ADF&G Yukon River Area Research Biologist :

The 2022 fall chum salmon run size is anticipated to be critically low, similar to this season's summer chum salmon that was the second lowest on record. The fall chum salmon projection based on inseason assessment projects indicates a run size well below 300,000 fish. Mixed stock analysis (MSA) was applied to the passage estimates at the Yukon River mainstem sonar near Pilot Station to remove summer chum salmon and resulted in an estimate of 25,000 fall chum

salmon in the river as of August 6. The current projection does not meet the threshold of 300,000 fish needed to allow subsistence fishing according to the Fall Chum Salmon Management Plan. In addition, it is unlikely to meet the drainage wide escapement goal of 300,000–600,000 fall chum salmon, tributary escapement goals and Canadian treaty objectives. Therefore, subsistence fishing for fall chum salmon will be closed. Selective gear can be used to target non salmon and salmon other than Chinook and chum salmon in most districts.

Lower Yukon River assessment projects are tracking well below average for fall chum salmon. The fall chum salmon run is approaching the historical midpoint at the sonar project near Pilot Station based on median run timing. Returns of Yukon and Kuskokwim chum salmon stocks are continuing to be some of the lowest on record. Coho salmon have begun to enter the Yukon River, and the bulk of the run is expected to pass the Lower Yukon Test Fishery (LYTF) between August 13 and 24. The primary parent year for coho salmon this year is from the escapements of 2018. This year's coho run size is anticipated to be below average to average (average is 233,000 fish). Coho salmon have started to arrive slightly later than average in the Yukon River assessment projects.

Fall Assessment Projects

All projects that handle fish (fall season LYTF, Mt. Village Test Fishery, Pilot Station, and Eagle sonar) are making efforts to reduce salmon mortality and distribute test fish catches to community members. Healthy salmon are released alive from the test nets. Injured salmon and mortalities are distributed to community members by Tribal councils or on a first come first-served basis from a public dock. Daily, cumulative, and historical data for most of the assessment projects listed in this section can be accessed online at www.adfg.alaska.gov/yukonfishcounts.

Lower Yukon River Cooperative Fall Drift Test Fishing / ADF&G, YDFDA

Fall season operations began on July 16 using 6-inch mesh gear to target fall chum and coho salmon. As of August 6, the fall chum salmon cumulative CPUE was 49.80 which is below the average of 577.11 for this date. The first coho salmon was captured on August 4 in this project.

Mountain Village Drift Test Fishing / Asacarsarmiut Tribal Council

Fall season operations began on July 18. As of August 6, the fall chum salmon cumulative CPUE was 108.00 which is below the average of 790.55 for that date.

Sonar Project near Pilot Station / ADF&G

The sonar project operated near Pilot Station transitioned to fall season counts on July 19. As of August 6, the cumulative passage is approximately 100,000 chum salmon. This compares to a median cumulative passage of 260,000 chum salmon for this date. The mid-point for chum salmon passing after July 18 is typically on August 9 for this project. Genetic stock proportions were applied to the sonar passage counts and resulted in an estimate of 25,000 fall chum salmon that have come into the river since July 19. The mid-point of the MSA fall chum salmon run at the mainstem sonar operated near Pilot Station typically occurs on August 14. Coho salmon have been captured in this project since July 27 and as of August 6 the cumulative passage is approximately 1,190 fish. This compares to a median cumulative passage of 4,900 coho salmon for this date.

Teedriinjik (Chandalar) Sonar / USFWS

Sonar crew is on site and preparing the sonar to count fall chum salmon.

Sheenjek River Sonar / ADF&G

This sonar project typically begins counting fall chum salmon the second week of August. The project on the Sheenjek River is being reinstated and has historical escapement counts from 1974 through 2012.

Eagle Sonar / ADF&G and Department of Fisheries and Oceans (DFO)

This project will transition from counting Chinook to fall chum salmon later in August.

Porcupine River Sonar / Yukon Territory Canada / DFO

This project will transition from counting Chinook to fall chum salmon later in August.

Fishing Branch River Weir/Sonar / Yukon Territory Canada / DFO

This project will count fall chum salmon sometime in late August to early September.

Christy Gleason - ADF&G Yukon River Area Fall Manager - Approaching historical midpoint, but this run could be late, is weak, low catches on fall chum and coho. We only have 27,000 fall chum salmon in the river, based on genetics. Tracking for a record low run. Below 300,000 fish needed to allow subsistence fishing. Opportunity for non salmon, important to use gear only to target non salmon, not catch fall chum. Fall chum fishing is closed because we need a minimum amount of fish in the river to spawn. Encourage fishers to let these fall chum pass. Coho are trickling in, expect counts to pick up. Pink salmon is still being caught, which is a good thing. Glad it's an even year that has pinks. Most districts are under fall season management. Selective gear for everything but chum and chinook. District 5D lower will transition to Fall season management. The District 5D upper will switch in the next 2 weeks.

Holly Carroll - US Fish & Wildlife Service Yukon River Area Manager - Nothing to add. Thorough assessment and updates.

Deena Jallen- ADF&G Yukon River Area Summer Season Manager - Getting to the end of summer season assessment projects. Chena counts 355 Chinook, well below average of nearly 5,000. 900 summer chum median is 7,000. Summer chum counts are about 1/10 of average. Aerial surveys in lower and middle observations showed that they saw 30 pinks to every 1 or 2 chum or chinook. Not good.

Department of Fisheries and Oceans Canada

Erica Gillis - Department of Fisheries and Oceans Canada Biologist

Porcupine sonar - 8/7 - 349 fish. Well below historical average of 3,000 fish for this date
Klondike - passage estimate 221 chinook.

Jaclyn Kendall - Department of Fisheries and Oceans Canada Fisheries Manager

Chinook management - no allocation for First Nation or public angling for 2022 season.

- The key priority for management in Canada is to ensure as many Canadian-origin salmon reach their spawning grounds as possible.

- With the current Chinook abundance estimates into Canada there will not be an allocation to the First Nation subsistence fishery.
- Based on the summer/fall Chum relationship, fall Chum spawning escapement goals are unlikely to be met in Canada for the Yukon River mainstem or Fishing Branch stocks, it's not anticipated that the season will start with an allocation to the First Nation subsistence fishery.
- Over the coming weeks, Fisheries and Oceans Canada will rely on information collected by assessment programs at Lower Yukon Test Fishery, Pilot Station Sonar and Eagle Sonar to inform management decisions in Canada.
- DFO will continue to maintain closures in the Chinook and Chum public angling (recreational) commercial, and domestic (non-indigenous food fishery) fisheries throughout 2022.

Community level reports:

Canada

Whitehorse: Elizabeth - Hearing that water levels are high and swift. Fish Ladder, no chinook went past that day. Generally people say they are feeling like crying because of the numbers of Chinook. Desperation and worried about Chinook and their possible extinction. 100 spawning locations and only 1100 across the border. First Nation governments have put out notices saying an emergency is happening here. Please don't take or harm the fish.

Dawson: Carly - Update about Klondike river sonar. 221 salmon passed through Salmon. 1612 historical average of 2-years. TEK baseline is a river running red with salmon. Did a redd survey last week and only witnessed 4 salmon in the river. Hope to do another survey next week. Not fishing at fish camps along the river. They are empty.

Sebastian Jones - This question is for Alaska managers at Eagle who are doing the lethal sampling. Understanding the purpose of research ichthyophonous. My question is - if you find a "smoking gun"- a relationship between ichthyophonous and managing salmon, then what? What management actions are going to be taken. Reason for asking, if there aren't any firm management actions, it makes me question why you are doing this.

Deena Jallen- ADFG - It will be useful to have these samples from Eagle, Pilot Station, and Rapids to figure out when and where fish are going missing. Ideally we do not do this every year and just sample fish at Pilot Station. This will affect how conservatively we need to manage.

Holly Carroll - USFWS. Appreciate the question. The importance is that sometimes we get eager to know what to do with the results. Sometimes we just need to get results and then figure out what to do with them. May need different age classes. Too late to do anything this year. We may see fishable run sizes in the future and if we can account for this, we can take this out of the count. If a large percentage of fish are not available, we need to account for that.

Sebastian - If you find a relationship between ichthyophonous and the vanishing salmon. You will sample at Pilot, determine prevalence of ichthyophonous, and then adjust your management

plan so that the right number of fish make it to the spawning grounds. Fishing on the main stem will be constrained even more.

Holly Carroll, USFWS - That could be one of the outcomes, unfortunately. If we find we can detect it early in the run, then we can manage more accurately to account for that.

Sebastian - Just thinking about the implications of this because it is very dire for the Alaska fisher.

Holly Carroll, USFWS - I'm not sure how to respond. I think what we are seeing right now is very dire.

Sebastian - What if you don't find a relationship?

Holly Carroll, USFWS - We have had previous scientists come on to talk about the different kinds of samples we are taking. Don't want to get ahead of ourselves and speculate what the results will mean. Will tell us much about what is affecting Chinook survival.

Carley - Dawson - Holly, I believe you said, Ideally we don't do this study every year. I have heard that you are planning to do this for 3 years. We support this study but not while the run is so low. Can you reduce the sample size?

Holly Carroll, USFWS - We do not have a plan for 3 more years of study. We have a plan for 1 more year of study. But we may see the prevalence reduce, then there is not more reason to study. Our prevalence drops to levels that are not alarming, so we stop studying. We may adapt after this year. There will be a tagging study done on chinook and that may tell us where the Chinook are dropping out.

Carley - will you be adapting to the salmon run size as well. Klondike river is not far upstream from eagle. We only saw 4 salmon when we did our survey. Your salmon study may take 50 salmon or 200 salmon that may be headed for the Klondike river. Glad you are reducing your sample size but it is not enough considering that our runs are so low.

Holly Carroll, USFWS - This is what we have to deal with. Even though the runs are poor, we still have to study them. Otherwise we will get too far behind. Need to know how many are not making it. Department heard the concerns and tried to come up with a compromise.

Carley - Appreciate your concerns and efforts but for salmon in the Klondike river. This could be the last life cycle.

ALASKA

District Y5abc&d:

Eagle: Ruby - Weather is cool and rainy, the river has come up dramatically in the last 4 days. Rising noticeably every few hours. Back to really high water. No one is fishing. Sense of loss, almost like we are grieving. There is no traffic on the river, it's eerily quiet. Really strange and sad.

Fort Yukon: Kara'lisa- No one fishing this week. Pretty quiet around here. Lots of rain, water is low.

Beaver: Rochelle - No one fishing. Been really rainy, with high winds. Not many people are on the river. No fish. Morale is low. Empty smokehouses. A void in our lives right now. Looking forward to the hunting season. Not much to report.

Tanana: Stan Z. - Water level is high but not much drift. Few people fish and almost all are because people have dogs. Checking spawning streams in the rapids area. Favored place to catch grayling. Usually summer chums are abundant. Spawning beds are visible in the mouth. 3rd year in a row largest summer chum spawning area in rapids, 3rd year in a row with no spawning chum. King run - ended now. None being seen in 4" mesh nets. Most seen at the end of the run were severely diseased. Last few years have been like this, severely diseased with ichthyophonous, at the end of the run. Same in mid 1990s.

Koyukuk River:

Huslia: Lisa - Done surveying. Haven't heard of anyone fishing. Water is low and it is cold and rainy.

District Y2:

Pilot Station: Martin- No subsistence fishing here. Want to share my ideas as to the main factors as to why there are no fish on the Yukon. If the biologists can't figure it out I know we are in trouble. This time of year we look forward to hunting. Pike is the main predator for the lakes up here and the tributary above Pilot Station. We make it a tradition to go camping up in the hills and we feasted on grayling. Our grayling up here was unheard of. We competed to get the biggest catch of the day and then feast at night. 65 miles up from Pilot Station, winding river. WE noticed the grayling were getting pushed further and further. Well known for giant pikes. Reason why the grayling are moving further. No connection with why our salmon are not here today but predation has a factor. Pikes are voracious eaters.

Mt. Village: Stanislas Sheppard - Nothing to report. Test fishery guy told me yesterday that the morning drift below Mountain was too rough and windy and the evening drift got one chum. To my knowledge, we discuss the chums. They (Area M) also sell King Salmon down there. What studies do they do down there?

Serena, YR DFA - We tried to get someone on the phone with more information, but we weren't able to get them on. We will try again.

Stan - Thank you. Also, both the Yukon and the Kuskokwim, I grew up understanding that subsistence was priority and when a certain amount of fish passed the pilot station sonar, then commercials could take place. In the 60's, 70's, 80's, commercials would start around June 15. My thought is that False pass fishes for days. Then not too long after that there were regulations for fishing only 6-12 hours. We saw more fish. If they put more restrictions in False Pass, they are getting 2.4 Million. We only have one bucket of fresh water. It is not fair for them to take the whole bucket and only give us a cup.

Fred- What is stopping the people at the headwaters in Canada to catch a male and female king salmon and help them incubate and put them back into the stream. I know that is illegal but....

Carley - Have been instream incubation projects doing just that. This year that is not happening out of respect for the salmon. WE would like them to do their natural thing and spawn. During a more healthy year, we do that. Egg buying station on standby in Dawson but decided not to do it due to low returns this year.

District Y1

Emmonak: John Lamont: I really appreciate Fred Beans asking that question. There is a mitigation project at the Whitehorse dam area. My question is related to mr. Sheppards. 1. Ichthyophonus in the late 80's when it was identified and found that it was coming from herring. Experts from Washington State said that the mortality was related to ichthyophonus. To relate this to the federal and state managers, in the future, should the Chinook salmon return, when there is ichthyophonus identified at Emmonak or Pilot Station and they see a percentage of ichthyophonus fish, they will reduce the expectation of returns by that percentage. The second suggestion I have is on Area M. The BOF states that it is their responsibility to share the wealth when the fish are good. But it is also their responsibility to share the burden of conservation through all users. Period. The managers throughout Alaska do not communicate when it comes to challenges. There needs to be meetings prior to management decisions. They need to ask, "are all users getting what they need " and the federal government needs to be involved in that too. That being said, the BOF, the burden of truth... they need to direct the managers to read that portion. All users that are affected by the return. I know that our people that migrated to the North American continent are hurting this year. There is no interest. No one cares anymore because there are no fish. When fish are going, people get on this call. And I think people are fed up with it. It is our responsibility as humans to deal with the shortages and the excess and we need help from the departments. We need to pinpoint why this resource is not returning.

Lastly, I understood that no summer chum will be on the Tanana and some might go to the Rapids area. Is that true?

Thank you.

Bonnie - Summer chum go up to Tanana River and into Bear creek and Salcha (unclear). They get more on a bigger year when Tanana gets a lot. It's such a small amount. They only can get so far, a summer chum, their range. Not like the Fall chum which go quite far.

Kotlik: Loraina - I would really like to encourage Serena to keep up the great work that she is doing. I am really thankful for Serna taking the job. I notice that there are hardly any participants like there were in the beginning. 2 weeks ago I wrote a statement and I would like to share it: Since participating in these calls, many thoughts of tasting salmon have crossed my mind, which has caused some depression. Subsistence board has made our people criminal to catch fish. Hunger will turn to anger. It is like offering a lollipop to a child and taking it back. You continue to offer hope with escapement goals while taking away our rights to fish. I noticed last year there were people stealing fish from fish racks. My people are losing hope. Some have given up. It's sad to hear of people stealing from others. The next generation is not being benefited to grow up with these morals. We need to respect people and their property. I am seeing less of that, especially the last 2 years. I was at a meeting and one board member said, "I'd feel bad hooking a chum on a 4" net." I said, "God gave us that fish". We shouldn't tattle tale on people. I wonder what my mom would do if she was alive. She always followed what Fish and Game said to do. Now it is forcing our people to be criminals. Some people who are really honest are doing dis-honest work. I feel bad for them because they are hungry.

We got some fish. It looked like a red salmon. I threw it in the freezer. We don't eat that red salmon, so a lot of people are feeding it to their dogs. They are wasting their money. It is really dry and not like the fish that we are used to.

Joe Afcan - Thank you for what you said about the Yup'ik people and some are really desperate about getting salmon. As for researching the salmon, king salmon, chum salmon, and other salmon, I suggest to ADFG add more sonars especially at the mouths and spawning areas of each tributary as far as Eagle. Put a lot less stress on salmon on their way to spawn. That would produce more salmon, a whole lot more salmon. To see them come back. So the people can use that resource for consumption. I believe the state of Alaska has enough resources to put those sonars in place so that research can be more accurate and answer some of the questions that Sebastian had. I am laying all my cards on politics right now hoping for a savior for our salmon. The trawlers are decimating our fish out in the ocean. I'm rooting for Mary Peltola. And one other senator Pat Chesboro, who is interested in saving our salmon resources. Those people have already thrown their hats in and are going against the bycatch. Politics is just about my last hope.

Christy Gleason, ADFG - I have Bonnie right here. We hear you with concerns for the spawning grounds. Sonar projects are really extensive. We try to monitor the systems where the fish spawn. We do have a new project that we are starting this year. That will help us monitor fall chum in the upper Yukon.

Joe Afcan - I understand that Sonar stations are expensive but I also understand that you hire a lot of people to go out on the river. Sonar counting stations can be automated and computerized. Thus reducing the costs.

Serena, YRDLA - We can provide more information on sonars on our website and maybe we can have a presentation as well. Thank you, Joe.

Additional Comments:

Stan S. - Yesterday evening 8:00-9:30 there was an announcement that white whale (beluga) was swimming upriver to here (Mountain Village) that must be an indication of fish if they are swimming up this far.

Fred - Quick comment, I concur with Mark Kelly on the predator of pikes. Pikes are all over in the river. I think we should do some studies on the predation of pikes.

Martin - I'm here at TC, wanted to let listeners know that Alaska Cares Act is on its second round, fisheries assistance, to the people that really need it.

John Lamont - With 11,000 through Eagle Sonar going into Eagle, with 3,000 going to Teslin; what are the sonar counts and are they using jet boats in the reds area?

Elizabeth MacDonald, CYFN - The Teklan sonar has not operated for a few years. I think it only operated for 5 years. Teslin Tlingit council does some aerial surveys. But if it is not clear you cannot see them. Big Salmon is not operating this year.

John- Does Yukon Territory restrict the use of Jet Boats or ATV in the spawning areas around Teslin Lake.

Elizabeth MacDonald, CYFN - As far as I know there aren't any restrictions on using jet boats in any areas. With the water being so high this year, I don't think it would have much of an impact. Don't know of any popular stream crossing where there are spawning areas.

Erica, DFO - I wanted to add to what Elizabeth was saying. 2 sonar units were picked up today. Not sure how that will go with water levels and clarity, but it is the plan for them to be added shortly.

Lorraina - could they include when they do their subsistence survey, include criminal subsistence activities? I don't want my people to become criminals of our own fish. I'm not a tattletale. My mom used to say, when people hurt us, we just leave them alone. I'm thinking about the future of our generation. How we are losing our culture and traditional values faster than everything with subsistence stopped for a second year now. Our people will probably abide by our rules and regulations more now.

Deena Jallen, ADFG - I might be confused, but the postseason surveys will start in September and they are confidential, and they are individual interviews in peoples households. It is going to be really important to know what fish were caught, and what non-salmon were caught. Please, it should just be a few minutes of your time, but it is really important.

Lorraina - I know a lot of people won't be honest because they are hungry for salmon. I am afraid. We don't lock our doors. When they are hungry they will go out and steal. I am not seeing it this summer, but last summer it happened. It bothered me when this lady said that God gave us this fish. AND I told her if I eat that salmon that got stuck in my net I will feel guilty. Just like when you steal someone's food. Don't you feel guilty eating it? We get tired of white fish too. And the pinks... we don't really cut those. As a leader of my village, a lot of people are being lost. Martin Kelly mentioned the Cares act, but that only helps a little and not in the long run. Some might need gas, or food, or stove oil. I just want you to understand what is really going on. If you went around in the village and observed with your own eyes, you'd see it.

Serena Fitka, YRDFA - For Alaska Round 2 Cares Act update applications are Due Oct 31. You can call 1888-517-7262 or email akcares@psmfc.org

Mike Peters - Couple questions for management. Concerns. One reason why I have questions, 22,000 fall chum passed pilot station sonar. Wondering if its true or not, with Eagle sonar, its pretty accurate. Question for management, combined with Eagle sonar, the escapement goal is... with the numbers, John Lamont had a good concern about how much escapement, fish coming out of Canada, it's a concern. I want to know the numbers of escapements and the quota. In Area M, it was in the newspaper that they closed it down for 3 weeks to have fall chum go by or something. With their studies, we have a quota in Area M and in bycatch. No one is giving us a report on how much escapement is for the Yukon River people. The comeback/escapement back to the ocean, would the studies (unable to transcribe). I've been on the board YRDFA for 15 years, I hear people talking about our subsistence lifestyle. If they are going to do the study, they should go beyond Area M and bycatch. I know we are trying to help the Canadians and everyone but my main concern is how long do we have to be in this situation, how long are we

going to have to sacrifice and for what. Other areas are allowed to fish - Copper River, Bristol Bay. When are they going to lift it so that we can fish?

Christy Gleason, ADFG - Thanks for your questions. For the number of fall chum past Pilot, it was about 20,000 based on genetics. The ones at Eagle are chinook salmon. Area M, I have not cleared for 3 weeks. They have reduced fishing. Their chum catches are less than half of what they were last year. Connect with Forest Bowers with more questions in that area.

Mike - Thank you for those answers. If you can do a print out for the people with escapement goals. If you could open fishing to us all along the Yukon, that would be good. Give us a report, what escapement went into Canada and what are the alternative goals. What are the numbers that passed the sonars? We haven't been fishing here in Marshall. A lot of time there is no followup on the escapement goal and % (met?).

Christy Gleason, ADFG - We do post the fish counts on the FACEBook page. That way you know what we are shooting for. We have the fish counts online and on the 24 hour phone line.

Mike - Thank you. If you can send to the tribal council. That way the print out can get the right information. Thank you.

Christy Gleason, ADFG - I will see if I can get a hold of someone at the tribal office and help them get signed up with our daily and weekly announcements with all of this information that you are requesting.

Mike - Thank you very much for the information. I'll watch for your follow up at the Tribe.

Martin - When JOhn was talking about the jet boats in Canada and the hydraulic... I've been there and seen the three big turbines, and I saw the fry had gone past the fish ladder and had spawned. The fry get caught up in the turbine and explode and end up floating upside down. If there are a whole bunch of flies being shot out the turbines, maybe you need to control the seagulls.

Call ended 3:03pm